

**THE MEANING AND EXPERIENCE OF CAREER  
AS IT IS LIVED BY WOMEN ARTISTS**

by

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## ABSTRACT

Little has been written in the literature on women's career or identity development specifically addressing the experiences of women artists. Yet there is reason to believe that these women, by virtue of their gender and their career choice, may have a particular perspective on how career is understood and lived that differs from that of the majority of women and men who have chosen more traditional career paths.

This qualitative study investigated the meaning and experience of career for eight women artists over age 40 from the visual, performing, and literary arts. The methods of inquiry and data analysis were based on a phenomenological approach. The researcher conducted three in-depth interviews with participants over a two-year period. Nine common themes, an account of what the term "career" meant to participants, and the fundamental structure--or common story--of the participants' experiences of career over their life span were drawn from the interview data. These nine themes are: (1) Sense of being an outsider; (2) Sense of validation through external recognition; (3) Sense of being obstructed; (4) Sense of being torn between the needs of self and others; (5) Sense of connection and belonging through art; (6) Sense of struggle to assume the identity of artist; (7) Sense of self-determination; (8) Sense of being a pioneer; and (9) Sense of harmony between self, art, and career. All of the participants indicated some degree of discomfort with the concept of career. They perceived their work as artists to be closely related to the sense of self and preferred to talk about their "lives as artists" and about "being artists," rather than about "having careers" as artists.

The findings of this study contribute both to our understanding of how women artists conceptualize and experience their careers over the course of their lives and to our

knowledge of how they develop their identities as artists within the context of their careers.

These findings led to specific recommendations for research and practice in the area of women artists' career development.



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## **CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this dissertation research was to investigate the general question: What is the meaning and experience of career as it is lived by women artists? In order to answer that question, this study explored women artists' recollections of their experiences of career over their life span. Little has been written in the career literature specifically addressing the careers of women who identify themselves as artists and whose primary career involvement is with artistic pursuits. Yet there is reason to believe that these women, by virtue of their gender and their career choice, may have a particular perspective on career and career development that differs from that of the majority of women and men who have chosen more conventional career paths. It is hoped that this research will contribute both to our understanding of how women artists conceptualize and experience their careers over the course of their lives, and to our knowledge of how they develop their identities as artists within the context of their careers.

### **Overview - Women's Career Development**

Despite the dramatic growth over the last several decades in the number of women participating in the labour force and the increased awareness of the particular challenges that women face in forging careers and making role choices, no comprehensive theory of women's career development has been established. Indeed, we know very little about how women even conceptualize career or how they experience career development (Fitzgerald & Crites, 1980; Chester & Grossman, 1990; Marshall, 1989; Perun & Bielby, 1981). We know even less about how particular groups of women such as artists understand and experience career and career development.

It is only within the past fifteen years that theorists and researchers have begun in any significant numbers to address issues pertaining to women's careers. For many years previously, the particularities of women's experiences were minimized or overlooked in the major career literature. Prior to the 1980's, most of what was written about women's personal and career development was extrapolated from studies of men and male development (e.g., Erikson, 1959; Havighurst, 1953, 1972; Levinson, 1978; Super, 1957, 1980; Tiedeman & O'Hara, 1963; Vaillant, 1977). That research generally postulated continuous, linear, and stage-sequential models of adult and career development that equated career with paid employment and that emphasized vocational roles over personal and familial roles. (Super's life span approach was distinctive in that it incorporated a broad definition of "career" and posited that stages of career development were not age-determined and could be "recycled" in an individual's life. Still, Super's model implicitly reinforced the notion that the typical career patterns of men were representative of career patterns in general.) If these traditional models are taken to represent "normal" development, most women appear abnormal or deficient in comparison. As Gilligan (1982) commented, "when women do not conform to the standards of psychological expectation, the conclusion has generally been that something is wrong with the women" (p. 14).

Of course, given recent social and economic changes, models which assume career development to be a continuous, linear, and stage-sequential process may no longer accurately reflect the characteristic experience of men in our society--if indeed they ever were representative of the experiences of the majority of men. In recent years a number of theorists (e.g., Bedeian, Pizzolatto, Long, & Griffeth, 1991; Collin & Young, 1986; Herr & Cramer, 1988; Richardson, 1993; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1983, 1986) have questioned the applicability of traditional models of career development to men as well as to

women. They have identified a number of major shortcomings in the theories and research underlying such models. These shortcomings include: (a) inadequate definitions of many key developmental concepts; (b) weaknesses in the research designs used to generate data (e.g., the prevalence of White, middle-class men in the sample groups); (c) a lack of attention to the larger social and economic forces that may influence an individual's life course; and (d) a focus on observed career progress rather than on individuals' subjective experiences of career.

But whether or not the traditional models currently fit for some or most men, they clearly do not address the experiences of the majority of women for whom the challenge to balance work and family responsibilities may preclude continuous employment and a linear experience of career. Indeed, it is precisely because of their ongoing efforts to balance work and family commitments that women may experience career as inherently more discontinuous, fluid, and cyclical than do most men (Astin, 1984; Bateson, 1989; Marshall, 1989).

In making career and role choices women typically are influenced by a multitude of personal, social, and economic factors that do not commonly affect men in the same way or to the same degree. For example, because women usually experience greater demands than men within their family roles (Bielby & Bielby, 1988; Pleck, 1985), women more than men may be expected to interrupt or adjust their work schedules to meet family needs such as the care of a sick child (Kahn-Hut, Daniels, & Colvard, 1982). As well, many of the factors that influence women's choices such as biological changes, the impact of the family life cycle, gender role expectations, and sex discrimination in the workplace, may vary in salience across the life span. Consequently, the traditional models that imply a largely uninterrupted career progression through education and employment may not be at all

appropriate for women whose experience of career, because of the factors cited, may necessarily include discontinuity and flux.

Since the early 1980's, numerous researchers and theorists have attempted to redress the androcentric bias of traditional theories of career development. Astin (1984), Farmer (1985), Gottfredson (1981), Larwood and Gutek (1987), Hackett and Betz (1981), and others have undertaken research studies and developed theoretical models which have highlighted the special factors that influence women's choice and experience of career. Such work has added substantially to our understanding of women's career behaviour. The contributions of that body of work notwithstanding, no clearly integrated theory yet exists that sufficiently illuminates the multi-faceted career development process for women.

### **Overview - Artists' Career Development**

The individualistic nature of artistic careers may particularly challenge the ability of either traditional or more recent gender-sensitive models of career development to adequately reflect the vicissitudes of most artists' lives. None of the established models may be wholly appropriate for artists, female or male, given the unique qualities of artistic professions and artists' particular dispositions as creative individuals.

In comparison to those who have chosen more conventional career paths, artists (particularly women artists) commonly lead lives that are characterized by personal, professional, and financial change and instability (Baker, 1973; Maisel, 1994). The artistic professions and artists themselves have generally been accorded marginal social and economic status in our society. Artists as a group are often considered to be "on the fringe" of mainstream culture. Their employment and income opportunities, as well as their social status, are usually less secure than those of people in more conventional occupations. As a result, artists may endure great financial hardship as well as professional insecurity as they



pursue their chosen careers (Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1982, 1986). In addition, career success for artists is not necessarily associated with upward mobility and financial success as it may be in more conventional occupations. Rather, success as an artist may be evaluated according to personal and subjective criteria that may vary widely from one artist to another and that may not be determined or accepted by any definable social institutions (Chicago, 1977; deKooning, 1973; Sang, 1989). Indeed, for some artists, such traditional rewards and markers of success as fame, fortune, and public acceptance may be an anathema--an index of inadequate creative risk-taking.

Various personal characteristics associated with creative individuals may also influence the nature and progress of artists' careers. For example, artists have been described as sensitive, independent, adventurous, risk-taking, flexible in their thinking, and intellectually original, among other traits (Roe, 1946; Barron, 1969; MacKinnon, 1978; Guilford, 1967; Torrance, 1966). Of course, none of these personality characteristics and intellectual abilities are unique to artists (female or male). However, they may play a part in artists' choice and experience of a career that may be fundamentally less structured and less predictable than many other occupations.

### **Workforce Participation of Women Artists**

Historically, women have been involved in many different roles within the arts--that is, the various creative fields of literature and the visual and performing arts. For example, women are commonly associated with the arts as educators, volunteers, benefactors, and audience members, but less often as creators of works of art. In most facets of the art world, the creative role traditionally has been associated with men (McCaughey, 1985). There is evidence, however, that the marginality of women artists in society and the perception of creative work as a predominantly male pursuit may be changing.

According to the most recent available Canadian statistics (based on the 1991 Federal Census), the arts labour force comprises about 1.00% of the total labour force (Statistics Canada, 1993). The arts labour force includes individuals involved in arts and arts-related occupations, and those who use arts-related skills in their daily work (e.g., visual artists, product and interior designers, musicians, dancers, actors, writers, and editors).

Approximately 45% (87,115) of this labour group are visual artists or designers, 27% (52,240) are performing or audio-visual artists, and 28% (53,510) are writers or editors.

Of the total number of artists in the labour force identified in the 1991 Census, 45% (approximately 87,000) were women. The proportion of women in particular arts occupations included 23% for photographers and camera operators; 31% for musicians and singers; 42% for actors; 48% for writers and editors; 50% for painters, sculptors, and related artists; and 81% for dancers and choreographers.

Significantly, between 1971 and 1991 the number of women and men in the arts labour force increased 195% (as compared to a 68% increase in the size of the total labour force). The number of women artists increased by 390% (as compared to 122% for men artists). The increase for women in the labour force as a whole during that same time period was 120%. Such trends strongly suggest that "not only are the arts overall a high employment growth area, but they are particularly so for women" (McCaughey, 1985, p. 29). In 1985 the Canada Council estimated that if current trends continue, women could make up one-half of the arts labour force by the 1990's (McCaughey, 1985). As McCaughey observed, the growing participation of women in the arts labour force is changing the face of the arts in Canada:

Within the art world ... the creative role has historically been associated with men. But with more and more women artists entering the arts labour force

and rising to prominence, women are making their presence felt too. In this way they are increasingly giving the creative side of the arts a feminine identification. (p. 33)

Given such changes in the participation and profile of women in the arts, research and program initiatives designed to address the concerns of women artists seem both necessary and timely.

### **Theoretical Background to the Study**

Five different perspectives on understanding women artists' experience of career formed the theoretical framework for this study. These five perspectives are: (1) a macrosocial view that addresses the social context in which women in general experience career and role choices (e.g., Jones, Marsden, & Tepperman, 1990; Rossi, 1980; Wolfman, 1984); (2) a review of the most prominent general theories of career development (e.g., Havighurst, 1953, 1972; Super, 1953, 1990; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986); (3) a review of theories of women's career development (e.g., Astin, 1984; Gottfredson, 1981; Hackett & Betz, 1981); (4) a review of theories of women's identity development (e.g., Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1983; Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1987); and (5) a summary of the factors that particularly affect women artists' career and identity development (e.g., Kerr, 1985, 1986; Sang, 1989). Though no one perspective may completely explain the meaning and experience of career and career development for women artists, they may collectively contribute to such an understanding. Accordingly, Chapter II includes discussions of each of these five perspectives and assessments of their relevance to this study.

### Limitations of Existing Research

Research to date on the subject of women artists and career has been extremely limited. The small amount of research that has been done in this area usually has been published under the rubric of the career development of the gifted and talented (e.g., Hollinger, 1988, 1991; Noble, 1987, 1989; Post-Kammer & Perrone, 1983; Sears & Barbee, 1977). In an extensive search of the psychological and educational literature, this researcher discovered only five studies which specifically addressed the career development of women artists (Bepko & Krestan, 1993; Foley in Piirto, 1991; Kerr, 1985; Sang, 1989; Stohs, 1991, 1992). A few other studies have explored the careers of artists in general and included women in their samples. However, such studies have usually either included only a small percentage of women (e.g., Rosenberg & Fliegel, 1979) or have focused primarily on how personality factors influence artistic development and career behaviour (e.g., Barron, 1972; Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976).

In one of the five most pertinent studies, Sang (1989) drew on the case histories of 40 female artists with whom she had worked in her psychotherapeutic practice in order to present some of the common personal and career related themes that women artists bring to therapy. Sang identified numerous internal and external barriers that a woman artist may encounter in her career development as a result of limiting gender expectations and sex discrimination. These barriers may include an inability to take herself and her career choice seriously, difficulties in arranging time for creative work due to personal and family pressures, lack of social support, and difficulties obtaining employment and recognition in the male-dominated art world.

In another study of note, Stohs (1991, 1992) compared 109 midlife women who trained in (visual) art with 99 of their male classmates 18 years after art school. She used a

questionnaire to gather data about career patterns, midlife occupations, marital status, and number of children. Stohs found that there were no gender differences in her sample group in relation to midlife occupations. However, the women in her study had experienced significantly more career discontinuity than the men, and the women whose careers had been discontinuous had significantly more children than the women who had experienced continuous career patterns.

In a third study, Kerr (1985) surveyed 22 variously gifted women about their career development and personal adjustment. She also analyzed the biographies of 31 eminent American women for themes related to achievement of potential. Among this latter group of women were four artists (a writer, a writer and dancer, a singer, and a painter) whose lives she described and analysed in detail. Kerr concluded that gifted women, including artists, frequently fail to realize their potential because of a number of internal and external factors. The internal factors may include fear of success and a tendency to adjust to society's lower expectations of women. The external factors may include sexism, discrimination, and a lack of resources.

In a similar study, Bepko and Krestan (1993) surveyed over 200 women and interviewed an additional 45 about how they balanced relationship and self-expression in their lives. Bepko and Krestan identified four dominant life patterns that women create in order to balance love and creativity: Lovers, Artists, Leaders, and Innovators. Women in the "Artist" category made up approximately 13 per cent of their participant group. According to Bepko and Krestan, "creative activity makes [women artists] feel most whole" and "relationship makes them feel the most conflicted" (p. 104). They identified "clarity-- knowing what one wants and needs to do and doing it with an unwavering, undiluted energy"

(p. 104) as a singular characteristic of the Artist life pattern. These researchers suggested that such clarity requires women artists to be independent, confident, and selfish.

Also, Piirto (1991) described the results of an unpublished 1986 study in which Foley investigated the dual role experience of 15 producing artists who were mothers of young children. According to Piirto, Foley found that the women in the study experienced guilt and conflict between their roles as mothers and their roles as artists, and that they perceived their success to be strongly related to their husbands' support of their choice of career.

In addition to the above psychologically-oriented research, one other study of interest is that conducted by the sociologist Bateson (1989). Bateson analyzed the biographies of five productive and successful women in order to explore the varying ways in which contemporary women shape their lives and make decisions about relationships and commitments. Her subjects included one multi-talented artist who was a dancer, writer, and jewelry designer. Bateson concluded that the lives of women, particularly creative women, are characterized by change, multiple commitments, and multiple beginnings. Managing this ever-changing balance of relationships and responsibilities may demand intellectual, emotional, and physical strength: "strength to imagine something new and strength to remain with it" (p. 37). Bateson also observed that for women who reject traditional domestic roles, "creative energies are subverted not only by conflicting commitments but also by the steady drag of disparagement and prejudice pulling them toward the acceptance of subordinate roles" (p. 37).

The findings of these six studies contribute to our understanding of women artists' career development in a number of ways. First, the results of all six studies highlighted the discontinuous nature of women artists' careers. Second, all the researchers linked their findings about women artists' career discontinuity to women's relationship commitments and

family roles. Third, all the researchers found that the careers of the women artists they studied were circumscribed by traditional gender roles and gender expectations in society.

Based solely on their singularity in the literature, the studies undertaken by Bepko and Krestan (1993), Kerr (1985), Sang (1989), and Stohs (1991, 1992)--and, to a lesser degree, Bateson (1989) and Foley (in Piirto, 1991)--can be considered of major importance to our understanding of women artists' lives. Nonetheless, all six studies have limitations which detract from their ultimate utility for explaining women artists' career development and the generalizability of their findings to other women engaged in artistic careers. For example, although Bepko and Krestan provided an extensive analysis of the conflict between women artists' needs for relationship and for creative expression, they did not explore in detail any other major factors that may affect women artists' careers. Bepko and Krestan also failed to adequately relate their results to those of other studies in the field. Unfortunately, Kerr gave only a small amount of attention to artists in her more general study of gifted women and did not explore artists' experiences in depth or as distinct from those of the other women in her sample. Similarly, Bateson did not focus on what distinguishes the life of an artist from the lives of the other women she studied. Although Sang concentrated expressly on artists, her study is limited by the lack of any theoretically-based discussion of the results and its possibly non-representative and biased sample. Sang did not undertake a formal study of the careers of women artists, but drew her conclusions only from observations of clients in her psychotherapeutic practice. The generalizability of her findings is therefore restricted. Stohs (1991, 1992) identified some of the major factors that influenced the career continuity of the women artists in her sample (e.g., the number of children they had), but she did not investigate the role of such factors in depth. Foley's study (to this researcher's knowledge) has not been published and so cannot be fully evaluated.

Also, none of the six researchers attempted to describe common stages or patterns in women artists' career development. Bepko and Krestan (1993) and Stohs (1991, 1992) did specifically study life and career patterns, but they did not examine at length any factors other than those involving relationships that might contribute to women artists' discontinuous experience of career. Furthermore, none of the six researchers explored the interaction of career and identity development. While none set out specifically to investigate that interaction--and so cannot be faulted for failing to do so--the lack of attention to this important area of research points out a general weakness in the literature on women artists.

### **The Research Question**

Given the shortcomings in the existing literature, it is both appropriate and necessary to undertake new research that will allow us to better understand what constitutes career and career development for women artists and what meaning their career and their identity as artists have for them. Accordingly, this study was designed to approach the phenomenon of career in women artists' lives from a conceptually open position. It explored the general research question: What is the meaning and experience of career as it is lived by women artists? This study was not intended to investigate the suitability of any particular theoretical perspective, nor to test any specific preconceived hypotheses. However, the findings were critically analyzed to assess whether or not any of the established theories help explain women artists' experiences (see Chapter V).

### **Rationale for the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the meaning and experience of career for women artists by examining the recollections of a group of women, each of whom is over 40 years of age and is engaged, as a creator and a practitioner, in a career in the visual, performing, or literary arts.



The reasons for undertaking this study were sixfold. First, the literature on the career development of women artists has been extremely limited and there is a critical need for studies which will illuminate the experiences of women artists, as well as other creative and talented women (Kerr, 1985, 1986; Noble, 1987). One significant consequence of the lack of research and theory in this area is that the special experiences and needs of creative and talented women are often overlooked. As Kerr (1986) noted, counsellors tend to pay very little attention to exceptional individuals (whether intellectually gifted or creatively talented) because they believe that such individuals do not need special attention or because they do not know how to counsel them.

Second, as was documented earlier in this chapter, arts employment as a whole has grown significantly in Canada over the last two decades. The rise in the number of women entering arts-related occupations has been particularly dramatic. Furthermore, the economic importance of the arts to society is being increasingly recognized (McCaughey, 1985). Such changes in the profile and status of the arts labour force suggest that career counsellors in the coming years will likely encounter more female clients involved in the arts. That being the case, it behooves us as members of the counselling profession to develop a resource base of research from which to draw in order best to serve such clients.

Third, in order to discern the particular career and personal counselling needs of artists, both female and male, it is necessary to understand better the unique meaning and experience of career for members of this distinctive social and occupational group. Artists choose a career that by its very nature lacks the traditional structure that characterizes most occupations. In contrast to most workers in our society, artists are largely self-employed and engage in radically individualistic pursuits that tend to exclude them from the mainstream structure of employment and of society. Women artists are doubly marginalized because,

more so than men artists, they may experience sex discrimination both in general society and in the arts community.

Fourth, a retrospective exploration of women artists' experiences of career may also shed light on the complex interplay between women artists' identity development and their career development. Sang (1981) suggested that because women encounter many internal and external obstacles as they try to assert themselves as artists, they may have difficulty developing a strong creative (i.e., artistic) identity. We do not yet know, however, precisely what constitutes the process of creative identity development for women artists or how such factors as gender socialization, sex discrimination, and relational needs may influence both women artists' creative identity development and their career development.

Fifth, there is a need to generate scholarly material that will provide women artists with information about how their peers have made sense of their experiences. As Heilbrun (1988) and Noble (1987) pointed out, women artists, like other creative women, are exposed to fewer same-sex role models than their male counterparts in all aspects of daily life including education, literature, the arts, and the media. The lack of appropriate role models may interfere with women artists' ability to claim ownership of their talents, their achievements, and their ambition. Without a sense of the collective experience of other similar women, artists may feel lonely, isolated, different, and--ultimately--incapable of recognizing and fulfilling their creative potential. Opportunities to learn from the experiences of women like themselves, however, can significantly enhance women artists' recognition and acceptance of their own abilities and career possibilities (Heilbrun, 1988; Noble, 1987).

Finally, this study may serve as a prototype for further studies that might investigate both women's and men's experiences in a variety of occupations. As Herr and Cramer

(1988), Bedeian et al. (1991) and others have observed, traditional stage-sequential models of career development that assumed career to be an uninterrupted, upwardly progressive path may be inappropriate not only for women, but for men as well. It is becoming increasingly apparent that career fluidity and flux are becoming the norm for both men and women in our society. For example, government researchers reported that the average Canadian worker, female or male, will experience at least three or four career changes over the course of a lifetime (Minister of State for Youth, 1989). As professionals, therefore, we need to create a base of research that can eventually lead to the development of new models of career development that may more appropriately reflect the realities of contemporary life for both sexes. And, as Bateson (1989) proposed, the circumstances of creative women's lives as they are lived now may provide examples of new ways of thinking about the lives of both men and women. It is hoped that this study will contribute to such a body of knowledge.

While this research study was designed primarily to be read and evaluated by professionals in the field of psychology, it may also serve as a resource for women artists and for other professionals (e.g., researchers in various aspects of the arts) who are interested in artists' careers. One way in which this research may serve this function is by the dissemination of the findings to the artists who participated in the study. Another way is to make the findings available to organizations such as the Canada Council who specialize in collecting and distributing information about different aspects of the arts in Canada.

### **Methodological Approach to the Study**

This study followed the general phenomenological method of inquiry as set forth by Colaizzi (1978). A phenomenological/narrative approach (particularly as described by Cochran and Claspell [1987] and Cochran [1990]) also helped inform the structuring of the main interview question and the analysis of the interview data. That is, the researcher

framed the main interview question and conceptualized the data overall as if participants' experiences were a narrative or story with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

As a number of theorists and researchers in recent years (e.g., Chester & Grossman, 1990; Collin & Young, 1986; Richardson, 1993; Young & Borgen, 1990) have suggested, phenomenological and other qualitative investigations are needed in the career field to supplement and to balance data gathered according to traditional natural science criteria. In contrast to empirical studies which focus on prediction, control, and measurement of observable data, phenomenological research focuses on the inner world of individuals by accurately describing human experience and by striving to understand that experience in terms of the structures that produce its meaning in consciousness (Polkinghorne, 1989). According to Osborne (1994), such research is essential: "If psychology is to be existentially relevant it needs to address human experience in its fullness rather than that part of the experience which is compatible with prevailing methodological biases" (p. 168).

In this study, women artists' descriptions of their experiences of career over their life span were elicited through in-depth phenomenologically-oriented interviews with the principal researcher. The interviews were then thoroughly analyzed to draw out significant themes and to construct a parsimonious and trustworthy account (i.e., a common story) of the participants' experiences.

A more detailed discussion of the rationale for choosing a phenomenological approach, as well as a full description of the research design and methodology used in this study is presented in Chapter III.

### **Definitions**

"Career," "career development," "vocation," "identity," and "artist" are all commonly used terms. However, the inconsistency of their usage in the psychological and

educational literature may give rise to confusion. Therefore, definitions of these terms as they were used in this study are provided below.

### Career

The complexity and ambiguity of this term have been well established (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989; Hesketh, 1985; Super & Hall, 1978). Several traditional career theorists have equated "career" with occupations and paid employment, and have de-emphasized nonwork activities ("work" being understood to mean "paid work"). Hall (1976), for example, defined "career" as the sequence of work-related attitudes and experiences that occur over the span of an individual's work life. Similarly, Tolbert (1980) saw "career" as meaning a succession of occupations. Such definitions, however, present a limited view of the term (Cochran, 1990). Also, as Astin (1984) pointed out, because these definitions tend to overlook many of the personal, social, and economic factors that complicate women's career choice and work behaviour, they cannot adequately depict women's experiences.

A number of theorists have attempted to expand existing definitions of "career" so as better to accommodate important life experiences beyond paid employment for both women and men. Super (1976), for example, conceptualized career as "the course of events which constitute a life; the sequence of occupations and other life roles, which combine to express one's commitment to work in his or her total pattern of self-development" (p. 4). Norris, Hatch, Engelkes, and Winborn (1979) also suggested that career is the "total composite of one's activities throughout life" (p. 6) and Herr and Cramer (1988) emphasized life roles in their definition, rather than such particular types of activities as paid work. Herr and Cramer drew on Super's work and stressed that careers "include not only occupations but prevocational and postvocational concerns as well as integration of work with other roles: family, community, leisure" (p. 17).

For the purposes of this study, Super's (1976) definition, as above, was used as a working definition of the concept of career. Although this definition, like those of Norris et al. (1979) and Herr and Cramer (1988), may be criticized for its breadth (its wide-ranging nature precludes any precise understanding of the term), it was nonetheless the most appropriate definition for this study because it suggests that career involves all manner of life roles as they evolve in the course of an individual's self-development.

It may not be assumed, however, that Super's (1976)--or any other theorist's--definition necessarily encapsulates women artists' understanding of the term. Therefore, participants in this study were invited to share their definitions of "career." Commonalities in the participants' definitions were then identified (see Chapter IV).

### **Career Development**

Sometimes the terms "career" and "career development" are used almost interchangeably in the career literature. However, as this study was concerned with how women artists' careers have evolved over their life course (as well as with what "career" means to this group), the term "career development" was used in the following sense: "the process by which an individual formulates a career and continuously evaluates the choice, new opportunities, and personal goals in an effort to find the most meaningful life" (Norris et al., 1979, p. 8). This definition, although it assumes an understanding of the term "career" (which is in itself open to individual interpretation), was appropriate here because it suggests that a person's career may change and expand over time towards the realization of that individual's potential in all aspects of her or his life (including personal and work-related aspects).

### **Vocation and Vocational Development**

Confusion may also arise on reading the psychological and educational literature as to the usage of the terms "vocation" and "vocational development." While some theorists use these terms to denote a sense of "a life's calling" (e.g., Cochran, 1990), others use it as synonymous with "career" and "career development" (e.g., Holland, 1973, 1985; Super, 1953, 1957). Most commonly, however, "vocation" is used to signify a specific and institutionalized approach to the making of a living (that is, paid employment), rather than the making of a life (which is connoted by the broader term "career") (Miller-Tiedeman & Tiedeman, 1990). In this study, the terms "vocation" and "vocational development" will be used to refer specifically to paid employment (unless otherwise noted), or to refer to distinct theories (e.g., Holland's [1959] theory of vocational choice). The terms "career" and "career development" (as defined above) will be understood to subsume the terms "vocation" and "vocational development."

### **Identity and Identity Development**

"Identity" is another term which has been interpreted in various ways. However, most definitions do conform in that they suggest that "identity" connotes some quality of an individual's consistent sense of self. For example, Erikson (1959), whose work on identity development has been particularly influential in the field of identity theory, referred to a sense of personal "ego identity" (as opposed to a "group identity") as a "persistent sameness within oneself [selfsameness] and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others" (p. 102). Similarly, Kegan (1982) saw identity as the product of an individual's authorship of a self "which maintains a coherence across a shared psychological space. ... This authority--sense of self, self-dependence, self-ownership--is its hallmark" (p. 100).

Likewise, Rossan (1987) defined "identity" as "the set of complex, more-or-less integrated attitudes which the individual has concerning him/herself" (p. 304).

Most authors (e.g., Erikson, 1959; Hall, 1990; Kegan, 1982; Rossan, 1987) also stress that identity development takes place within a social context and that there are many elements and stages to identity formation which involve both an individual's self-concepts and her or his interaction with the outside world. For example, Huyck and Hoyer (1982) touched on some of these in their description of the identity-formation process of an artist:

Not all aspects of the self-concept are equally important in forging a sense of identity. ... One may recognize a flair for artistic design and yet not accept being an artist as part of one's identity. When one accepts "artist" as part of identity, then one also accepts an identity or equivalence with others who are artists; one "fits" into the social world as an artist. An identity as artist means that the individual must accept the tasks and qualities of an artist as compatible with the self. It also means that other people must experience the individual as an artist. Most importantly, before an identity as artist can be secure, the individual must successfully meet the unexpected challenges set by other artists. It is not enough to feel like an artist, dress like an artist, and be accepted by one's mother as an artist; other artists must also take the individual seriously as an artist. (pp. 211-212)

For this study, "identity" was defined as an individual's coherent and persistent sense of her- or himself in the world. "Identity development" refers to the process by which an individual forms that sense of self. "Creative identity development" refers to the process by which an artist forms her or his sense of self as a creator of art (Sang, 1981, 1989). In



accordance with Erikson (1959), Josselson (1987), and others, it was assumed that one of the most important developmental tasks for individuals is the formation of identity.

### Artist

For the purposes of this study, an "artist" was defined as any manifestly creative woman who met the following criteria: (a) she identified herself as an artist in her chosen field (e.g., as a writer, poet, painter, photographer, actor, dancer, etc.); (b) she considered the pursuit and practice of her own art to be a major value and a primary life activity; (c) she considered herself presently active in her chosen artistic field; and (d) she considered her role as an artist to be her primary career.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

This chapter comprises an overview of the social context of the study and the changing roles of women; reviews of three major groups of theories drawn from the psychological and educational literature (traditional theories of career development, theories of women's career development, and theories of women's identity development); a summary of recent theoretical developments in the career field; and a description of factors affecting artists' career and identity development.

The relevance to this study of each group of theories was assessed according to the degree to which it illuminated the experience of career for women in general and for women artists in particular. Each group of theories is briefly described in turn, then evaluated in terms of its utility for understanding women's and artists' experience of career.

### **Social Context - The Changing Roles of Women**

The various theories to be reviewed in this chapter highlight many internal and external variables that may affect the careers of women generally and of women artists specifically. While a knowledge of such variables is vital to our understanding of women artists' lives, in order to understand fully how contemporary women--in whatever occupation--experience career, it is also important to recognize the impact on them of the larger social context. In the past few decades women in our society have undergone dramatic changes in their personal, social, and work roles and in their participation in and commitment to paid employment. These changes are a result of a number of powerful and interrelated social forces.

One important force is the changing structure of the labour market, which since the mid-19th Century has led to increased demands for women's labour. For example, women's

job opportunities have been extended far beyond traditional caretaking roles, such as nursing or elementary-school teaching. As well, "traditional barriers to married women's working for pay have been removed, and arrangements allowing part-time work have been formalized" (Jones, Marsden, & Tepperman, 1990, p. 36). The need for women in the World War II labour force contributed greatly to a redefinition of women's roles. That revolution continued after the men returned from the armed forces. As women's job opportunities increased after the war, the once rigidly defined sex roles of women grew more flexible (Jones, et al., 1990).

Other societal forces also encouraged a revision of women's roles. Jones et al. (1990) identified the 1960's as a pivotal decade for Canadian women because of the advent of safer and more accessible birth control technology, the easier access to higher education, the drop in birth rates (after peaking in 1957), and economic changes resulting in the need in most middle-class urban families for two incomes. These changes set in motion three processes that have resulted in profound changes in Canadian women's lives and in Canadian society in general: "(a) a rapid and prolonged rise in divorce rates, (b) a reduction and compression of childbearing, and (c) stronger career commitment among women" (Jones et al., p. 7).

As time progressed, growing numbers of women began to work outside the home. Since 1941, the participation of females in the work force in Canada has more than doubled (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1984) and it continues to rise. Jones et al. (1990) estimated that a century ago approximately ten per cent of Canadian women worked outside the home for pay. For 1941 that estimate was approximately 20 per cent, and for 1981, over 50 per cent. By 2001 it is expected to reach 80 per cent.

In addition, work patterns of both women and men have changed in recent decades. Several writers (e.g., Giele, 1982b, 1982c; Harevan in Evans, 1985) have identified a shift in the structure of work in American society away from the traditional linear patterns of school and job scheduling to more flexible and individualistic patterns in which school and work may be interspersed and family and work patterns integrated. Jones et al. (1990) observed similar changes in Canadian society, especially affecting younger women:

The current generation of young women is not just varied, it is also enormously fluid. ... Movements in and out of paid work, in and out of part- and full-time work, in and out of full-time education, are much more common today than a generation ago. So too are movements in and out of marriage.

(p. 56)

Also, according to Rossi (1980), we seem to be entering "a new period of increased variance in both the timing and sequencing of life events" (p. 16) such as education, marriage, childbirth, job entry, and retirement. To Wolfman (1984) these changes constitute a significant dislocation in our society: "The changes over the past 20 years affecting the economic structure and labour force have changed the ways in which women are needed as workers and women's expectations of what should happen in the labour force" (p. 2).

Finally, the feminist movement has profoundly affected innumerable aspects of women's lives. It has turned public attention to such compelling issues as the long-assumed conventions of gender role behaviour, relationships between the sexes, rights within marriage and under the law, implications of medical developments and their ethical consequences, equity hiring and pay, abuse and harassment, imaging of women in the public media, and gender biases in language. The debate over these issues and consequent changes in public

attitudes, legislation, and the practice of law have encouraged and even compelled women to reconsider who they are and what they might do or be in both the public and private spheres.

As women's available role options increase, their family and work roles--and the combinations thereof--have grown more varied and flexible. Tasks once thought to be exclusively the domain of men are now being performed by women (Giele, 1982a; Jones et al., 1990). Similarly, tasks once thought to be stereotypically "female" (e.g., various caretaking roles) are being increasingly performed by men, thereby freeing some women to explore other role options and continuing to challenge traditional role expectations. As Giele (1982c) wrote:

What appears to be happening in every major industrial society is a redefinition of men's and women's roles. Change is in the direction of greater equality and sharing in parenting, housekeeping, and making money. The new patterns correspond with greater interpenetration between the worlds of work and family life (Kanter, 1977). They also illustrate crossover in the family roles of women and men. (p. 130)

In addition, as Neugarten (in Hall, 1980) noted, our traditional assumptions about the appropriate timing of various role choices and behaviours (e.g., college entry, marriage, parenthood) are no longer valid. Chronological age no longer governs our life and role decisions to the degree that it once did.

More role options, however, have led to a more complex process of role choice and role management for women. Wolfman (1984) suggested that development for girls and women may be a process of training or "education" for incorporating the variety of roles they must play: "women have long assumed multiple responsibilities ... what has not been

obvious, however, is the complexity of the activity which goes into fulfilling the multiple roles and responsibilities--not to mention their significance for the total society" (p. 1).

Women's efforts to choose between various role options and to juggle multiple roles may also leave them more vulnerable to stress. According to Rossi (1980), changing, varied, and often conflicting role expectations for women may well result in "elevated stress at numerous decision points along the lifeline" (p. 17). For example, a woman considering a job promotion might have to weigh its consequences to various aspects of her life such as child or elder care responsibilities, work scheduling, and office dynamics, that would not normally concern a man. Similarly, Washor-Liebhaber (1982) stated that when having to make choices about work in their lives, women often "feel overwhelmed by the obstacles that they are just begining to recognize and face" and that anger, fear, anxiety, and confusion are "only a few of the feelings that suddenly come alive when women begin to ask themselves that age-old question: What do I want to be?" (p. 51).

The stress women experience in balancing home and work roles may also be increased by the lack of appropriate role models in their personal lives and in the larger culture. If women do not know about others with whom they might identify and who have achieved the difficult balance between work and family responsibilities, women are deprived both of models showing how it can be done and of the assurance that they are not alone in their struggle, that their difficulties have been shared and overcome by others. Furthermore, as is explored in the following section, for many years psychological researchers neglected the working woman by assuming that normative career development equated to uninterrupted, upward, and linear progression, a pattern traditionally associated with men and male development. Although there have been significant changes in theory and research towards developing models more representative of women's lives, the influence of traditional

views of what constitutes "appropriate" career behaviour may continue to contribute to women's experiences of role conflict and role strain.

The preceding discussion has only touched upon the many and varied changes in women's roles over the past few decades. What is clear is that our society has experienced some profound shifts in women's involvement in and commitment to paid employment and in shifting home and work roles for both women and men. It is not the purpose of this study to explore either the manner or the extent to which women artists' careers have been shaped by the social forces just described. However, an understanding of how these forces have changed women's lives in general is vital if we are to view women artists' experiences of career within the larger context of women's lives in contemporary culture. The lives of women artists, like those of other women, do not exist separately from the larger social context, but develop within it and are shaped by the same social, economic, and political forces that shape the lives of other women and men.

### **Relevant Psychological Theories**

None of the major psychological theories or models described herein are able adequately to explain the structure or development of women artists' lives. That being the case, new explanations are needed if, as counsellors, we are to understand the particular experiences of this group of women and the experiences of other individuals whose career development may be characterized by frequent change and discontinuity. However, before such explanations can be posited, it is necessary to understand what questions the established theories have left unanswered and in what ways they might fail or succeed in reflecting women artists' experiences of career. Only then will theorists be in a position to offer alternative explanations or to build on existing theories towards developing a complete understanding of the meaning and experience of career for this distinctive group of women.

### **Traditional Theories of Career Development**

Over the years, researchers and theorists have taken a variety of approaches to the study of career and career development. Some have focused on the process of career decision making and the factors which influence individuals' choices in this area: Williamson's (1939, 1972) trait and factor theory, for example, and Holland's theory of career and career choice (Holland, 1959, 1973, 1985). Others have emphasized the personality variables and intrapersonal dynamics of career choice: for example, Roe's (1956) and Roe and Lunneborg's (1990) theory of personality development and career choice, and Bordin's (1943, 1990) psychodynamic model of career choice and satisfaction. Alternative approaches have been taken by theorists such as Krumboltz (1979) and Krumboltz, Mitchell, and Jones (1976) who de-emphasized the intrapsychic variables involved in career choice. They constructed theories of social learning and career decision-making which focused on the impact of factors such as genetic endowments and special abilities, environmental conditions and events, and learning experiences. Still other theorists have viewed career and career choice within the context of development across the life span. Of the career and adult development theories that stressed life span development, those of Super (1953, 1957, 1969, 1980, 1990), Erikson (1959), Havighurst (1953, 1972), Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg (1986), and Levinson (1978) remain the best-known and most influential examples. This latter group of theories is especially relevant here, since the present research focuses on how women artists have experienced their careers over the full course of their lives.

### **Life Span Developmental Theories**

Super's approach is probably the most persuasive in the career development field. As Herr and Cramer (1988) observed, the work of Super and his colleagues over the years "has received the most continuous attention, stimulated the most research, influenced the most



pervasively the field of vocational psychology, and is the most comprehensive" (p. 136) of the developmental theories. A major component of Super's work was his collaborative research on the longitudinal Career Pattern Study (e.g., Super et al., 1957; Super et al., 1963) in which he examined the career development of over 100 males from childhood through to adulthood.

In terms of theory, Super (1980, 1990) drew on the earlier work of Buehler (1933), Havighurst (1953), Hoppock (1935), Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, and Herma (1951), and Miller and Form (1951), among others, to develop his "life span, life-space approach" (p. 197) to career and personal development. Super's approach was not reflected in one integrated, comprehensive, and retestable theory, but rather in a "segmental theory" (Super, 1969): that is, "a loosely unified set of theories dealing with specific aspects of career development, taken from developmental, differential, social, personality, and phenomenological psychology and held together by self-concept and learning theory" (Super, 1990, p. 199).

Super (1990) most recently attempted to portray his segmental theory in an "Archway Model" which he "designed to bring out the segmented but unified nature of career development, to highlight the segments, and to make their origin clear" (pp. 199-200). One of the key concepts in this model was the linkage of vocational preference, developmental stages, and self-concept. Super (1951, 1953) proposed that a person's self-concept is organized within the framework of a role (including either a functional or a social role) and that the choice of an occupation makes possible the playing of a role appropriate to the self-concept. For Super (1990),

the process of career development is essentially that of developing and implementing occupational self-concepts. It is a synthesizing and

compromising process in which the self-concept is a product of the interaction of inherited aptitudes, physical makeup, opportunity to observe and play various roles, and evaluations of the extent to which the results of role playing meet with the approval of superiors and fellows (interactive learning). (p. 207)

Another important theoretical approach to career development is represented by those theories that have explored the relationship of personality and career through the linking of career development with stages or phases of adult development (e.g., Havighurst, 1972; Tiedman & O'Hara, 1963). Erikson's (1959) eight-stage psychosocial theory of ego development was the foundation for a number of these theories. Erikson himself had relatively little to say about career choice and development (although he did regard work as a central component of an individual's life). However, his model of psychological development remains seminal in the field.

Most significantly, Havighurst (1972) built on Erikson's theory and identified specific developmental tasks, including career-oriented tasks, which he linked to specific ages. In his model of adult development, Havighurst suggested that some of the tasks that an individual should naturally complete during the ages 18 to 30 are: (a) getting started in an occupation, (b) selecting a mate, and (c) starting a family. Some of the tasks associated with ages 30 to 60 are: (a) reaching and maintaining satisfactory performance in one's occupational career, (b) developing adult leisure-time activities, and (c) accepting and adjusting to the physiological changes of middle age. According to Havighurst, bypassing any one of these stages can result in difficulties at a later stage. Havighurst also stressed the importance of the interaction between personal characteristics and social factors in an individual's career choice and development.

Like Super (1980, 1990) and Havighurst (1972), Vondracek et al. (1986) adopted a broad life span approach to career development. These theorists called for a developmental and multidisciplinary approach to the study of vocational roles and career development. Their conceptual model included "a contextual perspective that recognizes the changing character of the individual's social, physical, and cultural milieus" (Vondracek et al., p. 5) over time. In the view of Vondracek et al., career development can be "fully understood only from a relational perspective that focuses on the dynamic interaction between a changing (developing) individual in a changing context" (p. 5).

In addition to the above theories of career development, a number of researchers and theorists concerned with the more general process of adult development have also contributed to theory in the career development field (e.g., Gould, 1972; Levinson, 1978; Sheehy, 1976, 1995; Vaillant, 1977). Of these, Levinson's (1978) work stands out as especially influential. In his life-cycle approach to men's development, Levinson drew attention to the shifting periods of stability and transition in adult life. He proposed that most individuals are likely to experience several transitions in the course of their career development, resulting in periods of re-exploration and re-establishment of career goals. He also suggested that a personal Dream, or vision of "self-in-adult-world" (p. 91) is a powerful motivating factor in the choice and development of an individual's career.

### **Critique of Traditional Developmental Theories**

Despite their differences, one element that all of the preceding developmental approaches have in common is an underlying androcentric bias in their conceptualizations of career and career development and inadequate attention to women's alternative experiences of career. For example, Super's (1953, 1957, 1969) theory has received considerable empirical support over the years (e.g., Crites, 1971; Super, Kowalski, & Gotkin, 1967; Super &

Overstreet, 1960). However, it is important to note that the majority of studies undertaken to test Super's hypotheses have focused on the experiences of males, particularly school-age boys and young men. Corresponding research involving females and older adults of either sex has been undertaken less often.

Super (1953, 1957, 1980, 1990) also gave only minimal attention in his theory to the special factors that may influence women's career progress. On the one hand, his approach allowed for a great many determinants that may influence individuals' career development. On the other hand, the very range of his theory necessarily precluded particular attention to some of the complexities of the career development process as they may affect women, particular occupational groups (such as artists), or other special populations (such as racial or ethnic minorities). He did suggest that while "work and occupation provide a focus for personality organization for most men and women, ... for some persons this focus is peripheral, incidental, or even non-existent" (1990, p. 208). He did not, however, explore at any length the impact of factors such as gender role stereotyping or family responsibilities that may cause women's career decisions and development to vary from men's. Super concluded simply that his theory is "essentially applicable to both sexes, if modified to take childbearing into account" (1990, p. 234), thereby suggesting that childbearing is the only factor that significantly differentiates women's and men's career development.

Similarly, the applicability to women of Havighurst's (1972) theory is limited by its lack of supporting empirical evidence and its restrictive assumptions of what constitutes "normal" development. Havighurst, like Erikson (1959) in his psychosocial theory of ego development, often seemed to equate "typicality" with "normality," assuming that everyone will naturally marry and have children. Consequently, women who remain single or childless and who choose to focus on paid work rather than family do not fit well into

Havighurst's model. Furthermore, as Huyck and Hoyer (1982) pointed out, in models such as Havighurst's that emphasize developmental tasks, there is no recognition that the "consequences of being 'out of phase' might be beneficial rather than harmful" (p. 219). For example, it may be advantageous for some women to delay motherhood until their mid- or late 30's, when they have established a professional career.

Although Vondracek et al. (1986) did address a number of variables that commonly differentiate women's and men's careers, their model also has shortcomings which limit its applicability to women. For one thing, these theorists assumed career to be synonymous with paid work, an assumption which in Richardson's (1993) view, perpetuates a bias in favour of work accomplished within the occupational structure and both ignores and marginalizes the value of work and work roles (such as familial roles) done outside that structure. For another, Vondracek et al. gave relatively little attention to sociocultural factors and did not explicitly indicate in their model how factors such as gender socialization would impact on women's career development.

The suitability to women of Levinson's (1978) theory of development is likewise questionable. Levinson based his theory primarily on a three-year study of 40 middle-class men, aged 35 to 45. Although he took care to articulate that his research goal was to map the structure in men's development, Levinson nonetheless extrapolated his findings to women (as did much of the popular press that reported his research), by conceptualizing men's development as representative of adult development. This extrapolation reinforced the equation of male experience with normal adult experience, thus rendering women's differing experiences as somehow abnormal. Studies by other researchers in the field (e.g., Daniels & Weingarten, 1979; Sheehy, 1976, 1995), however, have suggested that the patterns of adult and career development identified by Levinson may be quite different for women.

### Gender Bias

To determine the value to women of the above theories of career development (and the more gender-sensitive theories that have been developed in response to them), it is necessary to understand the origins and consequences of these theories' inherent gender bias. The following discussion is provided to establish a philosophical and sociological context in which all theories of career development may be evaluated.

As the preceding review illustrates, a feminist perspective reveals a significant degree of gender bias in traditional theories of career development. The prevalence of such a bias in the developmental literature is not surprising given that most of the major theorists in the fields of adult and career development (e.g., Erikson, Havighurst, Levinson, and Super) are themselves male and have based their research almost exclusively on the study of men (usually White middle-class men) and the male life cycle. Even those theorists who are female (e.g., Roe and the adult development theorists Loevinger, Lowenthal, and Neugarten) and/or who have studied women as well as men (e.g., Gould) have often taken male development as their model for adult and career development. As a result, men's developmental experiences and patterns of work and relationship have usually been considered the norm in describing adult and career development (Evans, 1985; Heriot, 1983; Miller, 1976). In those rare instances when theorists have turned their attention to issues pertaining specifically to women's development, women have frequently been judged as abnormal when they did not adhere to the male-oriented pattern (Evans, 1985; Gilligan, 1982; Heriot, 1983; Miller 1976).

The adoption of a male-centred view in most adult and career development theories has impeded our understanding of women's experience of career in a number of ways. First, the acceptance of male norms in terms of work patterns has led to the assignment of different

weights to the value and role of (paid) work in the lives of men as compared to women. Whereas for men, the attainment of stable, satisfying, and productive employment has been considered an integral part of the adult development process, theorists and researchers (e.g., Erikson, 1959; Havighurst, 1953, 1972) have tended historically to downplay the importance of paid employment in the lives of women. Rather, assessments of women's success or failure in achieving psychological maturity have been closely tied with their relationships with men and the fulfillment of their mothering potential. The tendency has been for theorists in the fields of both adult and career development to reduce the lives of women to stages in their reproductive cycle or to equate women's development with the family life-cycle (Evans, 1985). As Barnett and Baruch (1978) suggested, "the best illustration of the impact of out-moded assumptions, stereotypes, and biases" in the developmental literature may be the way researchers deal with the variable of work: "although 90% of all women work for pay at some point in their lives, paid employment has not been conceptualized as central to the lives of women, who are not expected to function as economic providers nor to derive self-esteem and identity from this role" (p. 191).

Another important consequence of the underlying androcentric bias of most traditional developmental theories has been the general acceptance of age-oriented, linear, and stage-sequential models of psychological and career development. These models have commonly been based on patterns of growth and change identified in studies of predominantly White and white-collar men (e.g., Erikson, 1959; Levinson, 1978; Vaillant, 1977). Typically in linear and stage-sequential models, identity formation is associated with an increase in autonomy, sense of agency, and interactions with the world outside the family; career is associated with paid employment; and career success is associated with increased monetary resources, productivity, and upward mobility. In contrast, women's experience of

development in adulthood may be typically more inwardly-oriented than that of men, and more closely associated with space versus time and a cyclical pattern of change and transformation versus a pattern of linear progression (Marshall, 1989).

A third consequence of the gender bias of traditional theories of adult and career development has been the tendency of theorists to overlook the complexity of factors which influence women's role choices. For most women, whether or not (or to what degree) they have chosen to embrace traditional gender roles and to focus their lives on family, domestic and child-care responsibilities, and unpaid work, their career paths may be influenced by a myriad of sociological, cultural, and psychological factors which do not typically affect men (Astin, 1984; Barnett & Baruch, 1978; Gallos, 1989; Giele, 1982a; Marshall, 1989; Miller, 1976). These factors may lead to work patterns and role choices very different from that of many males and may include: (a) cultural, familial, and personal attitudes about appropriate behaviours and careers for women at various ages; (b) systemic barriers in the workplace that militate against women's attainment of certain career goals, particularly for lower-class and minority women; (c) biological imperatives regarding the choice and timing of bearing children; and (d) conflicts associated with balancing work roles with family and child-care responsibilities (Astin, 1984; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987).

A fourth consequence of the gender bias associated with androcentric developmental theories has been the incorporation of chronological age as a key variable (e.g., Erikson, 1959; Levinson, 1978). Barnett and Baruch (1978) proposed that if one "begins with a consideration not of the male experience but of the reality and variations of women's lives, it is unlikely that chronological age would be seen as the central variable" (p. 190). In their view, most traditional career theories are inappropriate for women because they fail to take



into account varying role patterns a women may occupy and the numerous combinations of career, marriage, and children that may occur at various times in women's lives.

Finally, a number of writers have identified the research design and methodology of many traditional career development studies (e.g., Erikson, 1959; Super et al., 1957; Super et al., 1963; Tiedeman & O'Hara, 1963) as being intrinsically gender biased. For example, Perun and Bielby (1981) and Washor-Liebhaber (1982) criticized established theories of career development for failing to include women in their validation samples. According to Barnett and Baruch (1978), even when women who work are included in studies and when work is treated as an important variable, relevant differentiations are rarely made between groups of women (e.g., between the career-committed and those who prefer to be at home).

In summary, it is apparent that the major theories of career development presented to date have failed to represent accurately the experience of career for women in general, as well as for specialized groups of women such as artists. (Furthermore, as was noted earlier in this text, these theories also may not accurately represent the experience of career for many men, especially those who are neither White nor middle-class.) Both overt and subtle gender bias has limited the applicability to women of most traditional theories of career development. The recognition of this bias has prompted some writers (e.g., Brooks, 1984; Marshall, 1989; Perun & Bielby, 1981; Washor-Liebhaber, 1982) to call the validity of all existing theories into question. Brooks (1984), for one, concluded that since "existing theories were formulated primarily to explain the career development of men, and since women's career development is different from men's, the existing theories are inadequate" (p. 355).

### **Theories of Women's Career Development**

As Marshall (1989) observed, a repeated challenge in career theory "has been to incorporate female values into a so far largely male base" (p. 288). To meet this challenge, and thereby to redress the gender bias inherent in many traditional theories of career and career development, Marshall called for a "re-visioning [of] the contents, structures, and methods of career theory--the three core aspects of knowledge-making over which patriarchy has exerted so much control" (p. 288). In recent years, numerous researchers and theorists (e.g., Astin, 1984; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Farmer, 1985; Gottfredson, 1981; Gustafson & Magnusson, 1991; Hackett & Betz, 1981; Larwood & Gutek, 1987) have attempted just such a "re-visioning" of career theory and have formulated theories and models designed specifically to explain women's career choices and behaviours.

Brooks (1990) described recent efforts at gender-sensitive career theory building as having taken three main approaches. In the first, a theory from one realm has been applied to another to explain more adequately women's experiences: for example, Hackett and Betz (1981) applied self-efficacy theory to vocational behaviour. The second approach has been to construct a new theory that is applicable to both women and men. The most prominent examples of this approach are Astin's (1984) and Gottfredson's (1981) theories. The third has been to try to incorporate new or additional concepts into existing theory. Forrest and Mikolaitis's (1986) integration of women's identity theory with established career theory exemplifies this last approach.

In all three of these approaches to women's career development, researchers have attempted to identify and to explore relationships among those variables which specifically influence women's experience of career. In some studies researchers have focused on the internal variables affecting career choice. For example, Hackett and Betz (1981) explored

the cognitive factors mediating the acquisition and performance of career-related behaviours in women. Their research, which was based on Bandura's (1977a, 1977b) earlier work on self-efficacy theory, focused on self-efficacy expectations as a major category of cognitive behaviour that has particular relevance to the understanding of women's career development.

Hackett and Betz (1981) identified sex differences in the access to and availability of four sources of information which are important to an individual's development of strong expectations of personal efficacy. These information sources were: (1) performance accomplishments (successful performance of a task or behaviour); (2) vicarious learning (vicarious experiences of observing other people succeed); (3) emotional arousal (the states of physiological arousal from which people judge their level of anxiety and vulnerability to stress); and (4) verbal persuasion (the verbal suggestions, encouragement, and persuasion from others toward a given behaviour). Hackett and Betz found that as a result of their gender socialization, women cognitively process these four types of information differently than do men. For example, men are exposed to vicarious learning experiences more relevant to career-related efficacy expectations. In contrast, women are exposed to sex role and occupational stereotyping in literature, textbooks, the media, and occupational information. Women also have fewer successful career-related role models. As a result of such gender socialization and learning experiences, women may develop strong internal inhibitions that restrict their options. According to Hackett and Betz, "women lack strong expectations of personal efficacy in relationship to many career-related behaviors and, thus, fail to fully realize their capabilities and talents in career pursuits" (p. 326). Differences in the career-related efficacy expectations of women and men, therefore, help explain sex differences in vocational behaviour.

In other studies, researchers have explored the impact of external, as well as internal, variables on vocational behaviour. Astin (1984), for example, in her need-based sociopsychological model of career choice, focused both on psychological factors such as personal motivations and expectations, and sociological factors such as sex role socialization and the structure of opportunities in the labour force. In designing her model, Astin drew substantially on Roe's (1956) personality theory of career choice and Bandura's (1977b) social learning theory.

Astin's (1984) model incorporated four important constructs: (1) work motivation (in the form of the three primary needs for survival, pleasure, and contribution); (2) work expectations (including perceptions of one's capabilities and strengths, the options available, and the kinds of work that can best satisfy one's needs); (3) sex role socialization (whereby social norms and values are inculcated by the individual through play, family, school, and early work experiences); and (4) the structure of opportunity (including economic conditions, the job market, one's family structure, the occupational structure, and other environmental factors). Her model was also a developmental one, "intended to explain changes in career choice and work behavior, changes that can be observed not only in the lives of individuals but also in whole groups (i.e., women) over time" (p. 119).

Astin's (1984) model defined both the psychological factors (work motivation and expectations) and the cultural-environmental factors (sex role socialization and the structure of opportunity) that interact to produce career choice and work behaviour, and explained their interactions. Astin designed her model to account for the occupational behaviour of both sexes. Her premise was "that basic work motivation is the same for men and women, but that they make different choices because their early socialization experiences and structural opportunities are different" (p. 118).

Another theory which included both psychological and non-psychological variables is Gottfredson's (1981) developmental theory of women's and men's occupational aspirations. Gottfredson's (1983) stated purpose in constructing her theory was to explain "how the well-documented differences in aspirations by social group (e.g., race, sex, social class) develop" (p. 204). Gottfredson integrated a number of principles from several different theories of career development and vocational choice (e.g., Ginzberg et al., 1951; Super, 1957) to develop her own theory, which focused on the role of the self-concept in occupational aspirations. According to Gottfredson (1981), her theory:

accepts the fundamental importance of the self-concept in vocational development [and] that people seek jobs compatible with their images of themselves. Social class, intelligence, and sex are seen as important determinants of both self-concept and the types of compromises people must make, thus the theory integrates a social systems perspective with the more psychological approaches. (p. 546).

Gottfredson (1981) identified four crucial cognitive developmental stages during which she felt individuals formed relevant elements of their self-concept and their occupational aspirations. For example, in Stage 1 (ages three to five years) the child develops an orientation to size and power and the "concept of being an adult" (1981, p. 548). In Stage 2 (ages six to eight years), the child develops an orientation to gender roles and a gender self-concept. In Stage 3 (ages nine to 13 years), the child develops an orientation to social class and valuation, and preferences for type and level of work. In Stage 4 (ages 14 and up), the child develops an orientation to an internal unique self and a refinement of her or his own values, attitudes, and vocational aspirations. According to Gottfredson, as individuals progress through these four developmental stages, they reject various occupations as

unsuitable to their self-concept (based on factors such as their gender, social class, ability, and personal interests and values). By so doing, they gradually develop personal cognitive maps of job-self compatibility, a "set or range of occupations that the person considers as acceptable alternatives" (p. 548). In Gottfredson's view, occupational choices are a result of the interaction between one's job and self-concept compatibility, and one's views about the accessibility of jobs. Women, therefore, often choose lower-status, lower-level occupations because such occupations are compatible with their self-concepts and their evaluations of job availability.

Forrest and Mikolaitis (1986) took quite a different approach than most other theorists in the field of women's careers. These theorists did not design their own theory, but instead drew upon the work of identity theorists Chodorow (1974, 1978), Gilligan (1977, 1982), and Lyons (1983) to suggest how theories that focus on the relational component of women's identity formation could be incorporated into existing career theories such as that of Holland (1985). Forrest and Mikolaitis observed that while most theories of vocational development included the constructs of identity or self-concept, they commonly ignored the importance of the relational component (i.e., self-in-relation to others) in definitions of the self and explanations of identity development. Instead, traditional theories tended to reflect a perspective which emphasizes the self as separate and objective, rather than connected to others. (They saw the former perspective as more stereotypically "male," and the latter as more stereotypically "female.") To these theorists, the relational component of identity is central to both women and men's self-definition, and incorporating a relational component into existing theories of career development would add an important "internal psychological construct that may help explain individual and group variations within and between men and women" (p. 83) on a number of demographic variables.

Using Holland's (1985) typology theory, Forrest and Mikolaitis (1986) demonstrated how the relational component of identity might be usefully incorporated into a specific theory of vocational development. They suggested, for example, that the relational construct of identity could be added to Holland's theory in order better to identify which work environments might suit which people. In their view, "women or men whose self-descriptions and real-life moral conflicts express a predominantly connected self (or separate self) would be more likely to prefer work environments where this component of their identity could be expressed and valued" (p. 83).

In addition to the theorists discussed above, several others have also made important contributions to the literature on women's career development. For example, Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) with Fassinger (1985) proposed a multi-dimensional structural model to examine individual differences in the realism of women's career choices. Their model of career-choice realism examines the congruence between a person's abilities and chosen occupational level, and between her interests and chosen field of work. Larwood and Gutek (1987) also presented a "bare bones" theoretical model designed to include several facets, such as career timing and sequencing of marriage and parenting activities, not commonly addressed in theories based on men's developmental patterns. And Farmer (1985) developed a social-learning model that proposes that adolescents' career motivation is influenced by three major variables: background, personal psychological, and environmental. Farmer found that girls and boys experienced significant differences in achievement motivation as a result of the interaction of these variables.

### **Critique of Theories of Women's Career Development**

Although the theoretical approaches to women's career development just described provide a salutary alternative to traditional assumptions, such approaches are still relatively

new and require further refinement and validation. The gender-sensitive theories that have been developed so far still do not adequately explain how psychological and sociocultural factors translate into women's expectations or experiences of career, or their choices of occupational and other life roles. The predictive utility of some of these theories is also questionable.

For example, as Brooks (1990) observed, although several empirical studies have supported the predicted relationships between self-efficacy and vocational behaviour proposed by Hackett and Betz (1981), other studies have not been as favourable. More research work needs to be done on self-efficacy theory to evaluate its ability to explain and to predict career behaviour, and its capacity to differentiate between the career behaviour of women and men. The generalizability of this theory to various populations (e.g., different groups of women such as artists) also needs to be assessed.

Astin's (1984) model is notable because it included sociological variables such as gender role stereotyping and the structure of opportunity, as well as psychological variables such as individual work motivations and expectations. It was also a laudable attempt at developing a theory that is applicable to both women and men. Astin's theory has been criticized, however, on a number of points. For example, Gilbert (1984) questioned whether the model sufficiently addressed the realities of the career development of women. She particularly challenged Astin's assumption that active participation in family roles is harmonious with occupational achievement and advancement, an assumption that, in Gilbert's view, "is very much at odds with our current institutional structure" (p. 129). Another reviewer, Harmon (1984), felt that Astin's model failed to include enough operational definitions to generate adequate testing. Fitzgerald and Betz (1984) also criticized this model for not acknowledging or integrating previous theory and research in the field, for including



poorly defined constructs, for failing to provide suggestions for measurement, and for not generating testable hypotheses.

Like Astin's (1984) model, a strength of Gottfredson's (1981) theory is that it included both psychological and nonpsychological variables and identified the principles of their interaction, as well as the interplay between development and choice. It also explicitly described the process of occupational compromise, took into account a substantial body of research, and explained some contradictory findings (Pryor, 1985). However, Gottfredson's fundamental construct of the self-concept was not well defined in her theory thus limiting its predictive power (Pryor, 1985). Also, according to Betz and Fitzgerald (1987), Gottfredson's theory failed to analyze sufficiently the effects of gender role socialization on women's career choices and aspirations. One particularly contentious point raised by Gottfredson (with which Betz and Fitzgerald took issue), is that the majority of women are in lower-level, feminine-stereotyped positions because that is where they wish to be (their aspirations being closely linked to their gender identity).

Forrest and Mikolaitis (1986), by highlighting the importance of the relational component of identity to career development theory, addressed a neglected area in women's career theory. They did not present a fully integrated theory of their own, however, nor did they undertake research to validate their ideas. More work needs to be done in this area if we are to comprehend more fully how women's identity development interacts with their career development and how established theories of women's identity development might be integrated with theories of career development.

Similarly, the other theories mentioned above (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Farmer, 1985; Fassinger, 1985; Larwood & Gutek, 1987) all offer promising concepts or models for

future research and theory development. None, however, is comprehensive enough to adequately explain women's career behaviour over the life span.

Finally, it is notable that all of the most influential work to date in the area of women's career development was published prior to 1990. Continued work is needed if theory and research in this field are going to stay current with the realities of women's lives in our rapidly changing society.

### Summary

This section has attempted to describe and summarize the theories that have made the most valuable contributions to our understanding of women's experiences of career and women's career development. Although each approach discussed here has its limitations, each has identified some of the many significant variables and dynamics that may shape women's careers. A summative review of these theories reveals the degree to which women's career development may be more complicated than men's. All the theorists mentioned have attempted to integrate and to articulate a vast array of factors that uniquely influence women's choices, aspirations, and patterns of career development. Indeed, in two extensive reviews of career research, Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) and Fitzgerald and Crites (1980) concluded that women's career development was more complex than men's and that women's career stages or patterns are significantly different from men's.

What is not yet known is the full nature and impact of the complexity of women's career development and the structure of women's career stages or patterns (if such definable stages or patterns exist). Moreover, information is noticeably lacking on the experiences of particular groups of women, such as artists, whose experience of career may or may not be similar to those of the majority of women. While each of the theories described above may inform to some degree our understanding of women artists' experiences, it is important at

this relatively early stage of theory development that no one theory is assumed to apply wholly to artists' lives or indeed, to any other specific occupational group. Data that will contribute to theory building in this area must come directly from studies--such as this one--of women artists themselves.

### **Recent Theoretical Developments**

In the early 1990's a number of reviewers examined the field of career psychology in terms of past and future directions for research and practice (e.g., Betz, 1991; Borgen, 1991; Osipow, 1990, 1991; Swanson, 1992). In so doing, various social and demographic variables such as the aging of the population, the increased participation of women in the labour force, and the changes in women's and men's roles were recognized as having had major influences on the career field. As researchers and practitioners have become aware of the impact of such variables on people's lives, the focus of the central research and practice questions has shifted. Osipow (1991) summarized the most significant changes over the past few decades as follows:

In the 1950's and 1960's many of the published studies dealt with career entry: who chose what and for what reasons. In the 1970's and 1980's there was a gradual shift to studies involving issues concerning women's career choice and development and to career adjustment issues such as reaction to occupational stresses. Early signs suggest to me that in the 1990's and the next century the emphasis will increasingly be on research that has an explanatory flavor. Studies will examine how variables interact in determining career entry and adjustment, but with less emphasis on who and what than on why and how. (p. 295)

Several writers (e.g., Osipow, 1990; Savikas & Lent, 1994; Swanson, 1992) have also addressed an apparent convergence of theories in the career field. According to Osipow (1990), there has been a tendency "toward convergence of [the] major theories into a coherent whole, while at the same time the maintenance of important and useful distinctive applications and features of each approach" (p. 130). Savikas and Lent (1994) expanded upon Osipow's observations and embarked upon a "convergence project" to explore and promote a unification of career theories and research for the purposes of creating a more comprehensive and integrated scientific base for career psychology. As part of that project, Savikas (1994) proposed "that a convergence agenda can aid theory renovation, advance the empirical process for knowledge making, and enrich the practice of career intervention" (p. 255).

One aspect of theoretical convergence noted by Swanson (1992) that could be particularly germane to an understanding of women's lives is the subtle shift in focus in the literature "from assuming that work and nonwork inherently involve conflict to viewing how the two domains interact and complement one another" (p. 145). According to Swanson, life span approaches to career development are especially "ripe for the inclusion and integration of nonwork variables" (p. 147). Likewise, Savikas (1994) stated that if career theory is to remain relevant to life in our postindustrial multicultural society, it "must broaden its focus beyond fixation on the work role and look to how different cultures and unique contexts provide different paths of development" (p. 237).

Increased attention to nonwork roles in career theory and research necessarily calls into question prevalent conceptualizations of career and work in general. As was discussed in Chapter I, these terms have been defined in the literature in numerous ways over the years and their definitions continue to evolve. Super (1976) has been especially influential in

expanding the notion of career away from strictly employment-related activities to include life roles experienced across various life domains. Despite the growing acceptance of such broad-based definitions, however, ambiguity remains concerning the usage and understanding of the concept of career and of the related concept of work.

A promising approach that may help resolve this ambiguity was suggested by Richardson (1993) who argued for a new "location" of the study of work in people's lives. Richardson identified the slow response to new advancements in research from other fields of psychology and the lack of representation of other than White and middle-class groups as persistent problems in the career development-vocational literature. In order to address these problems, Richardson proposed a transition in theory and research attention away "from the study of careers predominantly located in the occupational structure to a focus on the study of work in people's lives in which work is considered to be a central human activity that is not tied to or solely located in the occupational structure" (p. 427). In her view, such an expanded concept of work could help combat the pervasive social devaluation of women's work as embodied in the traditional concept of career. A focus on work in people's lives across all life domains and all role contexts might also contribute to a richer and more complex understanding of the nature of work relevant to both genders.

Notably, a number of theorists in the field of organizational psychology (e.g., Arthur, 1994; Bird, 1994; Mirvis & Hall, 1994) have similarly called for a re-visioning of our understanding of careers and have proposed a new perspective of careers as "boundaryless," that is, not bounded by traditional organizational career principles. For example, Bird (1994) argued for a reconceptualization of careers as "repositories of knowledge." In his view, career should be visualized as an "accumulation of information and knowledge rather than simply progressions of [paid] work experiences. ... In this context, work experiences

constitute the primary mechanism by which careers occur, though they are not in themselves a career" (pp. 325-326). Mirvis and Hall (1994) suggested that boundaryless careers will be inevitable for many workers in the future given present and forecasted changes in the economy and the labour market. While the transition to boundaryless careers may be a difficult one for many organizations and individuals, Mirvis and Hall proposed that this new career reality could also be a source of "psychological success" (i.e., a sense of satisfaction and enrichment) for many of tomorrow's workers as each sets her or his own career course and creates her or his own self-styled "path with a heart" (p. 378). These theorists also hypothesized that people's core identities may be enlarged by incorporating a commitment to their "life's work" rather than to the traditional idea of a "career:"

In this framework, a person's identity deepens, not only through cumulative work experiences and career achievement, but also through "work" as a spouse, parent, and community member, and especially through "work" on one's identity. In many respects the boundaryless career will give people the freedom and flexibility to more fully engage in life's work and find, where desired, greater balance in their lives. (p. 378)

### **Theories of Women's Identity Development**

Following from the perspective of Mirvis and Hall (1994) and as has been suggested by several life span developmental theorists (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Forrest and Mikolaitis, 1986; Vondracek, 1992; Vondracek et al., 1986), to fully comprehend individuals' experience of career, we must seek ways to understand how their identity development interacts with their career development. An understanding of this interaction may be especially pertinent to a study of women artists because artists, like other talented individuals, tend to use their work as a primary means to express their sense of self

(Rodenstein, Pflieger, & Colangelo, 1977; Sanborn, 1979). Therefore, the development of their creative identity (i.e., their identity as artists) can be expected to be closely aligned with the development of their personal identity (Sang, 1989).

Although an understanding of the interaction between identity and career development has been identified as vital to our conceptualization of the developmental processes of both women and men, there is little literature which explores this subject either in regards to women in general or to women artists in particular. There is, however, a significant and growing body of literature on the subject of women's identity development which may help begin to explain women artists' experience of career. Accordingly, a brief review of the currently prominent theories of women's identity development is presented in order to provide additional theoretical background to this study.

### **Relationship Models of Women's Identity Development**

Since the late 1970's there has been a groundswell of research and theory-building in the field of women's identity development. Numerous theorists and researchers (e.g., Chodorow, 1978; Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1983; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976) have examined the traditional theories of development such as those posited by Freud (1974) and Erikson (1968), and questioned their validity in terms of women's experiences. The general conclusion of these authors has been that there is a great disparity in much of the developmental literature between women's reality and the representation of human development. Furthermore, as Gilligan (1982) wrote, this disparity "has generally been seen to signify a problem in women's development ... [instead of] a problem in the representation, a limitation in the conception of human condition, [and] an omission of certain truths about life" (p. 2). Established personality theorists from Freud (1974) through to Rogers (1961) have equated normative human development with male development, thereby framing female

development as a deviation from the norm. Furthermore, they have associated healthy development with the Western cultural norms of achievement, individualism, independence, self-reliance, personal success, and affluence (Spence, 1985), thereby devaluing the alternative relational priorities commonly associated with women.

To counteract such androcentric views of development, Gilligan (1982), Josselson (1987), and others have developed new models of identity that have attempted to address the shortcomings of mainstream theories by conceptualizing women's experiences in their own terms. Enns (1991) divided these new identity models into five categories best represented by the work of the following theorists: (1) Gilligan (1982); (2) Josselson (1987); (3) Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986); (4) Surrey (1985), Jordan and Surrey (1986), Kaplan (1986), and Kaplan and Surrey (1984); and (5) Eichenbaum and Orbach (1983). These models share a valuing of women's unique experiences and an emphasis on the relational aspects of women's existence.

Of these five identity models, Gilligan's (1982) work is perhaps the most cited in both the professional and popular press. Gilligan studied female self-definition and moral development. She concluded that for women and girls, identity development is closely tied to their understanding and experience of their connection to others. This is in contrast to men, whose development is more associated with separation from others.

According to Gilligan (1982), not only do women define themselves in the context of human relationship, but they also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care for others. Women's place in man's life cycle, therefore, "has been that of nurturer, caretaker, and helpmate, the weaver of those networks of relationships on which she in turn relies" (Gilligan, p. 17). In Gilligan's view, however, women's predilection and capacity for caring has been consistently devalued by traditional theories of psychological development. She



concurred with Miller's (1976) earlier analysis that when individuation and individual achievement are championed as hallmarks of adulthood, and psychological maturity is equated with personal autonomy, women's concern with relationships inevitably is cast as a weakness rather than a strength.

Gilligan (1982) advocated a recognition of the masculine bias of traditional developmental theories and an understanding of the differing roles that relationships and dependency issues play in the development of women and men:

The elusive mystery of women's development lies in its recognition of the continuing importance of attachment in the human life cycle. Women's place in man's life cycle is to protect this recognition while the developmental litany intones the celebration of separation, autonomy, individuation, and natural rights. ... Only when life-cycle theorists divide their attention and begin to live with women as they have lived with men will their vision encompass the experience of both sexes and their theories become correspondingly more fertile. (p. 23)

Josselson's (1987) work on women's identity formation has also made a significant contribution to the developmental field. Josselson used Marcia's (1966) conceptualization of identity status development to frame her research into how women progress through Erikson's (1968) eight identity stages. She first categorized the women in her study according to Marcia's four identity stage outcomes (foreclosure, achievement, moratorium, and diffusion) with the aim of exploring "internal differences among the four groups of women that would explain why some resolve identity crises and integrate identities while others either avoid the task of creating an identity or become unable to transcend crises" (1987, p. 33). Later she re-interviewed these women to discover how their identity statuses

had influenced their ongoing life choices. Josselson's work demonstrated that interpersonal relationships and the experience of relatedness, rather than career ambition, were central to the women's sense of identity.

The work of Belenky et al. (1986) further contributed to our understanding of the relational aspect of women's identity development. These researchers drew on Perry's (1970) model of intellectual/ethical development of college students to examine women's approaches to knowledge. They identified five separate perspectives "from which women view reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge, and authority" (p. 3). These positions reflected the evolution of women's identity and ranged from the position of "silence," in which women experience an extreme denial of self and dependence on external authority, to "constructed knowledge," in which women begin to integrate rational and emotive thought and objective and subjective knowing. According to Belenky et al., underlying each of the five positions is a tendency for women to favour "connected knowing," a knowing that is based on an understanding of context and the other person's point of view. "Connected knowing" sees truth as emerging through care, in contrast to "separate knowing" which assumes that truth is established through impersonal procedures. The orientation of connected knowing, then, is toward relationship.

As Enns (1991) pointed out, the relational models of Gilligan (1982), Josselson (1987), and Belenky et al. (1986) were all adaptations of existing stage theories of development. Each of the three assumed "that maturation is the consequence of appropriate interaction between the environment and individuals and that these transitions are made gradually" (Enns, p. 212). Each model also suggested that women frequently experience a stage in their development in which they are closely identified with the traditional feminine and nurturing role. Rather than viewing this stage as socially regressive or limiting,

however, according to these models, this stage should be esteemed as a manifestation of women's relational values and an important transitional phase towards continued development (Enns, 1991).

The last two models to be described both stressed the importance of the mother-daughter relationship to women's identity development. Like the previous three models, they highlighted the role of sex role socialization in women's psychological difficulties.

Surrey (1985), Jordan and Surrey (1986), Kaplan (1986), and Kaplan and Surrey (1984) developed what they termed a "self-in-relation" model which emphasized growth within relationship as the primary motivational thrust in women's development. According to Kaplan (1986), "connection with others ... provides a primary context for action and growth, not a detraction from one's self-enhancement, as is implied in other theories" (p. 235). In this model, women's active engagement in the process of facilitating and enhancing connectedness with others, rather than separating from others, was seen to foster the evolution of a healthy differentiated self "with its own clear properties, wishes, [and] impulses" (Kaplan, p. 235). The growth of the differentiated self was understood to have its foundation in the mother-daughter relationship and to continue through relationships with other significant individuals in a woman's life. From a self-in-relation perspective, developmental problems occur, not because a woman has failed to become sufficiently autonomous or separate from others, but because her need to evolve through growth-in-relation has been frustrated by social denigration of her relational capacities (e.g., she is criticized for being selfless or for doing too much for others).

Eichenbaum and Orbach (1983) also emphasized the interaction of relationships and gender socialization in women's development. Their feminist analytic approach focused on the impact on girls' development of family structure and relationships, especially the mother-

daughter relationship. To them, "psychological development starts at birth and occurs within the context of the relationship the infant has with the caregiver. Women's psychological development is thus shaped in the mother-daughter relationship, the critical relationship in the formation of women's psychology" (p. 36). Eichenbaum and Orbach identified two major aspects of the mother-daughter interaction that shape a daughter's psychology. The first was that "the mother will identify with her daughter because of their shared gender" (p. 40). The second was that "a mother not only identifies with her daughter but also projects onto her some of the feelings she has about herself" (p. 41). In this model, developmental problems were seen to occur because a daughter internalizes, through the mother-daughter relationship, the same negative patriarchal norms that were earlier internalized by her mother. Any conflict or ambivalence a mother has about her own role will be transmitted to her daughter. As a result, the daughter may feel rejected, inadequate, and insecure.

### **Critique of Models of Women's Identity Development**

The relational theories of women's identity development described above have had a major impact in the psychological and feminist literature on the conceptualization of women's developmental processes and their concerns related to work, family, and relationships. These theories have both strengths and weaknesses, however, which must be taken into consideration when evaluating their usefulness in explaining women artists' lives.

In terms of strengths, these theories all emerged out of intensive research on women's daily experiences. They all framed these experiences in a positive manner and offered helpful clinical insights to counsellors who wish to affirm the previously undervalued experiences of empathic relatedness (Enns, 1991). They also challenged other researchers, theorists, and counselling practitioners to think more flexibly and positively about the nature of women's psychological maturation. In addition, according to Hare-Mustin and Maracek

(1988), the assertion in these theories of the worth of "feminine" qualities such as caring and nurturing has had the positive effect of "countering the cultural devaluation of women and fostering a valued sense of identity in them" (p. 459).

In terms of weaknesses, these theories may be criticized for exaggerating the differences between the sexes and for creating simplistic and artificial dichotomies between the psychologies and capabilities of women and men (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1988; Lerner, 1988). Their focus on gender differences in identity development may marginalize and obscure "the interrelatedness of women and men as well as the restricted opportunities of both" (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, p. 462). A focus on psychological difference may also lead theorists to underplay the influence on women of situational factors and external social forces, such as historical change, economic conditions, social role conditioning, institutional sexism, and the extent of male authority (Enns, 1991, Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1988). Furthermore, the methodologies used in these studies have usually consisted only of women (thereby making accurate comparisons with men difficult) and recent research evidence does not support their generalized gender distinctions (Enns, 1991).

Despite such weaknesses, these new models of identity development may contribute to our understanding of women artists' lives in at least two important ways. First, the prominence given to the issue of relatedness in each of the theories described suggests that personal and family relationships may be important factors in most, if not all, women's career choices, aspirations, and achievement patterns. For women artists an emphasis on relatedness may be manifested in struggles to balance home and artistic (work) commitments and difficulties in giving the required intense and focused attention to their creative work. Baker (1973), for example, observed that women artists frequently have to persist in their work in a unique kind of social and emotional isolation which may be exacerbated by the

demands of an intimate relationship. When the conflicts between that relationship and an artistic career become too great, many women artists may stop working. Second, the importance of the relational component of identity highlighted in these theories may explain the preference of many women artists for cooperative artistic ventures (in the manner, for example, of Judy Chicago's The Dinner Party [1979]). Such group projects may enhance women artists' sense of connection to other similar women and may mitigate the isolation often experienced by exceptionally creative and talented women in general (Kerr, 1986).

### **Factors Affecting Women Artists' Career and Identity Development**

#### **Women Artists' Career Development**

There has been little written about the career development of women artists as a specialized group. However, there does exist a small body of literature focused on the career concerns of gifted, talented, and creative individuals (both women and men). What has been written about women artists (e.g., Kerr, 1986; Sang, 1989) falls into that category. Although it may not be assumed that all artists can be characterized as "gifted" (in itself a controversial designation), some of the findings published in the "gifted and talented" literature are relevant to understanding women artists' experiences of career.

For example, several factors which may uniquely affect the career development of women artists have been identified in that literature. First, because gifted and/or talented individuals frequently use their work as a major vehicle for self-expression, their occupational choice may become a life style choice in which their time and energy is consumed in work-related activities (Herr & Watanabe, 1979; Hoyt & Hebel, 1974; Rodenstein et al., 1977; Sanborn, 1979). Second, gifted and/or talented individuals are often pressured by others to fulfill their potential. As Post-Kammer and Perrone (1983) commented,

talented individuals are continuously being told they can be anything they want to be. While such comments may engender self-confidence, they may also place emphasis on continued future accomplishments and create a feeling in talented individuals that they have not accomplished enough. (p. 203)

Third, the gifted and/or talented (particularly women and girls) often feel lonely and different and may be socially isolated (Kerr, 1986). As a consequence, they may have fewer opportunities to discuss career goals and life plans with their peers and may find social adjustment more difficult (Herr & Watanabe, 1979; Kerr, 1986). Finally, the gifted and/or talented must often forge their personal career paths with the benefit of few, if any, role models (Herr & Watanabe, 1979; Noble, 1987; Zaffran & Colangelo, 1979). This has been the case historically for women in many categories of the written, visual, and performing arts.

As noted in Chapter I, several personal characteristics associated with creative individuals may also play a part in determining the nature and progress of artists' careers. For example, in a study of the personality traits of 20 male artists, Roe (1946) observed that artists tended to be sensitive, nonaggressive, emotionally passive, hard-working, self-disciplined, and of superior intellect. In other studies, Barron (1969) and MacKinnon (1978) found that creative children and adults (both female and male) were typically self-confident, independent, adventurous, curious, playful, and able to take risks. Guilford (1967) and Torrance (1966) also identified several intellectual abilities that contribute to creative potential. These included fluency (the ability to produce multiple responses to an open-ended problem), flexibility (the ability to take various approaches to a problem), originality (nonconformity in both thought and action), and elaboration (the ability to develop and to

elaborate on ideas). According to Nochlin (1973), women artists especially may require "a certain unconventionality" (p. 31) of character in order to pursue a career in art.

In addition to the above factors, the career development of artistically talented women may be influenced by a number of gender-related factors. These include: (a) conflicting messages from others about the appropriateness of their career choice; (b) difficulty in balancing work, relationship, and self-actualizing needs; (c) devaluing of their career pursuits by self and others; and (d) sex discrimination in educational institutions and in the market- and workplaces (Garrison, Stronge, & Smith, 1986; Kerr, 1985; Noble, 1987, 1989; Sang, 1989).

It has also been suggested that in order for artists to create, it is necessary for them to "cultivate a singular determinedness about [their] work" (Donaldson, 1984, p. 232). For many women artists, however, conflicting messages about the appropriateness of an artistic career, and competing personal, relationship, and family responsibilities (especially mothering responsibilities) are likely to interfere to some degree with any "singular determinedness" and may hamper women artists from taking their career choice seriously (Sang, 1989).

Women have generally been socialized in our culture to put other people's needs before their own, but the pursuit of an artistic career is usually a very individualistic one which may require artists to spend large amounts of energy and time on their own work, uninterrupted and alone. Yet many women, particularly if they are mothers, find it difficult or impossible to shield themselves from the exigencies of everyday life in order to engage in creative work. The very practical considerations of day to day existence, therefore, may seriously inhibit women artists' ability to develop their creative potential. As Ochse (1990) pointed out:



The fact that Taylor Coleridge lost his magnificent work through the interruption of the man from Porlock has repeatedly been recorded with an appeal to public sympathy. But women are constantly held up by "men from Porlock" who demand their attention and interrupt their thoughts. They have no wives to insulate them from outside intrusion or to relieve the burden of the trivial domestic demands and social obligations that a family household entails.

(p. 173-174)

(The Coleridge story may well be apocryphal--"Kubla Khan" is a complete, if enigmatic, poem--but Ochse's point holds.) Moreover, the compensation for artistic effort is often intangible, sometimes rendering the value of an artist's work difficult for others in her life to appreciate or support (Sang, 1989).

Even when women artists do manage to take themselves and their work seriously, they often find that the options available to them through which they may express their abilities are severely limited (Noble, 1987). Sex discrimination still exists at all levels in the creative world (including the visual and performing arts, the publishing milieu, etc.) making it particularly difficult for women artists to get appropriate training, work, recognition, and adequate financial compensation (Chicago, 1977; Sang, 1989; Wyszomirski, 1985). The practical obstacles that continue to confront contemporary women artists in the realms of training and employment have been well documented by several writers (e.g., Chicago, 1977; Greer, 1979; Nochlin, 1973, Wyszomirski, 1985). These obstacles include difficulties in securing opportunities for training and production; in achieving positions of authority and leadership in educational and institutional settings; and in achieving public exposure, financial support, and acceptance of artwork created by women. Wyszomirski (1985) also noted that prejudicial attitudes about middle-aged and older women often interfere with the realization

of a woman's full artistic potential. Such attitudes "can detract from the acceptance of women as being creative, productive, or exciting once they pass 40--or at just the time when years of study, development, and reputation-building place them at, what is for men, the threshold of enduring success, acclaim, and stature" (p. 10).

A further result of such sex discrimination is that, in many artistic fields, there are few same-sex role models for women artists to emulate. Because women artists historically have been denied appropriate educational opportunities and access to publishing, exhibition, and performance venues, many have had to take male pseudonyms in order to get their work recognized (e.g., the writers George Eliot and George Sand) or have had their work appropriated by men (e.g., Auguste Rodin claimed as his own the work of the sculptor Camille Claudel, and Henry Gauthier-Villars published Colette's early stories under his own name). Also, the traditional distinction between art and craft has contributed to the exclusion of women from the realm of fine artists and the discounting of many art forms (e.g., needlepoint, weaving, quilting, etc.) produced by women working primarily in the private domestic sphere (Wyszomirski, 1985).

A final important factor that may affect women artists' career development is the generally marginal status of artists and artistic occupations in our culture. Although we may individually and collectively honour artists who have achieved prominence in a particular discipline (e.g., famous actors or musicians, etc.), we tend to marginalize artists as a group, both socially and economically. One reason for this may be that in contemporary society we place a lesser value on artistic talent than on many other skills. As Noble (1987) commented:

As a culture, we acknowledge and reward only those talents and abilities that have direct, marketable value, and what has value has largely been determined

by and for men. We tend, therefore, to dismiss "gifts" that aren't rewarded materially or that aren't technologically oriented. (p. 368)

Another reason may be that artists may intentionally or unintentionally set themselves apart from society as a whole through non-conformist attitudes and behaviours (Hogan, 1983; Holland, 1973).

Whatever the reasons for their precarious social position, the reality for most artists, women or men, is that the monetary rewards of their career choice are minimal and its social status uncertain. According to the Report of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee (Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1982), the role of artists in Canada has been seriously undervalued compared to other vocations. As a result, artists have been burdened by a variety of social, economic and political constraints that may interfere with their capacity to contribute fully to the cultural life of the country. This report particularly highlighted the "unreasonable economic restraints" which have marginalized artists:

A few artists at the very top of their fields are, of course, materially well rewarded. However, the evidence is overwhelming that Canada does not provide an adequate living for most of its professional artists. It is clear to us that the largest subsidy to the cultural life of Canada comes not from governments, corporations or other patrons, but from the artists themselves, through their unpaid or underpaid labour. (p. 4)

In terms of average income, self-employed artists, both female and male, have always fared worse than any other occupational group in Canada besides pensioners (McCaughey, 1985). 1991 Census figures, for example, indicated that the average annual income of artists in Canada in 1990 was less than \$18,000.00 (Statistics Canada, 1993). In addition, most performing and creative artists live with recurring unemployment and no formal access to

income security arrangements common to many other workers (Minister of Supply & Services, 1986) and they frequently have to manage two or more distinct jobs in order to earn a living (Statistics Canada, 1995). As a consequence, the struggle to survive financially remains a major factor in the career development of almost all artists. It may be a particularly pressing factor for female artists, given the greater discriminatory barriers and challenges women face in trying to establish themselves in an artistic career.

### **Women Artists' Identity Development**

There is also scant literature available pertaining specifically to either female or male artists' identity development. This subject has been addressed briefly, however, in the context of talented individuals' career development. For example, as mentioned, several writers have identified work as being a major means of self-expression for talented individuals (e.g., Herr & Watanabe, 1979; Rodenstein et al., 1977; Sanborn, 1979). Hoyt and Hebeler (1974) also linked occupational and life style choices in their study of talented individuals. These findings suggest that for artists, development of a personal identity is closely related to development of a "creative" work identity (Sang, 1981, 1989). As Sang (1989) wrote:

Most artists experience the need to make art to be as important as eating and sleeping. Being an artist involves more than producing a work of art; it involves a life philosophy--a statement about values and what is meaningful.

One can't separate living from the making of art. (p. 305)

While the process of developing one's creative identity may be challenging for any artist, it may be particularly so for women artists. As Sang (1989) pointed out, women artists, because of personal and social pressures, often find it difficult to take themselves and their work seriously. The absence of same-sex role models and the lack of artistic traditions

that include women may further compound women artists' identity struggles (Hatterer, 1965; Nochlin, 1973; Sang, 1989). Sang suggested that because society generally devalues artists, and because women artists experience sex discrimination at all levels in the art world, "a woman may experience considerably more anxiety, ambivalence, and doubt about herself as an artist" (p. 301) than would a man. Consequently, as the research on the career and identity development of artists (as well as other gifted and/or talented individuals) has suggested, personal identity formation for women artists may be closely associated with creative identity formation (Sang, 1989).

### **Conceptual Issues Related to Women Artists' Development**

The discussion in this chapter has shown that an understanding of the career and identity development of women artists requires a multi-faceted perspective that takes into account the internal psychological/intellectual variables that affect this group of women, as well as the external social and institutional context in which they live and work. A number of salient internal and external factors have already been examined in the contexts of women artists' career and identity development. One other important factor that may impede a woman's becoming an artist is a conceptual one: the commonly accepted, but restrictive, definition of the term "artist."

Historically, the designation of artist has been associated primarily with males. As Wyszomirski (1985) wrote:

Although the term "artist" is gender-neutral the social connotation attached to it implies masculinity. If women are to be encompassed in a discussion of art and artists, one feels a need to specify women artists or feminine art or feminist art or artists. Indeed, the idea of women as artists is still sufficiently

unorthodox as to entail confusion in both conceptualization and terminology.

(p. 8)

Wyszomirski (1985) identified three aspects of the traditional conception of "artist" that seem to have particularly hindered the acceptance of women as creative artists. These are: (1) the assumption that creativity is incompatible with procreativity, (2) the role of the artist as "great man" and independent individualist, and (3) the assertion of hierarchy of creative forms and genres and the distinction between art and craft (women have historically dominated the latter genre). Also, as Battersby (1989) noted, the concept of "genius" has been traditionally associated with images of a male "Hero" and "Outsider," who transcends everyday life and norms, especially domestic and reproductive tasks. This has contributed to the exclusion of women from the ranks of "Artist." As Battersby concluded, it is hard to imagine a working mother fitting the image of the Artist/Genius as Hero and Outsider.

There is an apparent contradiction, then, in our general understanding of women's role vis-a-vis the arts. On the one hand, the arts are customarily thought of as a feminine activity. The Muses, the sources of inspiration for artists, are female. Women are frequently the subject of artworks. And women have also given a strong feminine identification to the arts through their active involvement in arts education (both as students and teachers) and through volunteer work in many arts organizations (McCaughey, 1985). According to Collins (cited in McCaughey, 1985), "women have virtually cornered the market of art activity, if we discount the status of that activity and measure only the time spent on it" (p. 23).

On the other hand, women have historically been perceived as having secondary status in the arts and they continue to be underpaid and underrepresented as creative artists. For example, women artists continue to earn lower average incomes than men artists

(approximately 30% less according to the most recent Census [Statistics Canada, 1993]). In comparison to men, there are also fewer women writers, visual artists, playwrights, musicians, and composers. As well, there traditionally have been fewer women than men in positions of authority in arts organizations and in the fine arts and applied arts departments of universities (McCaughey, 1985). As McCaughey observed:

It is perhaps something of a paradox that males should dominate numerically creative and higher status occupations in the arts when there is a strong feminine identification of the arts. But in this respect, what has occurred in the arts is perhaps not unlike what has occurred elsewhere in the labour market, where women have also tended to be poorly represented in higher status occupations and jobs. (p. 23)

According to writers such as Battersby (1989), McCaughey (1985), and Wyszomirski (1985), the traditional conceptual and practical exclusion of women from the realm of "true" artists may seriously interfere with the acceptance--both by others and by the women themselves--of women artists' career goals and artistic talents. Despite their numbers and their active involvement in many facets of the arts, women artists may frequently encounter prejudicial attitudes and systemic barriers to the acceptance of their talents in various cultural institutions and in society at large. They may also quite typically struggle with issues of legitimacy in naming themselves as artists, in choosing careers as artists, and in considering the products of their creativity (e.g., paintings, fiction, musical compositions, etc.) to be important and valuable works of art.

### **Critique of Literature Related to Women Artists' Career and Identity Development**

The main critique of the literature pertaining to women artists' career and identity development reviewed in this chapter and the previous one is that few research studies and

no substantive theory in this area have been published. The little research and theoretical work that has been done has focused on the special variables that may affect the career development of women artists and other gifted and/or talented individuals. While knowledge of the nature and impact of these variables is crucial to an understanding of women artists' lives, we still do not know enough about how these particular variables fit into the larger contexts of women's career development. Many questions have yet to be answered. For example, how do the factors listed above specifically affect the experience of career for women artists and the meaning that career has for them? Are traditional theories of career development or the more recent theories of women's career development in any way applicable to the experiences of women artists? Are there predictable patterns of career development for women artists? In what ways are women artists' experiences of career the same or different from those of other gifted and talented women or from those of women in general? In what ways are women artists' experiences of career the same or different from those of men artists? While this study did not attempt to provide answers to all these questions, this investigation into the meaning and experience of career for women artists does shed light on many of these issues and lays the groundwork for further studies in this area.

### **Summary/Critique of Major Theoretical Approaches**

This chapter has examined the social context in which contemporary women in general experience career; traditional theories of career development; the origins and consequences of gender bias in traditional theories of career development; theories of women's career development; recent developments in career theory; theories of women's identity development; and factors affecting women artists' career and identity development. While all of these perspectives may provide valuable insight into women artists' lives, each of them taken individually has shortcomings which restrict its usefulness for explaining the



meaning and experience of career for this particular group. These shortcomings can be summarized as follows:

1. A knowledge of the various personal and social factors that may contribute to women artists' career development, as well as an understanding of the impact of changing social norms on women's role choices, provide only partial explanations of women artists' experiences of career. We still do not know how various intrapersonal and extrapersonal factors interact to shape the meaning and experience of career for these women.
2. Traditional theories and models of career development do not adequately account for the cyclical, fluid, and non-linear experience of career that is common for the majority of women (including women artists). Nor do they account for the many personal, social, and economic factors that may affect women's career development. Furthermore, the tendency of traditional career development theorists (e.g., Havighurst, 1953, 1972; Levinson, 1978; Super, 1953, 1957, 1980, 1990) to conceptualize the personal and career development patterns of White middle-class men as normative, has relegated female patterns of development (as well as differing patterns of male development) to the realm of the "abnormal" or "deficient." Although theory and research in the career field is beginning to address some of these issues (e.g., limiting conceptualizations of "work" and "nonwork" are increasingly being challenged), as yet no comprehensive theory exists which accurately reflects the realities of contemporary women's lives.
3. Recent theoretical models of women's career development, while more gender-sensitive than traditional models, still do not explain the full complexity of women's experience of career (especially as career may be experienced by diverse groups of

women such as artists). A major weakness in many of these models is their lack of analysis of the role that women's identity formation plays in women's career choice and development. Forrest and Mikolaitis' (1986) approach which was an attempt to integrate relational theories of women's identity development with established theories of vocational development, is an exception in this regard. Their work identified the relational component of identity as an important missing theoretical construct in theories designed to explain and predict women's vocational development. More theoretical and empirical work needs to be done, however, to assess the importance of this component as a major variable in both women's and men's career development.

4. Recent relational theories of women's identity development do not address many career-related components of women's development. As a consequence, their relevance to our understanding of women artists' career development is restricted. The identity theories reviewed in this chapter focused on the personal development of individuals within a relational context, and do not account for all the external societal factors that may influence women's career choices and their experience of career. For women artists, these external factors may include pressure by others to fulfill their potential, mixed messages from others about the appropriateness of their career choice, social isolation, lack of opportunities to discuss career goals and life plans, sex discrimination in training institutions and in the market- and workplaces, and financial insecurity.

None of these theoretical perspectives, then, if taken alone may serve satisfactorily to explain the complex experience of career for women artists. Instead, the best explanation of this phenomenon may lie in a combination of a number of perspectives. Accordingly, neither the methodology of this research study nor the conclusions to be drawn from the data

analysis were framed in relation to any one specific theory or point of view, but were informed by several perspectives as appropriate. The individual and collective limitations of all these perspectives in explaining women artists' experience of career also reinforce the value and necessity of research into this subject area. Only through studies such as this one will we be better able to understand women artists' career and creative identity development, and articulate and address the counselling needs of this particular group of women and of other women who identify with the nature of women artists' lives.

## CHAPTER III: METHOD

### Overview - Phenomenological Methodology

Phenomenological psychology draws on philosophical theories of existentialism and phenomenology, especially the work of Husserl (1970). Aiming for "a deeper and fuller understanding of human existence, ourselves, and others" (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989, p. 16), phenomenological methods were developed to help counter the prevailing behaviouristic and cognitive emphasis in psychological inquiry. As several writers (e.g., Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1985a; Polkinghorne, 1989; Valle et al. 1989) have contended, traditional experimental modes of inquiry, because they are grounded in scientific positivism, fail to explain many of the realities of human experience. The natural scientific model that can explore outwardly observable human behaviour may be inadequate for "the inward, unobservable side of others; that is, their thoughts, emotions, and sensations, commonly referred to as their private world of experience" (Valle et al., 1989, p. 4).

Whereas to the natural scientist objectivity is equated with distance from the phenomenon, to the phenomenologist "objectivity is fidelity to the phenomenon" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 52). To the existential-phenomenological psychologist "only that which has its base in naive experience is real and therefore, only that which is revealed or disclosed as pure phenomena is worthy of attention" (Valle et al., 1989, p. 13). The phenomenological approach concentrates then, not on describing physical objects, but on describing experience. The researcher suspends questions about the existence and character of the phenomenon under investigation in order to attend "to what is present or given in awareness. ... [Phenomenological psychology] differs from mainstream psychology by holding that human behaviour is an expression of meaningful experience rather than a mechanically learned response to stimuli" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 41-43). Correspondingly, phenomenological

researchers accept that the "truth" about any investigated phenomenon emerges not as one absolute and objective view, but as a composite picture of how the individual(s) who have experienced that phenomenon perceive or understand it (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975).

According to Giorgi (1985a), the purpose of phenomenological psychological research is to undertake "direct analysis of the psychological meaning of naive descriptions of personal experiences provided by individuals from all walks of life in situations that are easily recognizable as belonging to everyday life" (p. 1). In order to understand and describe a phenomenon in all its many diverse appearances, the existential-phenomenologist seeks to reveal the structure of the phenomenon, that is, its meaning. To reveal this structure, the existential-phenomenological psychologist asks

the question, What? That is, he or she seeks to understand phenomena in their perceived immediacy and is not concerned with explaining, predicting, or controlling them--the question, Why?, is not asked as this question implies an underlying causal view of the world. (Valle et al., 1989, p. 13)

But even as the emphasis remains on meaning-making, phenomenological understanding should not, as Colaizzi (1978) properly noted, be seen as "insulated from action since the agent of phenomenological understanding is not a supramundane mind but a [person] as bodily-engaged, participating being-in-the-world-with-others" (p. 56).

### **Research Design**

The researcher in this study took a phenomenological approach to eliciting and analyzing women artists' conceptualizations of career and their experiences of career over their life span. A phenomenological approach was chosen for two interrelated reasons.

The first reason was that phenomenological methodology allowed for an investigation of women artists' experiences of career from an holistic perspective. As Osborne (1990)

observed, the human sciences have grown disenchanted with traditional natural science methodology, preferring qualitative research methodologies, such as phenomenology: "A growing number of psychologists are unwilling to accept the decontextualization of experience and reduced meaning as a necessary price for the elusive goal of scientific objectivity" (p. 79). Compared to other methodological disciplines, the aims of the existential-phenomenological approach--to "explicate the essence, structure, or form of both human experience and human behaviour" (Valle et al., 1989, p. 6)--are most closely aligned with the purpose of the present study. In this case, phenomenological research methodology allowed direct contact, through descriptive techniques, with women artists' experiences of career in order to "attempt to elucidate the fundamental themes" (Valle et al., 1989, p. 6) of that phenomenon.

The second reason for choosing a phenomenological method of inquiry drew upon the feminist impetus to conduct research that reflects women's actual experiences. It is becoming axiomatic that across the social and natural sciences research has been deeply gender-biased (Crawford & Maracek, 1989; Harding, 1987, 1991). Because analysis in the social sciences has been based primarily on men's experiences, it has, as Harding (1987) observed:

asked only the questions about social life that appear problematic from within the social experiences that are characteristic for men (White, Western bourgeois men, that is). ... While studying women is not new, studying them from the perspective of their own experiences so that women can understand themselves and the world can claim virtually no history at all. (pp. 6-8)

As one way to reclaim women's history, Kremer (1990) proposed that research about women not only involve women's "lived reality," but that the research be carried out by

women. Women might then begin to be acknowledged not only as creators of knowledge in general, but of women's knowledge of themselves. In a similar spirit, Marshall (1989) encouraged researchers to engage in "collaborative forms of inquiry, in which participants become co-researchers and sense makers" (p. 289). Gallos (1989) also advocated research with a "micro-focus on the individual and the gender-specific ways in which she sees and makes sense out of her world" (p. 110). One way to create this micro-focus is through phenomenologically-oriented in-depth personal interviews with research participants such as those that were conducted for this study.

In addition, phenomenological methodology coheres with a feminist attitude of respect for women's specific reality. According to Miller (1988), for example, a feminist approach to understanding the lives and work of women writers is one that articulates a self-consciousness about women's identity both as an inherited cultural fiction and a process of social construction, and contests the available plots of female development. In other words, a feminist approach values women's personal interpretations and constructions of their reality, and seeks to transcend the accepted assumptions that have been generated in androcentric theories of psychological and social development. Similarly, a phenomenological approach respects the integrity of individuals' stories (Howard, 1991) and allows the participant's mind and voice full freedom of expression. Although the researcher's expectations and demands on the participant are always present to some degree, implicitly and explicitly, this research approach attempts to account for the impact of the researcher's presence through clear identification of the researcher's frame of reference.

### **The Interview**

To the phenomenologist, the clearest route to understanding a phenomenon is to confront it directly, that is, "by contacting the phenomenon as people experience it"

(Colaizzi, 1978, p. 57). Contact with the phenomenon can occur via a number of sources and take a variety of forms depending upon the purpose and constraints of the research investigation. Among the possible data sources and descriptive methods, interviews are one of the most frequently used forms in phenomenological-psychological research. A phenomenologically-oriented interviewer engages in a theme-oriented dialogue with the interviewee in order to "describe and understand the meaning of the central theme of the experience being investigated" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 49). Of course, as Kvale (1983) noted, common discourse often takes place on a factual level. A theme-oriented interview seeks to cover both the factual and the meaning levels, and aims to elicit non-theoretical and "nuanced descriptions [of the experience under investigation] that are precise and stringent in meaning and interpretation" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 49).

The interview in this context tends to be unstructured and open-ended; that is, it becomes a discourse constructed jointly by the interviewer and the respondent, rather than a strict stimulus-response interaction (Mishler, 1986). The interviewer strives "to remain open to the presence of new and unexpected constituents in the description and does not shape the questions as tests of ready-made categories or schemes of interpretation" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 49). The resultant interview usually takes the form of a directed dialogue with the interviewer utilizing gentle probes and other active listening skills to elicit participants' responses as clearly and in as much detail as possible. This approach also allows the interviewer to immediately confirm or modify her or his understanding of what the interviewee is saying (Kvale, 1983). The time needed to complete such interviews may vary considerably as a consequence of their agendas not being tightly preset. Their length may also vary with both the topic being studied and the interviewee's willingness to engage in self-reflection (Polkinghorne, 1989).



This study used largely unstructured interviews as the primary source of descriptive data about women artists' perceptions of their careers. Information about the specific components of these interviews is provided in the section below titled "Data Collection."

### **Framing of the Interview Question**

The overall methodology of this study and the framing of the research problem were consistent with general phenomenological principles as articulated by Colaizzi (1978). A (modified) narrative approach was also adopted, however, to help structure the main interview question and to inform aspects of the data analysis. That is, the main interview question, which was derived from the general research problem (i.e., What is the meaning and experience of career as it is lived by women artists?), was framed in a narrative mode derived from Cochran and Claspell's (1987) dramaturgical-phenomenological approach to narrative research. In that approach, the researcher uses the initial data collection interview as an opportunity to elicit participants' recollections of the investigated phenomenon as if their experiences were a story with descriptive detail and temporal development. In accordance with this principle, each participant in the study was invited to respond to the following question: "Would you please tell me, in as much detail as possible, about your life as a woman artist as if you were telling me a story; for example, when did your life as an artist begin, how did it progress, and what is it like for you now?" Also, during the data analysis, the fundamental structure of the participants' experiences (i.e., the essential structure of their constructions or interpretations of their experiences of career over the course of their lives) was conceptualized in basic narrative form (i.e., as a story). The fundamental structure or common story of their experiences is presented in Chapter IV. (A more extensive narrative analysis of the participants' reports was beyond the scope of this study.)

A narrative perspective was included in the general phenomenological design for this study because of the utility of that perspective in studying experiences across the life span. The inclusion of a narrative approach is especially appropriate for research focused on individuals' life experiences given that, as a number of writers have observed (e.g., Cochran, 1990; Cochran & Claspell, 1987; McAdams, 1988; Mair, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988), we live and make sense of our lives as a series of discrete stories, each with a beginning, a middle, and an end. (The "end," of course, does not mean that the participant's life or growth is over, but that there is a closure inherent in any individual's understanding of how the present has been shaped by the past.) In Cohler's (1982) view, "Lives are organized in the same manner as other narratives ... and are understandable according to the same socially shared definitions of a sensible or followable presentation" (p. 207).

Indeed, as a number of theorists (e.g., Howard, 1989, 1991; Mair, 1988; McAdams, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986) have proposed, identity development itself is a process of life-story construction. Furthermore, the importance of such a story lies in its revelation of "how change from beginning to 'end' takes place" (Freeman, 1984, p. 9). Studying the life course does not just exercise historical inquiry, therefore, it must also acknowledge the narrative structure of the recollection itself. According to Freeman, "More than a simple mapping of discrete and isolated events--whether they be particular or general-- [the study of the life course] is, in a distinct sense, an ongoing story to be told" (p. 3).

### **Bracketing**

Two important elements of both phenomenological and feminist approaches to research are the dialectic between the researcher and the participants and the acknowledgement of the researcher's effect on all aspects of the research. As Osborne (1990) stated, "existential-phenomenology recognizes the unavoidable presence of the

researcher in the formulation of the question, the determination of what are the data, the collection of the data, and their interpretation" (p. 81). Instead of attempting to avoid such influences through traditional experimental design, the phenomenological researcher admits to predispositions and assumptions through "bracketing," a process of rigorous self-reflection. This process involves the researcher's intensive review of the preconceptions and presuppositions (i.e., the biases) that she or he may bring to the investigation (Valle et al., 1989) in order to make these assumptions explicit to both the researcher and the reader. Once the researcher's orientation is acknowledged, the reader can judge how well that perspective has illuminated the subject (Osborne, 1990). Similarly, Harding (1987) observed that

the best feminist analysis ... insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of research. ... Thus the researcher appears to us not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests.

(p. 9).

Harding suggested that some ways in which researchers can become more visible are to declare their gender, race, class, culture, and how they may have been influenced by these factors.

As well as serving to make explicit the point of view of the researcher, bracketing also helps the researcher to clearly formulate the research question. To help clarify the research question, Colaizzi (1978) suggested that the researcher undertake pilot interviews with appropriate participants in order to gain information that may have been overlooked in the researcher's articulation of her or his presuppositions.

Bracketing, then, is an opportunity for the researcher to contact personal conceptions of the phenomenon under investigation, before the formal process of data collection has begun. Some or all of the information that comes to the researcher's awareness through bracketing may be reported in the write-up of the study. For this study, the researcher's bracketing involved personal reflections on the topic at hand, articulation of those presuppositions that emerged as a result of readings in the area of women artists' career development, and a pilot interview with a 47-year-old female artist. Some of the information and insights gained thereby are presented in Appendix A. A brief descriptive profile of the principal researcher is also presented at the beginning of the "Data Collection" section below.

### **Procedure**

Osborne (1990) and Polkinghorne (1989), among others, identified a number of common steps in conducting phenomenological research. These include: (1) Framing of the Question; (2) Bracketing; (3) Selection of Participants [Co-researchers]; (4) Data Collection; and (5) Data Analysis. The applications to this study of the first two of these steps were addressed above. Steps three to five are addressed below.

### **Selection of Participants**

This study included eight women artists 40 years of age or older. As noted earlier, an "artist" was defined as any manifestly creative woman who met the following criteria: (a) she identified herself as an artist (e.g., as a writer, poet, painter, sculptor, photographer, actor, dancer, etc.); (b) she considered the pursuit and practice of her own art to be a major value and primary life activity, (c) she considered herself currently active in her chosen artistic field, and (d) she considered her role as an artist to be her primary career. In

accordance with Colaizzi (1978), "experience with the investigated topic and articulateness" (p. 58) sufficed as the prime criteria for selection.

The minimum age requirement of 40 years was meant to serve as a rough guide only. As this study took a life span developmental view of career, it was necessary to include participants in mid- or later life who could provide some perspective on their experiences of career over their life span. Age 40 was chosen as the minimum age because the fourth decade is commonly associated with the beginning of midlife, a stage of adult psychological development which is often accompanied by increased self-reflection and a realignment of goals and priorities (Rubin, 1979; Stein, 1983; Viorst, 1986). Midlife has also been associated with increased stability and life satisfaction, especially for women (Baruch, Barnett, & Rivers, 1983; Black & Hill, 1984; Mitchell & Helson, 1990). And for many women artists, midlife is a time of great creative activity and accomplishment (Carr, 1946; Chicago, 1977; Dormann, 1985; Robinson, 1989). Of course, the relationship of age 40 or any other particular age to the onset of midlife is not absolute. However, it was assumed that by the time a woman reaches 40 she has experienced some evolution in her career and can reflect upon that process in the context of her general life structure. Also, by this point in her life, a woman may be expected to have substantially consolidated both her sense of personal and vocational identity.

Participants were recruited in a number of ways. First, letters and notices for posting were sent to a variety of arts associations in the Greater Vancouver area, soliciting volunteers for the study (Appendices B and C). These associations included the B.C. Performers' and Writers' Guilds of ACTRA, Circle Craft Co-op, the Community Arts Council of Vancouver, the Federation of Canadian Artists, the (Vancouver) Musician's Association, and the Potters Guild of British Columbia, among others. Second, similar notices were posted in the Fine

Arts, Applied Arts, Music, and Creative Writing departments of various local colleges and universities in the Greater Vancouver area inviting female faculty, staff, and students to volunteer for the study. Among the institutions that received postings were Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, Capilano College, Vancouver Community College, and the Vancouver Academy of Music. Third, letters were sent to the larger private art galleries in Vancouver requesting that the gallery directors consider whether any of the artists they represent or exhibit would be suitable for participation in the study. If so, they were asked to pass along the relevant information to the artist(s) and request that the artist(s) contact the researcher directly (Appendix D).

Volunteers were assessed for inclusion in the study through an initial telephone interview focused on determining if they met the criteria of "artist" as outlined above, if they were at least 40 years of age, and if they demonstrated a willingness to offer descriptions of their career experiences. Ten women originally responded to the researcher's recruitment efforts and were interviewed by telephone. Two of the respondents were eliminated as inappropriate, one because she wished to be paid for her involvement and one because she was in her early thirties.

### **Data Collection**

The approach to data collection in this study was informed by general phenomenological principles, especially as articulated by Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1985b), Polkinghorne (1988, 1989), and Valle et al. (1989). In accordance with these principles, the primary mode of data collection was personal interviews. The interviews were supplemented by self-reflection (bracketing) by the researcher and a pilot interview (Appendix A).

### **The Researcher**

The principal researcher in this study was a Caucasian female from a middle-class background, born and raised in British Columbia. She was 39 years old at the time of the first data collection interview. Prior to her graduate studies in Counselling Psychology, the researcher had worked for many years in the Vancouver arts community, primarily in administrative positions for various theatre companies and art galleries. Through her involvement in that community, she had worked with a wide variety of visual, performing, and literary artists. The researcher has also worked as a counsellor with numerous artists, female and male.

### **The Interviews**

The interview process that was followed in this study was based on a method proposed by Colaizzi (1978). There was one brief telephone assessment interview plus three personal in-depth interviews per participant. All interviews were conducted by the researcher described above.

The main purpose of the initial telephone interview was to evaluate individuals' suitability for participation in the study and to discuss with potential participants the purpose and nature of the study. Basic descriptive data was also collected at that time (e.g., age and artistic speciality). For those individuals who met the necessary criteria, times were arranged for the first in-depth interview. Also, after the initial assessment interview, a package of pre-interview material was sent to each participant. This package included information regarding the parameters of each participant's involvement in the study (Appendix E) and two copies of an ethical consent form (Appendix F).

The three personal interviews were devoted to data collection and validation. These interviews took place either in the participants' homes or the researcher's office. The length

of the first two interviews varied from 90 minutes to 2 and one-half hours and the length of the third interviews from 30 minutes to 1 and one-half hours, depending upon each participant's verbal fluency and her degree of eagerness to describe her life experiences. All interviews were tape-recorded.

The purpose of the first personal interview was for the researcher to hear each participant's initial description of her experience of career as a woman artist. Each participant was read an orienting statement, then was asked to answer the main interview question: "Would you please tell me, in as much detail as possible, about your life as a woman artist, as if you were telling me a story; for example, when did your life as an artist begin, how did it progress, and what is it like for you now?" Additional questions were included in the interview to ensure that participants fully described their experiences (Appendix G). Afterwards, the tape of each interview was transcribed and reviewed by the principal researcher.

The second interviews were conducted approximately eight months after the first interviews. Prior to the second interview, each participant was given the opportunity to review a transcript of her first interview. The purpose of the second interview was to allow each participant to extend her exploration of her experiences. Each participant was invited to comment on her experience of the first interview and asked to elaborate on information she had given at that time and to add any new information she felt was relevant. Near the end of the second interview each participant was also asked to complete a "timeline analysis" exercise (Heppner & Johnston, 1989) to further stimulate her life reflections (see Appendix H). The second interviews were then transcribed and analyzed in detail.

The third interviews were conducted approximately 15 months after the second interviews. Prior to the third interview, each participant was given the opportunity to review



the researcher's results to that point. The purpose of the third set of interviews was for the participants to validate the researcher's description of the themes that had been revealed in the two preceding sets of interviews and the common story that had emerged from the data analysis, as well as for each participant to confirm the content of the biographical profile that the researcher had constructed about her based on the content of her first two interviews. After the third interview each participant was also asked to confirm in writing her choice of a first name by which she wished to be known in the write-up of the results (Appendix I).

Consistent with the principles of interviewing summarized by Polkinghorne (1989), the interviewer's role was seen to be primarily one of keeping the interview focused on the topic under investigation. The interviewer used active listening skills as necessary in order to help each participant share her experiences. The interviewer also "tracked" topics in the interview that required probing and redirected a participant to these topics only after she had finished expressing her thoughts. This method served to minimize the interviewer's interference with the natural flow of each participant's thoughts and dialogue (Daniels & Weingarten, 1983). The duration of the interviews was flexible. A participant was interviewed for as long as necessary until she felt she had fully reported her relevant experiences.

### **Data Analysis**

Three approaches to data analysis were employed in this study. First, basic descriptive information was collected in order to provide summary profiles of the participants. Some of this information was provided by the participants at the time of the first telephone contact. Additional information emerged during the interviews. Second, Colaizzi's (1978) method of phenomenological inquiry was followed (with minor modifications) in order to structure the analysis of the interview data. (This method is

outlined below.) Third, Colaizzi's method was supplemented by a narrative approach (particularly as described by Cochran & Claspell [1987] and Cochran [1990]) to the identification of the storied nature of the data and the construction of the fundamental structure, or common story, of the participants' experiences.

Colaizzi's (1978) method comprises seven essential steps, which in this study applied as follows:

1. After the first set of interviews and transcription of the tapes, all participants' transcriptions ("protocols") were read in their entirety by the researcher "in order to acquire a feeling for them, a making sense out of them" (p. 59). The researcher also took back to each participant a transcript of her first interview for the purposes of stimulating further exploration and discussion of her experiences. Although Colaizzi did not call for a second interview at this point, such an interview was included in this study to add to the richness of the data and the ultimate soundness of the results. After the transcription of the second set of interviews, the researcher read each of those protocols to get a general feeling for the data.
2. Once a sense of the whole had been grasped for both sets of interviews, the researcher re-read all the protocols to extract "phrases or sentences that directly pertain to the investigated phenomenon [i.e., women artists' experience of career]; this is known as extracting significant statements" (p. 59).
3. The researcher attempted to articulate the meaning of each significant statement. This is known as "formulating meanings" (p. 59). Colaizzi identified this step as a precarious one because the formulations "should never sever all connections with the original protocols; [they] must discover and illuminate those meanings hidden in the

various contexts and horizons of the investigated phenomenon which are announced in the original protocols" (p. 59). This step was repeated for all protocols.

4. Next, the aggregate formulated meanings identified from the various protocols as described in Step 3 were organized into "clusters of themes" (p. 59). Here there was an attempt to identify themes which were common to all of the participants' protocols. Originally 18 minor themes and eight theme clusters were identified. These were subsequently collapsed into nine major themes. At this point, the nine themes were once again referred back to the original protocols for validation. This step of the validation process was undertaken by the principal researcher and one co-researcher. The nine theme descriptions were also reviewed for purposes of validation by the researcher's supervisors.
5. The results of the analysis so far were then synthesized into an "exhaustive description of the investigated topic" (p. 61). To formulate the exhaustive description derived from participants' protocols, the researcher drew on the narrative approach to analysis as exemplified by Cochran and Claspell (1987) and Cochran (1990). The aim at this stage was to begin to transform the nine identified individual themes into the structure of a story.
6. An effort was made to "formulate the exhaustive description of the investigated phenomenon in as unequivocal a statement of identification of its fundamental structure as possible" (p. 61). That is, the researcher attempted to further synthesize the data analysis into a concise and integrated story, the purpose of which was to illuminate the meaning and experience of career for women artists. A description of the participants' understanding of the term "career" was also developed.

7. To conclude the validating process, the researcher took back to each participant the findings to this stage in order to check how closely the descriptive results compared with the participants' experiences. Following Colaizzi's directions, any relevant new data that emerged from these interviews was "worked into the final product of the research" (p. 62). The "final product of the research" in this study includes brief biographical profiles of each of the participants, detailed descriptions of the nine common themes that emerged from the participants recollections, a description of what the term "career" meant to the participants, and a holistic description in narrative form that reflects the shared experiences of career for all participants over their life span. The holistic description is intended to form the collective story that most directly addresses the basic research question: What is the meaning and experience of career as it is lived by women artists?

### **Ethical Considerations**

A number of steps were taken by the principal researcher to ensure that this study was carried out in an ethical manner and with the informed consent of all the participants.

First, after the initial telephone assessment interview, each participant was sent a letter outlining the purpose of the study, its format, and the terms of the participants' involvement (Appendix E). This was accompanied by two copies of a participant consent form (Appendix F). The researcher ensured that before the start of the first interview each participant had signed both copies of the consent form. One signed copy was taken by the researcher and one copy was retained by the participant. Second, at the beginning of the first interview each participant was read a statement by the researcher reviewing the purpose of the study and the procedure for data collection (Appendix G). Third, each participant was kept informed throughout the data collection process of the purpose of the different data

collection procedures, the researcher's expectations, and the parameters of each woman's role as a participant in the study. Participants were also encouraged throughout to ask questions about any aspect of the research. Fourth, each participant was asked to confirm the content of the biographical profile that the researcher had written about her. If any participant requested changes or omissions in the biographical material that pertained to her, the researcher complied with that request. Fifth, each participant was informed that she could choose to be identified by a first-name pseudonym in the write-up of the study and was invited to provide a name for that purpose (Appendix I).

### **Limitations of the Study**

As LeCompte and Goetz (1982) observed, "attaining absolute validity and reliability is an impossible goal for any research model" (p. 55). Nonetheless, phenomenological and other qualitative researchers may approach these objectives through the conscientious use of strategies designed to enhance the credibility of their studies within the context of their particular research problems and goals (LeCompte and Goetz). In this study, attention was paid to a variety of factors that may have threatened the essential trustworthiness of the research. At the same time, certain limitations do exist on the reliability and validity of the results, and therefore on their generalizability to the larger population of women artists.

### **Internal Reliability**

Internal reliability concerns the degree to which multiple researchers can agree about the classifications and descriptions of previously generated constructs. In this study, internal reliability was addressed through the review and confirmation of all theme descriptions by two co-researchers (the principal researcher's supervisors).

### **External Reliability**

External reliability concerns whether or not independent researchers would generate the same constructs given the same or similar data. In this study, external reliability was addressed through the involvement of an independent co-researcher familiar with phenomenological methodology. This co-researcher reviewed two sets of interview data (after permission was obtained from the relevant participants), extracted numerous constructs (i.e., themes), and then compared these to the descriptions of the nine themes and the common story that were generated by the principal researcher. The co-researcher's results were highly congruent with those of the principal researcher.

Whether or not other researchers would find the same constructs using different but similar data cannot be assured. The unique characteristics of this study's participant group, setting, and research procedure cannot be precisely replicated. However, as has been done in this study, replication may be facilitated by outlining the theoretical premises of the research, defining the key constructs that inform it, and providing a detailed description of the research methodology (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982).

### **Validity**

Phenomenological research approaches validity from a general perspective. For example, Osborne (1994) equated phenomenological validity with the coherence and internal consistency of the researcher's interpretations of the data. Polkinghorne (1989) similarly equated it with the persuasiveness of the argument that supports the researcher's conclusions. Those conclusions are represented by the general structural description of the phenomenon in question. The assessment of validity in this type of study is therefore quite subjective. At the same time, certain criteria may be used to evaluate the rigor of an investigation, and therefore its claims to accuracy and generalizability.

### **Internal Validity**

Internal validity in this study refers to the extent to which the results accurately represent the participants' experiences of career. The major claim to internal validity here stems from the fact that the methodology allowed for formal involvement of the participants in the process of data analysis. On two separate occasions participants had the opportunity to validate the accuracy of the researcher's syntheses of the data. Also, the term of this study was relatively lengthy. The last set of interviews took place approximately two years after the first set. Although maturation effects may have interfered with participants' perceptions and reports of their experiences, as LeCompte and Goetz (1982) pointed out, long-term studies may be advantageous to qualitative researchers because such studies permit the identification of phenomena that remain stable over time.

The main threat to internal validity in this study may be the participants' discomfort with the construct of "career." This is a study specifically about the experience of career, yet the term itself is one that most of the participants disliked because they felt that it did not reflect the reality of their lives as artists (although they did use the term--as did the researcher--for lack of a better one). Consequently, participants may not have all been referring to the same construct when they discussed their experiences of career.

### **External Validity**

External validity refers to the extent to which the results are applicable across groups. The external validity of the results in this study may be threatened in several ways. First, the participant group was small (only eight participants) and quite homogeneous. All of the women in the study were Caucasian, from lower- to upper-middle class families, and had lived for long periods of time in the same geographical area. The homogeneity of the group therefore restricts the applicability of the results to other women artists. Second, the results

were based on the participants' self-reports and so were dependant on the women's individual levels of self-awareness and willingness to share relevant information. Third, the participants' reports would undoubtedly have been affected by the presence of the researcher and the research process itself. Consequently, the results that were generated in this study may not be generalizable to other groups of women artists because they are a function of "context-under-investigation" (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982), rather than of context only. For example, the presence of the researcher in this study may have influenced participants to have shaped their reports in socially desirable ways. Also, the researcher may have unintentionally missed or misinterpreted certain data. As Sandelowski (1993) pointed out, in qualitative research both researchers and participants are "stakeholders in the research process, concerned with staking out certain claims, ... with maintaining certain personas, ... and with frequently divergent interests, commitments, and goals" (p. 5). At the same time, the fact that the researcher has had extensive past experience in work and personal contexts with women artists other than the participants supports the knowledge claims in this study and the possible generalizability of the results. As Colaizzi (1978) noted, "understanding" of the investigated phenomenon by the researcher "qualifies exquisitely as a criterion for research knowledge" (p. 56). Finally, the unproven nature of the constructs used to describe the phenomena identified in this study (i.e., the nine theme titles), the general lack of consensus as to the precise meaning of the construct of career in the psychological and educational literature, and the participants' sometimes idiosyncratic use of the term "career" all restrict the generalizability of the study. The constructs discussed in this study may not be meaningful or similarly applicable to other women artists.



## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter includes: (a) brief career profiles of the eight participants; (b) detailed descriptions of the nine common themes that were identified in the data analysis; (c) an account of the participants' understandings of the term "career;" and (d) the fundamental structure, or common story, of the participants' experiences of their careers as women artists.

### The Participants

All of the eight women artists who comprised the participant group for this study are Caucasian, and by their own reports, from lower to upper middle-class families. Five of the women identified as heterosexual, two as lesbian, and one as bisexual. Six of the women are mothers. Five of the women live with intimate partners (only one is married) and two of the women are single mothers with one dependent child each. Two of the women live alone. All the participants lived in the Greater Vancouver area for the duration of the study. The age given for each woman in the following biographical profiles was accurate at the time of the first interview. The age range of the participants was 40 to 65 years. (NB: A number of the participants have been involved as students and/or faculty with what is now the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver, B.C. This Institute was known from 1924 to 1951 as the Vancouver School of Applied and Decorative Arts, from 1952 to 1977 as the Vancouver School of Art, and from 1978 to 1994 as the Emily Carr College of Art and Design.)

#### Alice: Potter, Art Instructor, 56

Alice was born in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. She has one older sister and two younger brothers. Her mother was a former teacher and homemaker and her father was a businessman and a "country gentleman."

Alice recalled that when she was growing up she was not drawn towards art as a career. However, she was strongly influenced by her mother's interest in music. Beginning when she was six, Alice took lessons for many years in both piano and violin. Her parents valued "craftsmanship" and her father had a strong "social action streak" which Alice found influential. After high school Alice considered becoming an Occupational Therapist in order to combine an interest in arts and crafts with "trying to help people."

Alice attended a private liberal arts college where she majored in sociology and minored in fine arts. While involved with the Fine Arts Department she won prizes for some of her designs and also travelled to the Netherlands to interview potters and glass blowers. At 22, after receiving her Bachelor of Arts degree, she began studies towards a Master's degree in social work at Columbia University in New York. She had chosen Columbia in order to be near the arts. At that point she considered her artistic interests to be a hobby only. After graduation, she returned to Minnesota, took a job as a social worker, and started to take night classes in pottery. Also during this time, at age 24, she married a man who was working on his Master's in Fine Arts. After three years in social work, Alice felt somewhat "burnt out." When her husband received a teaching position in Bellingham, Washington, Alice left her job--intending to return to it later--and moved with her husband to the West Coast.

Alice spent the next two years reading, exploring her growing interest in pottery, and teaching children's art classes part-time. At 28 Alice and her husband adopted their first child, a son. Three years later they adopted their second child, a daughter. When Alice was 32 she and her family moved to England for a year. Her husband painted at home and she was a "mom and housekeeper." She felt she was "still trying to juggle" her multiple roles and she put her career "very much in second place." However, she continued to take pottery

classes and eventually built a kiln and began to exhibit occasionally. She also began to consider a career in art education.

Upon their return to the U.S.A., Alice enrolled in pottery classes at the University of Cincinnati in Ohio. At 38 she received her M.F.A. and both she and her husband applied to teach at the Vancouver School of Art. Alice was hired for a forty per-cent position and her husband for a full-time position. Until that point, Alice had been working on a relatively small scale artistically and on one-of-a-kind functional pieces. In Vancouver she was able to work in a much bigger studio and began to explore making large clay sculptures for exhibition. She found this change to be both artistically and emotionally liberating. She also began to receive national and international critical acclaim for her work.

At the same time that Alice's profile as an artist was growing, she was experiencing difficulties in her home life. She often felt torn between the responsibilities of her multiple roles of wife, mother, artist, and art teacher. Her husband was also uncomfortable because Alice's career threatened to overshadow his own. She felt pulled between what she saw as her appropriate gender role as the supportive wife and her desire to be successful as an artist in her own right. When Alice was 47 the marriage ended. Although that transition was emotionally difficult, she also experienced it as "freeing."

After separating from her husband, Alice devoted herself to her art career. (By this time both children had moved away from home.) As well as continuing her work on her own art, she began to take on added responsibilities at the art school including a full-time teaching load and administrative duties. At the time of the last interview, Alice was living alone and enjoying her creative explorations and her "nurturing roles" of teacher, mother, and grandmother. She was--at least for the time being--free of exhibition commitments and was looking forward to making art "without the pressure of an exhibition."

**Carol: Multi-Media Artist, Writer, Composer, Entrepreneur, 40**

Carol was born and raised in Calgary, Alberta. She is the eldest of 12 children (the family included eight girls and four boys). Her mother was a homemaker. Her father was a geologist.

Carol said that she never felt personally supported by her parents to be creative, but she remembered that when she was growing up there were always books, music, and intellectual discussions in the family home. When she was a young teenager she decided she was going to "become an intellectual and write books and pursue the arts." She felt fascinated by many subjects and did not want to limit herself to the study of just one.

Carol's childhood and adolescence were physically and emotionally very difficult. Her home life included physical violence as well as sexual and emotional abuse, and she reported that she had "a terrible time at school." In Grade 11 Carol's parents sent her to a boarding school in England. Carol found this to be a very positive and formative experience. She was relieved to be at a distance from her family and finally felt encouraged by her teachers to pursue her interests in art and music. She had "her first experience of being an artist" when she displayed some of her art in the hallways of the school. After her graduation at 18, Carol briefly attended the Heatherly Wilson School of Art in London, then returned home.

Back in Canada, Carol worked temporarily as a draughtsperson, then at 20 enrolled at the Alberta College of Art to study drawing and painting. Her studies at the art college were cut short, however, because she was expelled due to her involvement with student politics. That experience exacerbated Carol's growing feelings of anger and disillusionment with the art establishment. She not only considered many of the art teachers she had encountered to be ineffective, reactionary, and unsupportive of her work, she also had experienced

considerable sexual harassment and sex discrimination from authority figures connected to her art studies (in England and in Canada). Carol decided to modify her career path. She ventured into the mental health field and worked at a few different jobs in that area.

Eventually, however, Carol felt drawn back to art study. She subsequently enrolled in the University of Calgary Fine Arts Department and majored in photography. During her time at that university, Carol used a variety of innovative means to support her studies, including working at a newspaper and winning prize money in beauty contests.

At 22, just prior to completing her Fine Arts degree, Carol married and moved with her husband to Montreal where she studied creative writing at McGill University. While in Montreal she gave birth to her first daughter. She was 25. Shortly thereafter her husband was transferred to Toronto. Carol then briefly attended the University of Toronto and Ryerson Polytechnic (graphic design speciality), before her husband was transferred again to Vancouver. At 27, after having settled in Vancouver, Carol had her second daughter.

Carol found the next few years of her life to be emotionally very hard. She felt torn between her art interests and her responsibilities as a wife and mother of young children, and found her husband, his family, and her own family unsympathetic and dismissive towards her career concerns. Carol eventually left the marriage and started up a small computer graphics company to support herself. However, in that arena too, Carol felt limited by the gender biases of other businesspeople who she felt did not take her "seriously" and were reluctant to invest in a woman-owned enterprise in a male-dominated industry. Eventually she was forced to close the company for financial reasons.

Carol's late twenties and early thirties were challenging years, both personally and professionally. For much of that time she felt ambivalent about the art world and the business world--she felt she had been "burnt" in both areas--and moved back and forth

between the two. At 30 Carol decided to concentrate on another professional field entirely and enrolled in Math and Computing Sciences at Simon Fraser University, but as had happened earlier, she felt that she was not taken seriously as a woman in that field. She also found that she missed being involved with art when she was away from it for very long. Consequently, she began to concentrate on her own creative work once more and switched from S.F.U. to the University of B.C. in order to complete the fine arts degree that she had started at the University of Calgary.

After graduation from U.B.C. at 36, Carol focused on her art career with renewed energy. She built a studio for herself and really "became an artist." Following her early pattern of pursuing multiple interests, Carol continued to work in a variety of different art disciplines including painting, photography, creative writing, and musical composition. She published some of her writing and participated in a number of art exhibitions. In addition, she became active with a number of different arts-related community groups and arts boards.

Also in the years following her graduation, Carol became involved in a number of business and entrepreneurial ventures including architecture, engineering, and industrial design. Her "passion for creativity" also included business and product development. She sought out formal business education and in 1995 received a Master's degree in Business Administration from Asia Pacific University.

After her divorce, Carol was a single mother on and off. At age 31 she married a second time to a man who she felt was supportive of her multi-faceted approach to her career. When she was 37 one of her children came to live with her and her husband. When she was last interviewed, Carol and her family were planning a move to the Interior of B.C. to live on and run a farm which would provide them with income and leave Carol more flexibility to concentrate on her creative projects. Carol was simultaneously working on

compiling a book of her photographs for publication, developing a small consulting business, writing a handbook for entrepreneurs, and producing various art pieces, a play, a novel, and a music CD. Her stated career goal was to "find a place for creativity" in everything she does.

**Diana: Painter, Musician, Librarian, 58**

Diana was born in New York, New York. When she was 10 her family moved to Vancouver, B.C. which has been her primary home since that time. Diana is the oldest of three children. She has a sister and a brother. Her mother was a homemaker. Her father was an insurance manager.

Diana said that when she was a child she was not especially drawn to making art, although she enjoyed art classes at school. Her parents were not interested in the arts, nor did they encourage her to explore her creativity. At age 10, however, Diana began to take piano lessons. Encouraged by her piano teacher, she avidly studied piano until she was 21.

When growing up, Diana attended both public and private schools. After graduation from an all-girls' private school, she decided to build upon her growing interest in art and music. She enrolled for part-time studies at the Vancouver School of Art and at the same time continued her musical training. She attended art school for two years. During that time she also received her diploma in piano from the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto.

At 21 Diana went to England where she lived for two and one-half years. While there she worked, travelled, and took a second music degree from the London School of Music. It was a difficult time for her emotionally. She felt she was "searching for herself" and began to feel depressed. Diana returned to Vancouver where she briefly taught piano and choir at her old private school. Then at 24 she enrolled in U.B.C.'s School of Music. She began with the intention of becoming a performer, then switched to musicology. Diana

felt frustrated with the school, however, because she found its focus too narrow for her tastes; she wanted a more interdisciplinary educational experience. At 28 Diana graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Music, but decided not to do further music study because she wanted to maintain "a broad spectrum" of experience in the arts.

The same year that Diana had entered music school she had married a man who she felt was very supportive of her intense involvement with music. After graduation with her Bachelor's degree, Diana worked part-time in the U.B.C. library. Then after two years, when Diana was 30, she and her husband moved to Ontario so they both could attend graduate school. He entered law and she enrolled in library school at the University of Toronto. Diana felt that library science would be a practical career choice.

Two years later, at 32, Diana completed her library degree. After travelling in Europe and Africa for nine months, she and her husband returned to Vancouver where Diana accepted her first full-time job as a librarian at U.B.C. However, she soon began to feel unhappy and "claustrophobic." Encouraged by a friend, she became involved in the burgeoning women's movement. That experience catalyzed a major period of change in her life. At 34 she quit her library job and began to study printmaking and to work seriously on her own art. Age 36 was a "crisis year" for her. She decided to end her marriage--partially because she found herself attracted to women and partially because she felt that she had to discover on her own "what [her] identity was" as an artist and as a musician.

At 39 Diana returned to the Vancouver School of Art. She subsequently spent three more years at the art school, focusing on lithography. She also joined a women's art collective and began to participate in various exhibitions--first as a printmaker and then as a painter. After graduation from art school at 42, Diana began performing as a pianist,



sometimes as a solo performer and sometimes with other musicians. At 45 Diana returned to library work part-time in order to supplement her limited art income.

Diana reported that the five years after her graduation from art school were a particularly "important" and "exciting" period in the development of her art career. During that time, and then for the five years following, she maintained a dual focus on music and visual art. She participated in a number of solo and group art shows and performances in artist-run galleries. Since her mid-fifties Diana has exhibited her work sparingly because of the time it takes her to produce enough new work to show.

At the time of the last interview Diana was living with her long-time intimate partner, painting, and working part-time as a librarian. She was also involved in building a house with an art studio on Saltspring Island. Diana was looking forward to retiring from her library job in order to concentrate more fully on her creative work and on once again bringing together her musical and visual interests.

#### **Elizabeth: Painter, 65**

Elizabeth was born and raised in Vancouver, B.C., the youngest of two children. She has one brother. Her mother worked as a homemaker. Her father ran his own business.

Elizabeth reported that she was interested in drawing and painting from the time she was "still in diapers." When she was young her father, a former newspaper illustrator, actively encouraged her artistic pursuits. He treated her artwork as "special" and taught her how to look after her art materials. Elizabeth attended art classes from ages 9 to 15. As a teenager she imagined having a career in commercial art. At the same time, however, Elizabeth remembered that she received a strong message from her parents, particularly her father, that art was acceptable as a hobby, but unacceptable as a career choice for a young

woman. Her father expected her to assume a traditional gender role and to marry and raise children.

Nevertheless, at 17 Elizabeth enrolled in the Vancouver School of Applied and Decorative Arts and after two years she received a diploma in commercial art. She then travelled to England to further her art training, but was unable to get into any of the commercial art schools in London because they were full of returning World War II soldiers. Instead, she pursued fashion illustration and modelling, a career area that she continued to explore after her return to Vancouver a year later.

Elizabeth spent the next 14 years as a model for fashion and commercial photographers, TV, and fashion runway shows. She also lectured on fashion. During this time period, Elizabeth married (at age 23) and shortly thereafter had two daughters. For many years she felt that her personal artistic pursuits were overshadowed by her fashion-related work and family commitments. In her late twenties, however, she began to feel a growing need to give attention to her own artwork. She consequently enrolled in a number of different painting classes. Elizabeth remembered that her increasing interest in painting placed severe strain on her already difficult relationship with her husband who was unsupportive of her art career. Eventually the marriage ended and Elizabeth became a single mother with the responsibility of supporting her two children. At 32 she returned to art school. At 34 she graduated from the Vancouver School of Art with an honours degree in painting and drawing.

After graduation, Elizabeth decided to become an art teacher. Teaching allowed her to work in the art field while earning an income. It also provided a way in which she felt she could make an important social and educational contribution. Elizabeth had felt frustrated with many of her own art teachers and she wanted to offer her students a better

quality learning experience. She believed too that as a female she could be a rare and valuable role model for the other women who made up most of the art student population.

For the next 12 years, Elizabeth taught art privately and for various educational and art institutions. She reported that throughout those years she struggled financially and logistically to balance her work roles as a painter and a teacher with her multiple personal roles of single mother, intimate partner, and friend. It was also during that time that she became acutely aware of sexist attitudes and behaviours on the part of her predominantly male art colleagues. She said that she frequently experienced sexual harassment on the job and encountered an attitude of condescension in the art world towards her role as an art teacher. At age 39 Elizabeth seriously injured her back which temporarily interfered with her teaching and other creative activities. She was unable to paint--which she found "depressing"--but tried to keep artistically involved by pursuing other forms of art such as copper enamelling.

At 42 Elizabeth's life took "a huge switch" when she became involved with a man with whom she subsequently travelled extensively. She found the travelling that they did together "very broadening," but felt that it left little time for her art career. At 55, after that relationship ended, Elizabeth placed renewed emphasis on her art. By that time both of her daughters had moved away from home which also left her feeling freer to pursue her own creative work.

Over the next decade, Elizabeth focused on her painting. She also taught part-time (until she was 57) and took on other creative projects such as interior design contracts to earn extra income. Her reputation as an artist grew significantly. She participated in various exhibitions, sold some of her work, and was represented by a number of well known galleries.

At the time of the final interview, Elizabeth was living on her own in semi-retirement. She reported that she was feeling very artistically productive. Although she continues to struggle with balancing her roles as artist, mother, and now grandmother, she described herself as being "very happy" and as having a "full" life.

**Marilyn: Fabric and Mixed-Media Artist, Art Educator, 46**

Marilyn was born in Carman, a small town in rural Manitoba. She has one older brother and four older sisters. Her mother was a homemaker and her father was a municipal road maintainer.

As a child Marilyn enjoyed doing artwork of various kinds, but she remembered her parents as being "unsupportive" of such activities. There were also no other adults in the community in which she grew up who encouraged her creative efforts or who served as artistic role models. However, an aunt who lived in Ontario supported her art interests by sending her art books and supplies. Also, Marilyn admired an uncle in England who was a weekend painter.

Marilyn disliked school and quit before high school graduation. As a teenager she styled women's hair on the weekends as a creative outlet and to earn money. After high school she considered becoming a hairdresser, but her parents disapproved of that choice and would not finance her training. At 17 Marilyn left home to work as a secretary for her aunt in Ottawa. While in Ottawa Marilyn visited art galleries for the first time. The next year she travelled with her aunt to England where she again sought out galleries to visit. On her return to Canada, she began to dream of becoming an artist.

Shortly after returning from England Marilyn moved to Toronto. She again worked briefly as a secretary, but soon became "disillusioned" with the business world. She knew she wanted a less-restricted lifestyle and at 24 she entered the Sheridan College School of

Design. She majored in textile arts with the intent of becoming a furniture designer, but later changed her focus to fibre arts. After completing her studies at Sheridan College, Marilyn moved to Winnipeg, rented a studio, and launched her career as a fibre artist. She soon began to show her work at numerous galleries, including the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Marilyn's reputation as an artist grew rapidly. At 27 she travelled to northern Manitoba to teach textile arts under the auspices of the W.A.G. and at 28 she received a Canada Council grant to go to Poland to explore fabric arts in that country. While in Winnipeg, Marilyn also started a successful fibre arts supply store and teaching studio in order to supplement her art income.

During her late twenties, Marilyn felt "successful" as an independent artist, but also dissatisfied with many aspects of the art world. She especially disliked the internal and external pressures she felt to make commercially successful art and to maintain her profile in the art community, and the isolation that was necessary to produce a high volume of work. She finally reached a point where her life as it was "wasn't enough" and she desired more "balance" and a "more holistic" lifestyle. She consequently sold her business, left her intimate relationship of seven years, and moved to Vancouver.

Once in Vancouver Marilyn set up another studio and gradually began to participate in the local art scene, taking part in both individual and group shows. At 33 she entered a common-law relationship and decided to have a child. At 35 she gave birth to her son. After her son was born, Marilyn found it emotionally and practically difficult to continue working as intensely on her art as she had been doing prior to his birth. Wanting to work at home and on a smaller scale, she switched to jewellery design as a way to stay artistically active and earn money. At the same time, she also started making small sculptures and "assemblages," and experimented with making various fabric pieces for commercial sale.

For Marilyn, the years when her son was young were an important time of sorting out what being an artist meant to her. She felt conflicted about the legitimacy of her career choice and identity once she was no longer depending on her artwork for her main income. Also, her intimate partner was critical of her art career and was pressuring her to "get a real job." After intensive soul-searching she concluded that she wanted to continue to pursue art, but without the pressure of having to earn money from it.

When Marilyn was 40 she ended her intimate relationship and became a single mother. At about that same time she also began teaching art to children through an alternative school program. She took great pleasure and reward from that experience and sought out other teaching opportunities. Teaching art to children and adults soon became her main source of income, freeing her to work on personal artwork of her own choosing.

At the time of the last interview Marilyn was living with her 12 year old son. She continues to be active as a teacher and to experiment with many forms of art. She is involved on a small scale with sales of her work, but mainly produces art for her own interest and pleasure.

#### **Melanie: Actor, Storyteller, 46**

Melanie was born in Vancouver, B.C. and raised in Vancouver and in Port Moody, B.C. by her grandmother and her father, a salesman. Her parents divorced when Melanie was four years old. She has one younger sister.

Melanie remembered that from the time she was "very small" she was aware of "a kind of yearning inside." Years later she learned that that "yearning" was due to a need for creative activity. As a child she liked to "make things" and would invent stories to tell her sister. She was also particularly interested in historical costumes. She would do research and then design costumes for her dolls. Melanie's interest in costume later served as her

entry into the theatre world. When she was 16 she discovered a local amateur theatre company and approached them to see if she could help out making costumes. They instead offered her a small part in one of their productions.

After graduation from high school Melanie attended Simon Fraser University. She felt alienated and confused at university until she became involved in a university stage production. That experience proved to be a turning point in her career as a performing artist. She reported that at S.F.U. she "fell in love" with acting and that she "ate, slept, breathed, and even once fell asleep in the theatre." She had enrolled in university to become a librarian, a choice that had her father's and grandmother's "blessing." Discovering theatre, however, "totally upset the applecart" for Melanie and for her family who wanted her to choose a "sensible" career.

When she was 19 Melanie moved to Montreal to reconnect with her mother and to investigate the possibility of attending the National Theatre School. She felt unsure, however, about whether theatre school was really the right choice for her. She felt confused about her goals and afraid that her acting abilities were inadequate. She also felt swayed by the strong opinions of her father and her common-law husband who were highly critical of the acting profession.

Melanie's career questions were temporarily put on hold when she became pregnant. Then at age 20, shortly after her daughter was born, Melanie separated from her husband and moved back to Vancouver. Once back at home Melanie began to reconsider working in the theatre. She realized that what she "wanted most in the whole world, after having a baby, was to be an actor." That realization precipitated for Melanie a "very sad, on-again, off-again, passionate, intense, miserable relationship with theatre."

The subsequent 15 years were turbulent ones for Melanie in terms of her personal life and her career. The acting and other theatre work she found was intermittent and usually paid little. She struggled to support herself and her daughter financially. Also, she found a number of aspects of the theatre world distasteful. For one thing, she felt she had to fight against the sexist biases of many of her male theatre colleagues, particularly in relation to her status as a single mother. For another thing, she had a hard time temperamentally with the "networking" and "schmoozing" that she saw was necessary to build a career in commercial theatre. She often felt extremely uncomfortable in that world.

A pivotal experience for Melanie during those years was an opportunity she had to work briefly with a well known theatre director. She received much needed support and validation from him and he encouraged her to persevere in her acting career. Another important experience was that when she was 33 Melanie auditioned for the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre. Although she was not accepted into the company, Melanie felt pleased and proud of herself because she had departed from the usual audition protocol and risked telling a story as part of her presentation. It was received very well by the judges.

Despite such positive experiences, by her mid-thirties Melanie had become discouraged with her life as a struggling actor and single mother. Also, at 34 she had entered into a committed intimate relationship and she began to feel that she wanted more financial security in her life. She set out to find "an ordinary job" and was hired as an office worker for a mining company. At the same time, she was unwilling to give up all involvement in the theatre, so she started a women's theatre group. It was not long, however, before Melanie and the other women in the group began to feel overwhelmed by the multiple role pressures of balancing their paid work, their creative work, and their family responsibilities. They chose to disband which Melanie found a "heartbreak."



With no formal creative outlet, Melanie soon felt depressed and trapped in her "straight" job. She examined her options and chose to explore storytelling as a creative alternative to acting. She felt that storytelling would give her the experience of being a performer at the same time that it would give her the autonomy to choose her material. Storytelling would also provide her with more opportunities to work since she would not have to wait to be "chosen" for a role. Working in collaboration with another woman actor, Melanie applied for a grant to the Canada Council to tell stories to senior citizens in hospitals. They received the grant and Melanie, then 37, immediately gave her notice at the mining company. That experience launched her career as a storyteller. She subsequently worked with her storytelling partner for five years, then went out on her own when she was 42. Since that time, Melanie has performed in a variety of storytelling festivals and in numerous private and public venues. She has also taught storytelling workshops and has been instrumental in developing and promoting the field of storytelling in Vancouver.

Melanie reported that from the first day of storytelling she knew that that was what she should be doing. She said that she continues to find the creative challenges of storytelling and being her "own boss" extremely satisfying. Still, she finds certain practical aspects of the work difficult. For example, she sometimes feels frustrated by the generally low and erratic income that storytelling, like acting, provides. Also, she sometimes resents the tremendous amount of time and energy that she must invest in the organizational side of her work (e.g., sales, bookings, etc.).

At approximately the same time that Melanie began planning her career as a storyteller, she left the intimate relationship that she had begun in her early thirties. Soon after, when Melanie was 39 her daughter moved away from home. At the time of the last interview, Melanie was living with her intimate partner of 10 years, another woman artist.

She was actively involved with her storytelling career and with her new role as a grandmother.

**Sarah: Writer, Librarian, Teacher, 40**

Sarah was born and raised in Vancouver, B.C., the third child in her family. Sarah has two older brothers, one of whom is a stained-glass artist. Her mother was a homemaker and her father was an Anglican priest.

Sarah described her home environment as one in which her father's vocation was "all-consuming" for him and for the rest of the family. She consequently grew up "thinking that work was to play a key role in your life." She said that from an early age she identified more with her father in terms of work, than with her mother who had the "job" of being his assistant. Artistic exploration was not emphasized by either of Sarah's parents and she remembered a particular family admonition against any activity that would be perceived as "showing off" or making oneself different from others. She did not recall ever knowing any artists as a child.

As a young girl, Sarah enjoyed school and remembered a number of early experiences of feeling "creative" and "successful" in that environment. She especially enjoyed writing for school assignments, but never considered becoming a writer until much later in her life (although old friends apparently recalled Sarah telling them in elementary school that she was going to grow up and be a writer). She also took pleasure in learning to play various musical instruments. In fact, Sarah considered her musical outlets her "only saving grace" during adolescence.

At 17, after graduation from high school, Sarah enrolled at the University of British Columbia where she completed an arts degree. Sarah found her undergraduate years to be intellectually satisfying and personally validating. For the first time, she felt that she

belonged to a peer group that "had the same feelings" that she did. Building upon her love of books, Sarah decided to pursue a Master's degree in library science at U.B.C. Although Sarah did not find library school to be as creatively stimulating as her undergraduate studies, an important aspect of her graduate experience was her introduction to the field of children's literature.

At 23 Sarah graduated with her M.L.S. degree and was offered her first job as a librarian. She soon found that the position had "many satisfactions, but not really creative ones." Nonetheless, Sarah worked full-time as a librarian until she was 32, mainly in the children's area. In her late twenties she also attended Simmons College in Boston, Massachusetts. She received her Master's in Children's Literature from Simmons when she was 28.

During her years as a full-time librarian, Sarah grew increasingly frustrated with her career choice. While she enjoyed many aspects of the library profession and received a number of promotions, she felt creatively restricted and disappointed that the job was not "engaging" her heart. Around the time she turned 30, Sarah began exploring other options. During this exploration she hit upon the idea of writing as a career. She soon started to do some book and theatre reviewing and other kinds of free-lance writing in addition to her library work. At this time she also began teaching part-time in the field of children's literature.

Eventually Sarah found that trying to sustain simultaneously all her various creative and work projects was too stressful. At 32 she decided to give herself a "defined time to write" and to seriously "test out" her new goal to become a writer. This involved a practical shift in her work pattern--she took a six-month leave from her job--and a "redefinition" of herself. She said she consciously "stopped being a librarian" and assumed instead the

identity of "a writer." During that six months, Sarah began to write fiction and discovered a "feeling of rightness" about it. Among other works, she wrote her first novel. It was quickly accepted for publication and won the Sheila Egoff Award for Children's Literature. Encouraged by such rapid success, Sarah decided to continue to focus on her writing, although she also arranged to work part-time as a librarian and as an instructor of children's literature in order to supplement her writing income. Shortly after the publication of her first novel, she wrote the text for a picture book and two more novels in rapid succession, all of which were published. After the first novel, Sarah also began to participate in various local and national book tours and to give public lectures on her work. Her third novel won the 1993 Governor General's Award for Children's Literature. The Governor General's Award--and the sizable amount of money that accompanied it--was significant for Sarah not only because it confirmed the value of her work in the national writing community, but also because it validated her creative efforts in the eyes of her family who were skeptical about her change in career.

Unlike many of the other participants, Sarah felt that she had encountered little overt sex discrimination either in her library or her writing career. However, she did report that throughout her working life she has had to struggle against a "deep underlying sexism" that she believes affects anyone who works with children.

At the time this study ended, Sarah was living in Vancouver, B.C. with her intimate partner of 10 years, another woman artist. She was involved with writing a fourth novel for children, as well as ongoing book tours and lectures, and was continuing her part-time librarian and teaching work. She had just found out that her fourth novel had won three prestigious national awards.

**Susan: Painter, Art Instructor, 47**

Susan was born in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, England, an only child. Her mother was a homemaker when Susan was growing up and later a part-time bookkeeper. Her father was a civil servant.

Susan reported that she received a lot of parental encouragement to do well in school, but that there was no understanding at all of visual art in her family. However, she was strongly influenced by an art teacher at high school to pursue her interest in art. Also, she identified more with her father's role as the breadwinner than with her mother's domestic role and expected that she would have to learn a skill to earn her own living. As a teenager Susan decided that she wanted to go to art school in London. Both of her parents, particularly her father, were skeptical of her choice, but supported her emotionally nonetheless. She won a grant to cover her expenses and thereby experienced financial independence for the first time.

At 18 Susan entered the Chelsea School of Art and majored in contemporary painting. After graduation she took a graduate course in modern social and cultural studies, instead of studying for a teaching degree at London University, her original career "backup" plan. She soon "stumbled" into a number of different part-time positions teaching art to adults. She also took on free-lance graphic design contracts including major challenges such as cover illustrations for the London Sunday Times magazine. All the while, however, Susan considered her painting her "serious" work and felt that she was "just marking time" until she could get to New York and investigate that city's art scene. After three years she was able to finance a short trip to New York. That visit and the "culture shock" she experienced there opened her eyes to a different and "freer" way of life than she had ever experienced in England.

After Susan returned to England, she went back to working "bits and pieces" as a teacher, a commercial illustrator, and an usherette to make ends meet. However, she soon decided that she wanted to leave England. At 25 she returned to New York where she briefly worked as a commercial artist, then set out by car for the West Coast. She eventually travelled to British Columbia and immediately felt comfortable. Once she was settled she found a studio and began painting.

Susan considered her early years in B.C. to be a particularly rich time in her creative life. She felt she had to "re-think everything" in order to learn to paint from her own perspective instead of that of the all male faculty she had studied under in England. She also became aware of how very important a sense of artistic freedom was to her. She decided that she would make money the best way she could, but that she would keep her art practice "free" of commercial restraints. To that end, she began teaching at the Vancouver School of Art when she was 26. As part of her exploration of freedom and personal creativity, she exchanged her painting for conceptual and mixed-media art. She maintained this art focus for 10 years. When Susan was 38 and after having taught full-time for 12 years, she took a sabbatical to travel in Europe. Inspired by the illuminated manuscripts that she saw there, she began to paint again. Since that time she has focused her creative work on painting. In her mid-forties she also took on some administrative responsibilities at the art school and became the Associate Dean of the Studio Program. She never pursued commercial exhibitions, always preferring to show her work in public exhibitions.

When Susan was 31 she had entered a intimate relationship with another painter. They married when Susan was 32. When Susan and her husband were first married they chose to put his career first with the intention of giving Susan her "turn" at this position after he had established himself professionally. In practical terms, this meant that Susan became

the major wage-earner and her husband concentrated his energy on his painting. The marriage ended 12 years later, however, without Susan having felt that she was supported by her husband to focus on her art career in the way that she had supported him.

In her mid-thirties Susan had begun to feel the desire to have a child. For various reasons she did not have a child with her husband. She continued to want to be a mother, however, and when Susan was 40 and on her own she began trying to adopt. Two years later she adopted an infant boy from Peru. She felt that beginning motherhood at midlife worked out well for her because she had already established her "outward" professional career and was ready to focus on more "inward things" such as childrearing. At the same time, the financial realities of her life as a sudden single mother meant that she could not reduce the amount of her paid work.

At the time of the last interview, Susan was living near Vancouver, B.C. with her eight year old son and a new intimate partner, a male musician. She said that she now realizes "how little personal support" and "validation for [her] art" she received in previous relationships. She continues to work full-time at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, but has reduced her administrative duties. She reported that her move away from the city in recent years and the entry of her son into school has finally allowed her the focus that she "had always been seeking" for her own creative work. Over the past few years she also began learning banjo and studying voice "for fun" and proudly reported that these "creative accomplishments culminated recently in three paid gigs!"

### **The Themes**

The following nine themes were identified in the data analysis as being common for all the participants. Not all the participants are necessarily equally represented in each theme write-up, however. This is for two reasons. First, the themes varied in salience for

different participants. Second, some participants were particularly articulate about certain themes, so their descriptions of the phenomenon in question were included more than those of other women.

The themes are presented roughly in the order in which they appeared to emerge as significant in the lives of the participants, although the order of presentation is not absolute. For example, the women indicated that some of their earliest significant experiences as artists were about feeling like they were outsiders in their families of origin or in their communities. Thus, the "sense of being an outsider" is presented as the first theme, followed by the "sense of validation through external recognition" which seemed to emerge next for participants and so on.

Also, while an attempt has been made to differentiate the experiences described in the various themes as accurately as possible, the themes are not completely discrete. Some theme descriptions may overlap slightly with others and sometimes a particular descriptive vignette provided by a participant could possibly illustrate more than one theme. In such cases, the participant's vignette was related to the theme that emerged as most dominant within it. For example, a woman's description of feeling pulled between her need to make art and her need to attend to her family would most logically belong in "Theme 4: Sense of being torn between needs of self and others." That same experience, however, might also have contributed to the woman's sense of being an outsider to her family or peer group (Theme 1) or her sense of being obstructed in her career progress (Theme 3).

The nine themes are:

- 1: Sense of being an outsider
- 2: Sense of validation through external recognition
- 3: Sense of being obstructed



- 4: Sense of being torn between the needs of self and others
- 5: Sense of connection and belonging through art
- 6: Sense of struggle to assume the identity of artist
- 7: Sense of self-determination
- 8: Sense of being a pioneer
- 9: Sense of harmony between self, art, and career.

### **Theme 1: Sense of being an outsider**

#### **Overview**

The theme of being an outsider has two interrelated aspects: a sense of marginalization and a sense of alienation. Marginalization involves the women's experiences of being set apart from others (e.g., socially or economically). A sense of marginalization could be either externally- or self-imposed. Alienation involves feeling lonely, misunderstood by others, or disconnected from others. Such feelings usually arose for the women out of their experiences of marginalization, whether or not that marginalization may have been visible to others. Most commonly, participants had the sense of being outsiders (i.e., either marginalized and/or alienated) in situations in which they believed their values or life experiences were different from those of significant others in their lives or from those they saw as representative of "normalcy" or the status quo.

All the participants reported having the sense of being outsiders in a number of different relationship areas in their lives. These areas included family, friends and colleagues, other women, society in general, and the established art community. The sense of being an outsider was exacerbated by the lack of what the women felt to be appropriate mentors and role models throughout their lives.

The women experienced "life on the margins" as both problematic and rewarding. While they often felt hurt, disappointed, or angry at their social position as outsiders, that position also afforded them freedoms that they saw as being denied to non-marginalized individuals. In some cases, the women also identified their outsider status as a source of creativity and delight. The coping strategies employed by the participants to deal with their experiences of being outsiders included efforts to distance themselves from others, to fit in with familial and social norms, and to find "kindred spirits."

### **The lived experience**

All participants reported feeling to some degree different or emotionally disconnected from their families of origin. The intensity of these feelings varied considerably among the women. A common experience for participants was to feel that family members, especially their parents, did not know how to relate to or understand their personalities, interests, or talents. The women perceived that an artistic career generally was viewed by family members as somewhat mysterious, at best and/or irresponsible, at worst. They also felt that an art career was judged by their families to be of lesser value than more conventional choices due to the unstable nature of artistic employment and income.

Furthermore, from an early age most of the women felt alienated as well as limited by familial gender role expectations. For example, Sarah recalled her frustration as a young girl at being excluded from the comic antics of her male relatives:

I remember clearly [that] I wanted to be funny. And I remember that there weren't any role models for me. ... Women in my world tended to be well-behaved. They didn't cut-up. The men in my family cut-up. The women didn't. They would smile and look on and went out into the kitchen and had

good discussions. But I wanted to be the guy with the comb under my nose.

I didn't want to be the audience. I wanted to be the star!

Marilyn, Susan, Alice and Diana also all reported longstanding struggles with their decisions to rebel against familial norms. Diana said that, "I can't just say, 'well, so what?'... There's always a part of me that is caught by my guilt in connection with the family." For Susan, the experience of being an anomaly in her family was instrumental in her choice to become a teacher as well as a practitioner of art. For her, teaching was a way to "explain why I was different from, why I was interested in different things from everybody where I grew up."

As the women aged, some of them made attempts to mitigate their feelings of alienation by entering intimate relationships in which they assumed relatively traditional gender roles. In every case, however, such attempts failed. For example, Carol, after many childhood and adolescent experiences of feeling misunderstood and rejected by her family, tried to fit in by putting aside the artistic aspirations she had as a young woman and taking on the role of a stay-at-home mother and wife to a successful businessman. Although she was financially and materially comfortable, Carol's emotional experience in this circumstance was one of extreme unhappiness:

[My husband] was making piles of money and we bought a house in the British Properties. ... I had just turned 27. I had a newborn and a four year old and lived in this huge mansion on an acre up there with a panoramic view. ... And I said, I've got to move out ... this drives me nuts.

Other women such as Elizabeth and Alice continued to pursue art within the context of their marriages, but found the conflict that ensued intensified their experiences of disconnection from their spouses. For example, Elizabeth felt unable to reconcile her

interest in art with traditional gender role expectations. She believed that her marriage "fell apart:"

probably because of my interest in painting, because I was spending more and more time in that and my husband was very alienated with the idea of anything to do with the arts. I mean, he saw all [artists] as being crazy people. Just crazy, nutty, bohemian people and so that was one of the things that pulled us more and more apart.

Regarding other types of relationships, many of the women reported that they spent a great deal of time alone as children. Diana talked about not having any "peer groups:" "I basically went to school and I came home and I practised [piano]." Similarly, Elizabeth talked about being "by myself a lot" when she was very young and not having any "playmates to speak of." As they grew, the women all made some attempts to fit in with various social or professional peers. However, such efforts frequently served only to heighten their experience of being outsiders. For example, Carol described feeling torn between her desire to be connected to others and her need to honour her individuality: "It's that sort of conflict between fitting in and being also different, so different. Sometimes I feel very alienated especially when I am someone who really likes people."

The problems inherent in trying to make themselves conform in work situations were especially acute for participants like Melanie and Diana who experimented with more conventional jobs and career paths before wholeheartedly committing themselves to an artistic career. Melanie described her experience of alienation in an office workplace in very dramatic terms:

So off I went doing job interviews and are they ever easy compared to auditions! And within no time at all I'd found a job. Just an ordinary job. I

was a mail clerk in an office. I had a two-hour interview--"audition" I was going to say--with this woman. I walked out of the office. I knew I had the job and I cried. And when she phoned me the next day and said, "we want you to start Monday," I hung the phone up and cried for an hour. ... I was just horrified that I was doing this. ... And the job drove me crazy. It was a simple job and I did a good job of it and all that. Rose in the ranks and learned a whole lot about how the other half lives who isn't involved in theatre--the straight world--and learned a lot of interesting things. But I often felt like I would like to run full-tilt screaming through the plate glass windows and crash to my death seven floors below. Not that I wanted to commit suicide, but that I wanted to get out of there!

A number of participants also discussed their experiences of feeling separate from other women because they had not followed gender-traditional life paths or taken on what others would consider usual or appropriate gender roles. For example, Susan reported feeling alienated from both other creative women and women in general:

I feel now, when I compare myself to some women who are my age who are also in the creative field ... I feel like I am still out of sync with everybody. ... [When] I moved to Bowen Island it became clear to me that the women were already putting me into the category of the same as the men because I go off-Island [to my teaching job] every morning. ... And so it contributes to being [a] strange gender combination ... I've never felt like I fitted in either gender.

Likewise, Elizabeth reported that she felt unsupported by and disconnected from other women, particularly older women in her age group. Her coping strategy was to distance herself: "I don't really seek them out."

All of the women reported some sense of feeling separate from the established art community. Carol, for example, felt that she never really "belonged to the art world." For some of the women, the experience of being an outsider in the arts was especially disappointing because they had anticipated finding others to whom they could relate in that community. Instead, often because of what they perceived as sexist biases, they experienced themselves once again as being on the outside looking in.

One way in which the women experienced alienation in this particular milieu was through the choice of a specialty that was not mainstream. For example, Marilyn talked about being an outsider at art college by virtue of choosing a specialty that was "obviously totally going somewhere else" compared to most of the other students and faculty. Elizabeth echoed this experience: "I think when I was younger I felt as though I really didn't belong anywhere. So this is this sort of isolation thing. [Also] I felt that in a way because my art wasn't ... as modern or contemporary [as others']." Sarah too felt set apart in that her choice of children's literature was an area that was dismissed by some of her peers:

There are a lot of remarks made ... in the Writers Union of Canada, for example, an area where I don't feel at all at home, there is a real undervaluing of children's writers. And because they tend to be women, not exclusively, but the majority of them, there's a feeling of women being "lesser than."

Alice and Diana also each described incidents in which they felt acutely misunderstood by art colleagues. Like Sarah, Alice had an experience in which she felt undervalued by her colleagues and which left her feeling "quite alone and almost alienated."

Diana's experience of having some of her work censored by a feminist art gallery was especially painful because she had believed that she was working with other women who would understand her work.

Another way in which the women experienced marginalization in the art world was the common feeling that they did not share the values of other members of that milieu. For example, Melanie said that she initially perceived many theatre people as being "too phoney" and "too egotistical and opportunistic." One of her fears when first becoming an actor was that "if I go into the world of acting I am going to be like them. I'm not going to be a real person." Although she reported that her views on this point have softened over time, she said she still struggles with feeling uncomfortable with aspects of the performing arts community. Similarly, Sarah reported feeling separate from the writing community. She talked about how her sense of herself as a writer was linked more with her individual identity than with a group identity:

I have a couple of writers who are close friends and that's good, especially if we're talking over practical matters. But I still don't identify very strongly with writers as a group. I tend not to join, well I join the organizations, but I'm not an active member. ... I just don't find myself very drawn to them.

A factor that contributed significantly to the women's experience of being outsiders was their general perception of a lack of mentors and appropriate female role models. None of the women had someone in their lives who took on a prominent and consistent mentoring role. As a result, each woman felt she had to struggle on her own to "learn the ropes" of her particular artistic discipline. As Melanie said, when she was starting out she "had nobody who took me in hand." Susan expressed this same thought more forcefully: "I felt like I had to hack my way through a jungle to find a way of being."

In some cases, an interested relative or teacher briefly took on the role of mentor or role model. For example, Melanie appreciated the emotional and practical support given to her at one point by a male acting teacher. And Susan, Carol, and Diana were all strongly influenced in their choice of careers by teachers who encouraged their talents. Indeed, Diana said that she knew even as a young girl that her piano teacher was "the person that was saving me somehow ... and developing some part of me that had to be expressed."

For most of the women appropriate role models were hard to come by, however. Marilyn, for example, came from a small rural Manitoba village in which:

there wasn't anyone who painted or anyone who was involved in any kind of creative work that I was aware of ... there was absolutely not one role model in the community. There was not one person to my knowledge, a visible person, that did anything along the lines of painting a picture, ever.

For Marilyn, the absence of any other visibly creative people intensified her sense of being an outsider in her own community.

Appropriate female role models were especially rare. Melanie noted regretfully that "there were very few ... women in any kind of position of power" in the acting world that served to inspire her as she was developing her career. Elizabeth also discussed the absence of any women in the arts with whom she felt she could identify, especially in the early years of her career.

Given the lack of role models in their own lives, some of the artists were quite inventive in identifying role models where they could in the larger culture (poets they had heard, film stars, other painters, etc.) For example, Melanie cited Marlene Dietrich as an early inspiration. Similarly, Susan was impressed by the late career accomplishments of older women like the American artist Louise Nevelson. For Carol, "having read a lot of



books and autobiographies and biographies of artists, especially English artists, there was sort of a style, a bohemian style that I tried to emulate."

One consequence of the lack of role models in either their families or communities was that as young girls most of these women never considered an artistic career. Diana, for example, said, "it never occurred to me." Another consequence was that they had no example to follow or to help them create a vision of what being a woman artist might be like. Susan stated that:

Ever since [high school] I have never personally had a female role model and I really think that that's hard [in order] to carve out your own path. It's much easier if there's somebody who is presenting you a picture that you want to emulate in some way.

Carol talked about a similar struggle in her life: "It's really frustrating. I feel probably really not very understood ... I don't have a role model and I think that's been very hard."

Some of the women also discussed feeling dissuaded from pursuing an artistic career because that seemed to be a predominantly male realm. As Sarah said, "Even when you were studying literature at the University, you didn't read that many women. You read some, but there still was that identification of writing and men." She remembered being particularly moved at a reading by a female poet with whom she finally felt she could identify:

I remember once I went to a reading of P.K. Page and she was beautiful for one thing. She had a lovely bearing about her. She was softspoken and she was beautifully dressed and she read this poem about a flight of swans. And all of a sudden it was like ... [I realized] it's not corny to write about nature

or more interior kinds of things, and you don't have to be George Bowering!

And I found that very comforting.

Elizabeth similarly felt that she was given a strong message as a young artist that she was not really wanted in the painting world:

The thing ... with a lot of the male painters in those days ... was that they felt that painting was ... a male domain and that if women wanted to get into the arts, they should pick up weaving and perhaps pottery and some of the crafts and that's all they were capable of and that the more intellectual heavy stuff was for the male.

This designated position of outsider made it difficult for Elizabeth and some of the other women to take on the identity of "artist."

The women often experienced the price of being different--or to use Elizabeth's words, of being "outside the pale"--as very high. Some, like Melanie, expressed this reality in relatively mild terms: "it was a kind of a lonely struggle." Others, like Carol shared strong feelings of anger about how she felt she has been punished for not fitting in. One example she gave was of receiving unfair treatment in a custody dispute with her ex-husband due to her "unconventionality:"

When we were going through a court battle with my kids in the divorce ... our lawyer wouldn't let me into the courtroom because he said, you are a non-linear thinker and you would scare the judge. I thought that that was really, really incredible and really revealing. I'm trying to get custody of my kids and he's trying to protect me from meeting the judge because I'm such a spooky person, because I'm so non-linear! I'm eccentric. You don't give

custody of kids to eccentrics. Meanwhile, I lost custody of them. That's because I'm not conventional.

While the women described their experiences of feeling like outsiders as difficult to varying degrees, they also found that those same experiences could be a source of creativity and pleasure. In terms of creativity, the position of outsider required the women to learn to develop their talents and rely on their own resources. Elizabeth, for example, identified her ability to use her creativity and her independence as two of the positive consequences of spending so much time alone as a child:

I used to do a lot of things where I had to use my imagination. ... That has held over into adulthood and although I think I can be quite sociable, I probably get along fairly well on my own. ... When you're involved in the arts, unless you're teaching or something ... you are virtually a hermit.

Although Elizabeth stated that she enjoyed her solitude, she was aware that not "too many people can really understand that. You know, they think ... it's not normal or natural."

Susan likewise saw her individuality as a source of strength and perhaps a necessary prerequisite to creative work: "I never did feel that I fitted [in] and maybe not fitting in is something that ... is peculiar to everybody who's creative. ... [Artists] have to make decisions that aren't so normal."

In terms of pleasure, some of the women also clearly enjoyed having the freedom of time alone. Alice stated that "it's quite nice to be by myself in the studio." And Sarah said that working on her own allows her the possibility of doing her best work: "I like being sort of isolated in my work. That was another thing about my decision to be a writer is I knew that really and truly I work best on my own. I'm not a team player."

Some of the women also expressed delight about the often unpredictable nature of life on the margins. For example, Diana explicitly stated that she "kind of likes the margins. There are kinds of things that happen on the margin that are very interesting to me. Unexpected things, surprising things." Susan too saw benefits in her marginalized position:

I definitely view myself as an outsider. As a woman and as an artist, I still feel that I'm not a mainstream operator, by choice and inclination. But I learn things that way as well. By being outside you can see clearly I think.

Of all the women in the study, Carol and Alice expressed the most ambivalence about their marginal status. Both indicated that they appreciated the freedoms inherent in their positions, but also felt frustrated at the restrictions of being marginalized even within their own artistic communities. Alice described her thoughts on this topic at length. On the one hand she indicated that she felt "lucky" to be in a field like pottery because: "We've never really been in the mainstream ... [and] it allows me a kind of a freedom. ... [My work is] not in the centre of the storm, but that means when the storm rages I'm still existing and in a comfortable place." On the other hand, she expressed great disappointment that her art college colleagues repeatedly failed to give the ceramic department "external validation of our marginal position." She recognized her own mixed feelings on this issue after a difficult faculty meeting: "I still want to stay [on the margins], but I think at the same time I wanted this other support [from my colleagues], so [their denial of that support] really surprised me." Alice's feelings on this point seemed fairly representative of all the participants. To live as an outsider was clearly often difficult for these women, but it was also experienced by them as in some way essential to their ability to survive as creative individuals.

## **Theme 2: Sense of validation through external recognition**

### **Overview**

All of the participants discussed the importance of being validated by others--that is, being recognized, accepted and supported by others. This experience involved the women's sense of being externally validated both for themselves as unique individuals and for their artwork. Both intangible and tangible forms of validation were influential in shaping the women's self-perceptions and life choices. Intangible forms of validation usually involved attention and praise from significant others. Tangible forms of validation usually involved financial remuneration for their work. Overall, when the women had the sense of being seen and valued as artistic individuals, they felt encouraged and motivated to pursue their interests; when they did not experience such validation, they felt discouraged and lacking in self-confidence.

### **The lived experience**

The experience of having their artistic interests and talents validated was especially important for the women during their early years. Marilyn, for example, said that a "high point" for her was having contact as a child with an uncle who "talked to me about horizon lines and colour." She was also moved by a singularly supportive experience with her father:

My childhood was mainly a place of feeling very lost, but I remembered suddenly my father showing an interest in my pictures one day at the kitchen table, and I remember what that made me feel, it was such a foreign experience. ... I remembered that that fed me something that I really needed.

Elizabeth also remembered being strongly influenced by early "training and encouragement" from her father:

As a little girl [my father] encouraged me at a very early age, in fact he even saved some of the drawings that I had done on the wallpaper ... because he thought they were so special. ... And he taught me how to look after my art materials and my brushes and pens and so on.

Alice reported that although she was not directly encouraged by either of her parents to pursue art as a career, her early art interests were supported because her family valued original art, "craftsmanship," and "excellence of any sort." She also was influenced by various teachers who she felt saw her "as a good student" and so, while not specifically prompting her to pursue art, encouraged her to follow her goals. She termed this "indirect or minor mentoring."

Marilyn attributed a major change in her self-perception to the experience of having her artistic talents recognized by others when she was an adolescent. For her, this experience was tied to having left her family of origin:

It was when I left Manitoba and was living with my aunt in Ottawa that I started to experience people taking an interest in me. Really all of a sudden realizing that maybe I had something to offer the world. Like maybe there was really something in me that was worth trying to get out.

As well as bolstering their self-esteem, validation by others also served to encourage the women to explore new areas of creativity. Alice noted that when a particular teacher challenged her to focus on hand-building with clay she found it "very encouraging" and it "kind of convinced" her to explore new ways of working.

Unfortunately, some of the women reported that they did not have any such validating experiences as young children or as students. The consequences of the lack of early external validation for those women seemed to be that they had to struggle particularly hard as they

grew to gain a sense of themselves as artists and to come to terms within themselves with seeing art as a legitimate personal career choice. For example, Carol and Diana reported that they had felt discouraged and angered by their parents' lack of interest in their artistic pursuits when they were young. Both women felt that as a result they had a difficult time honouring their own creativity. They also felt that they had to reconcile within themselves their rejection of their families' conservative values about career before they could feel comfortable with their choice to be artists.

Having the opportunity to show or publish their work was also of great significance to the participants. For instance, Diana talked about her painting exhibitions as "high points" of her life. Alice talked about feeling "grateful" when people recognized the value and uniqueness of her work and invited her to participate in art exhibitions. Carol recalled that she greatly valued the opportunity she had to hang some of her work in a hallway of her high school. She found this visibility enabled her to get "feedback from the other students" and afforded her "the first experience of being an artist" which she took "very, very seriously." Later in her life she had the experience of exhibiting in one of the "major art galleries" in the city. For her, that opportunity was proof that she had "made it."

While some of the women, like Alice, were quite low-key in describing their response to being seen--"I must admit that it's nice to have attention"--others, like Melanie, were openly enthusiastic about receiving recognition. Melanie talked about "getting fed" by the audience:

I love applause! I love getting lots and lots of kudos and being told I'm good!

I really like it! One way that I can tell is a certain physical sense when I'm in the middle of something. It's as if I broke out in a fine sweat. That's not what happens, but when I've finished a show, I can tell that it was a good

show if there's a kind of high, almost buzzing. You can't hear a buzzing, but it's as if there's a fine, fine electrical wire somewhere singing very, very lightly and I'm quite tired very soon afterward.

Diana similarly talked about how significant it was for her to confront her shyness and take on the challenge of playing piano in front of an audience:

I learned how to perform in public. ... [I was] really getting out there and doing it and not falling apart ... and it was fabulous for me. It was extremely important to realize that I actually could perform and that I was quite good at it and that I could also improvise [in front of people].

Some of the women found it to be especially rewarding when they experienced recognition coming from other artists they admired. For Melanie, receiving praise from a respected colleague confirmed for her that:

I really am doing something good here. It's not just in my head. Somebody I really respect likes what I do. [When he complimented me] I was so happy!! Whew!! So I guess [what is important is] respect from my peers and the people that I respect, and respect from the public in the real sense of when you're actually right in there working.

For some of the women, having their work seen and appreciated by an audience was much more important than monetary reward. For example, Carol's stated goal was that she wanted "more success, not so much monetary, but success that other people can see what I'm trying to do." For others, however, adequate financial compensation for their work was extremely important to their sense of themselves as successful artists. They felt strongly that they wanted their work to be recognized in the same way that society recognizes other forms of work. Sarah made this determination early in her life:



From very early in my childhood I've known somehow that the only way some people are going to notice you is if it brings in money. I remember being a little kid on the school grounds and someone was teasing me or something. I remember thinking I'm going to grow up and I'm going to make a lot of money and then you're going to be impressed. It wasn't a desire really to make a lot of money, but because I knew that would be the only way, my only revenge against these bigger girls who were scorning me or whatever it was.

For a number of the women, their very legitimacy and identity as artists was directly related to being paid for their work. For example, Melanie considered that "it is a very important part" of her experience as an artist that she be paid for what she does. She said that getting her first cheque for storytelling was "the best thing that ever happened to my self-confidence. It was wonderful!" Elizabeth also reported that she felt "pleased and surprised" when people recognized her work, but that recognition alone was not sufficient for her: "I would be probably very depressed if I didn't make any money at my art. ... [Sales are a] reflection that there is an appreciation of perhaps some of your work." Marilyn too talked about it being "very exciting" and "a real turnaround" in her own self-concept for her to be present at a sale of her work and to see that she "was producing something that people really wanted ... and the excitement that was generated at that sale, watching people and the conversations I got into with them ... it was pretty powerful."

Some of the women also considered monetary recognition for their work to be particularly important because of the effect that it had on significant others in their lives. For example, Sarah said that when she won the Governor General's Award for her third novel she was aware that it had a great "impact" on her family "in a way that hadn't happened before." Most notably, she felt that it served to legitimize her career in the eyes of

skeptical family members "who just don't get it--this writing thing." In her view, the fact that she received money as well as recognition with the award was just "the sort of thing that impresses other people, especially people not in your world."

Overall, the women indicated that a certain degree of acceptance, recognition, and support was necessary to both their financial and emotional survival as artists. On a practical level, they each required access to resources such as art materials, studio space, libraries, and galleries, that were--especially in the early days of their careers--sometimes obtainable only through the cooperation or generosity of others. More intangibly, recognition of the value of their work was necessary for the women to feel motivated to continue in their careers. Carol, for one, talked about the importance of having people around her that "accept" her and "are supportive" of her and her career pursuits. Similarly, Melanie stated that it "helps a lot ... to just have the people who matter to you think that what you're doing is a good move." Sarah acknowledged that she needed a certain degree of recognition in order to feel inspired to continue with her writing: "I don't know if I'm the type that would have continued for years with no validation. I don't think I am." And Susan considered that having access to an audience was integral to her work, "There's definitely a truth in terms of visual work, that if you don't have an audience then you haven't finished the cycle. You have to have an audience to see the work."

In addition, visibility in their fields offered the women increased and valued opportunities such as exhibitions or publishing contracts. For Carol, who was active on a variety of arts boards and committees, an important benefit of public recognition was that she felt it bolstered her political effectiveness and her sense that she could "have more influence on the culture and more influence on Canada and the opportunities to have those influences."

When the women experienced being invalidated for their artistic efforts, their feelings ranged from sadness and discouragement to extreme anger. Two of the women specifically commented on the extended negative effects of invalidating experiences they had had in their childhoods. For example, Diana felt that in her family there had been "no mirror there" for her artistic talents and that that had inhibited her development as an artist. She consequently emphasized the importance of parents "responding" to their children's individuality. Marilyn also felt sad and angry that her immediate family had rarely validated her talents when she was young. She felt that her artistic and personal growth had been slowed as a result. Like Diana, Marilyn believed that validation from others could be instrumental in shaping the life of an aspiring artist:

I really do believe if that nurturing had gone on for me, if I would have gotten any kind of support and direction and encouragement around my obvious interest in creative work that then the other struggles that are inevitable for all of us would have been so much less totally overwhelming.

External validation for their artistic efforts and accomplishments continued to be important to the women throughout their lives, long after they had made the choice to become artists or had attained a sense of personal satisfaction with their career status and level of fame. For example, at the time of the interviews Susan expressed contentment with her relatively low profile as a painter and a teacher. Still, she commented almost wistfully that "nobody ever asks what I do." She compared that reality to the experience of an artist friend of hers whose presence and artwork had generated a lot of public interest when she had visited Germany. Similarly, Marilyn reported mixed feelings on having removed herself almost entirely from the formal art scene. She said that she valued the independence and freedom afforded her by such a low-key position, but at the same time, when a friend saw

one of her old exhibition catalogues and did not realize to whom it referred, she felt shaken: "It was like I had just disappeared." Carol also had an unsettling experience of invalidation when she felt an art critic seriously misinterpreted some of her work that was on display in a gallery. She felt honoured to receive the attention of a well-published critic, but the experience of not being seen by that critic as she would have wished left her feeling hurt and very angry.

A final point confirming the ongoing importance of validation by others is that a number of the women talked about how satisfying they found the act of participating in the interviews for this research study. Melanie, for example, described how "very nice" it was for her "just to sit and have somebody pay so much attention to my life." Carol said she found the interviews "a good experience." And Marilyn said that she "really appreciated" being part of the study and that the opportunity to reflect in such a way on her life had been "a really positive thing." Diana, in reference to her previous comment about the lack of "mirroring" in her family, said that she found the interviews "a perfect mirror" for her perceptions and valuable to her because of that. Apparently, the interviews themselves afforded the women an opportunity to experience the very essence of this theme: that is, a sense of validation when they felt that another person recognized, accepted, and supported their uniqueness and their life choices.

### **Theme 3: Sense of being obstructed**

#### **Overview**

This theme relates to the participants' sense of being obstructed by others, overtly or covertly, from pursuing their art and developing their careers as artists. Their experiences of being obstructed ranged from the relatively mild (e.g., disapproving comments by others) to

the severe (e.g., blatant sex discrimination). The emotional responses of the women to such experiences ranged from self-doubt and discouragement to extreme anger.

The women felt obstructed by the attitudes and behaviours of others in a variety of circumstances: with family members, in society in general, and in the established art community. The thread that connected the women's disparate experiences of feeling obstructed was the limiting effects of gender role socialization.

### **The lived experience**

Many of the women first had the sense of being obstructed or held back in their artistic pursuits within the context of their families of origin. This experience most often took the form of their parents' challenging, or in other ways failing to support, the women's interest in art and in an art career. All of the women said they felt encouraged to do well academically, but most also felt that they received negative--or at best, mixed--messages about their interest in art and the choice of art as a career. This was usually manifested in their parents' lack of emotional and/or financial support.

Some of the women found their family's lack of support for their artistic interests to be expressed in relatively subtle ways. That is, in a number of the families, an art career was not specifically condemned or prohibited, it was just, to use Sarah's words, not "presented as an option." Susan, for example, was aware that "there was no encouragement or understanding of visual art in my family at all." She reported that although her parents did not hold her back once she had chosen a particular course of art studies, neither did they actively encourage her to pursue her artistic interests:

They wanted me to do well in school and they might have preferred that I did well in something else. ... They just wanted me to be at the top of the class,

have good grades. They weren't anti-art, they just didn't know any artists, they didn't know it was a viable career.

Diana felt the absence of encouragement by her parents for exploring any "aspirations"-- artistic or otherwise. When she expressed a desire to attend art school rather than university (her parents' preference), she felt she received only reluctant support; her father did agree to send her to the school she wanted, although he said he "wasn't sure about it."

Other participants perceived more active career discouragement on the part of their parents. For example, Melanie said that she received a clear message from her father that "acting was a waste of time." He wanted her to go to university. When in her early twenties Melanie chose to leave her common-law husband, raise their child on her own, and become a professional performing artist, her father showed his extreme disapproval by "disowning" her for a time.

Marilyn's perception was that her parents too were highly critical of her early artistic inclinations and her lack of academic interest: "[They] decided that I was a failure because I couldn't pass all my examinations." She felt angry that they did not encourage her or take an interest in her talents and she viewed their attitudes as a strong negative influence in her life:

I was just not getting any kind of support for anything I wanted to do. So it's no wonder I was as negative and cynical and angry as I was. I had to really escape that influence in my life. ... I think that if [my interests] had been nurtured in me as a child, there's no doubt in my mind that I would have been painting and very actively involved in finding my way to that much earlier in my life.

Another way in which the women experienced being obstructed by their families was that they felt they received mixed messages about career success. On the one hand, they felt that their parents expected them to "succeed" in the world of work. On the other hand, their perception was that this success was to be restricted to certain traditional areas.

Furthermore, the women felt that they were not to seek attention or show "too much" of themselves. For example, Sarah felt that there was "an absolute rule" in her upbringing "against showing off." Diana too felt the weight of her family's expectations in this regard:

My family was very much a family that felt that you shouldn't be pushy. ...

The children were not encouraged to have a sense of themselves. They were encouraged to be respectable, well-dressed, well-spoken and do the right thing.

So there was not room for any kind of unusualness.

Some of the women also reported that they received mixed messages about the importance of honouring their career desires and the necessity of earning a good income. As a rule, their parents' pragmatic advice was at odds with the economic realities of an artistic career. For example, Alice reported that her parents "would always say that I could do anything I wanted to." At the same time, she was aware that her mother "was very concerned we would have a way to have an income" and expressed to Alice her "intense" worry that an art career would not provide her daughter with adequate financial stability. Similarly, Melanie recalled that her father told her that she should do what "what she loved" for a living, but to be sure and "make money doing it"--a major challenge for a self-employed actor and storyteller.

Many of the women felt obstructed by the restrictive gender role expectations of their families and--later--of their intimate partners. For example, both Diana and Alice reported that their parents assumed that they would marry. Diana remembered her parents' attitude as

being, "oh we just thought you were going to get married. It was like that was the only possibility." Alice's father questioned her decision to go to graduate school for similar reasons. He thought such advanced education was unnecessary for women because they did not have to worry about earning money or getting jobs. Alice linked this attitude partially to the time period in which she was raised:

I mean, I'm of that era [in which people thought], she's just going to get married. Why did girls want to go [to graduate school]? Even though I had a really good scholarship. You know, [my parents] valued education, but their notion of it was [that it was] not for women.

Elizabeth's experience was comparable. Although she felt her father had strongly supported her creative pursuits when she was young, she felt he did not take seriously her desire to become an artist:

My father [was] very old-fashioned and Victorian and although he was enthusiastic about my artwork, it wasn't as a career or anything like that. ... Most of the interest was put on [my brother] and his education and ... the idea [for me was] that you marry. Grow up and marry and someone would look after you.

Further, Carol found that she received criticism for her career pursuits not only from her parents, but also from her in-laws. She felt that they "laid a heavy trip" on her because she was working at the same time that she was raising her children. To them, "that's not what a woman should do."

Another area in which the participants experienced being obstructed by gender role expectations concerned the relative status of their careers within their intimate relationships. For example, Susan said she felt like an "appendage" to her ex-husband's art career. She



said that she and her husband had both chosen initially to give his career priority, but ultimately she felt cheated because it never became "her turn" to put her career in the forefront in their relationship. Alice struggled with the same issue of whose art career should take precedence in her marriage. She also noted that this was another area in which she received a "double message" from her parents, especially her mother. Alice felt that the message from her parents was both "I could do anything and was smart enough" and "also that I should keep my place ... because my mother would often say, you shouldn't have too many shows because you're having more shows than [your husband and] ... getting more attention."

As adults, many of the heterosexual women found that their nonartist intimate partners or spouses criticized their career choice. (None of the bisexual or lesbian women reported this to be the case with their female partners.) Often they felt belittled for pursuing an art career. For example, Marilyn said that her ex-husband, both during their common-law marriage and afterwards, put "pressure on me to get out and get a real job." Similarly, Carol reported that her first husband "still asks my kids, what is she doing right now?" In his estimation, being "an artist is not a job." Melanie also recalled being told by a romantic partner that theatre was an "egotistical" pursuit. His opinion was that if Melanie "was going to be acting" she would be "feeding" her ego and that she "should be trying to get above that."

It was not uncommon for the women to feel that competition from within their intimate relationships served to restrict their sense of freedom to explore their creativity and to be more publicly visible in their careers. For instance, Alice was affected by her and her husband's mutual assumption that his art career should take priority. She was reluctant to appear competitive with him and would hold herself back or not tell him if something good

had happened in her career for fear "that he would feel badly." She perceived that he was angry with her that she had switched professional fields from social work to art, "especially when I started to do well." She described how she tried to cope with such negative internal and external messages:

So I both had that double message from [my mother] and then I took it in and I was trying to hold back, or I would try to work hard to get him to have a show or a gallery or something ... thinking it's much more important for him. I remember saying that to people, "no, he needs the gallery, I don't need a gallery. He needs to sell things, 'cause he's a guy, of course he does!

Elizabeth likewise encountered a lack of support for her art career in her relationships with men. This was true for her whether or not her intimate partners were other artists. In her words:

I have never had any man in my life that's ever been supportive of my art. It's been an interference. ... I really feel that if I had been a male, I probably would have had a helpmate that could have helped me in all that, because that's what happens with all the fellows.

A particularly "difficult" experience for Elizabeth that she later felt "sorry" about was that she passed up an important career opportunity because of an intimate relationship. She had refused an attractive full-time teaching position that was offered to her because her partner didn't want her "to be so sewn up" with her work that she would not "have time" for him.

While the women's sense of being obstructed by others due to gender role socialization was strongly associated with experiences in their families and intimate relationships, many of the women felt similarly obstructed in their careers in the larger society. For example, Susan said she felt "the impact of sex role stereotyping" in English

society. Part of her motivation to leave England was to experience a life that was freer in terms of gender roles. Carol felt that she was held back in the business world because of her sex, "I find that people are a lot less accepting of me because the first thing they see is a woman and then they stereotype me right away." Elizabeth saw gender role struggles as pervasive in society and in her career: "I wish I'd been a man because I think I would have been much much more successful in everything. ... I think it's been very very tough for women ... in the arts [and] in all walks of life."

Unfortunately, the women collectively experienced little respite from traditional gender role discrimination in the art community, despite the apparent unconventionality of that milieu. There they felt they encountered many of the same blocks that they had encountered in their families and in the larger society. These blocks fell into two interrelated categories: the women felt that they were not taken as seriously as were male artists, and many of them experienced covert and overt sexual harassment and discrimination.

A number of the women provided detailed descriptions of situations that they felt demonstrated that women artists were not as valued or welcomed in the art community as men artists. For example, Elizabeth said that when she attended art school, and later when she became an art teacher herself, she encountered many instances with her predominantly male colleagues in which she felt that she was not being taken as seriously as the men at art school. Her perception was that repeatedly over the years, focus was put on her appearance and her sexuality, rather than on her artwork, and she described a number of incidents of overt sexual harassment. She also experienced "tremendous professional jealousy" from some male artists who she felt had attempted to disparage or minimize her work.

Carol also felt that people both within and without the art world did not take her seriously--she felt looked upon as only "a housewife with a really nice hobby." She too

described a number of occasions in which she was sexually harassed and even assaulted by men in the art community (e.g., teachers and gallery owners), including one man that she had considered a "protector figure." The result of these experiences for Carol was that she began to "hate the art world" and to feel "really punished by being an artist." She described being "shocked" and "traumatized" by a particular experience at art school in which she felt deeply misunderstood. One of her instructors had expressed surprise when she told him that she was working at night to put herself through school:

And he looked at me and it was really profound and he said, you're kidding, why do you have to work? I said, to pay my way through college. Why do you think? And he said, oh I didn't know you worked. I thought you were some rich man's daughter ... who had this idea of marrying an artist and that was your ambition.

As this example illustrates, Carol felt that she was consistently denied a level of emotional or practical support that was more available to male artists. In her opinion: "Women artists ... [are] held back. ... It's very hard for the women artists to have the same number of shows as the men. We're not taken seriously and I find that infuriating. ... So being a woman artist is a burden."

Melanie shared many of Carol's convictions about the challenges facing women artists. Her experience was that being a female artist was "especially" stressful "because often [women's] choices are limited by male writers, male directors, male producers, and the lack of female parts. There are more women in the theatre, but fewer parts and it creates a great deal of tension." She described a number of occasions in her career in which she felt obstructed because of her gender. For example, she recalled a particularly frustrating experience in which she was denied a part she dearly wanted because the director said that it

wasn't "right" for him to take her away from her daughter, and that because she was a mother, he assumed that she wasn't "really interested in acting so much." Melanie reported that soon after that incident she:

opened this book written by an English director, Peter Brook, and in the preface he's talking about how, if you want to be an actor, you have to devote your life to it. It's almost like you're a monk. Everything else, your love life, your family, everything must be second place. You shouldn't even have a family. Well I got into this and I picked the book up and I threw it across the room. I was so mad!

For her, that advice epitomized her objections to what she perceived to be a pervasive sexist attitude in the theatre that served to limit women artists' full participation.

The others--Susan, Alice, Diana, Marilyn and Sarah--did not feel as obviously held back in their careers because of their gender, as did the women just mentioned. However, all of them did comment to some degree on their awareness of sexism in the art community. Marilyn, for instance, described an incident in which she encountered blatant sexist attitudes. She and a friend, as relative unknowns, had managed to secure a joint exhibition at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. She recalled that this accomplishment was met with jealousy and she remembered "someone in the community saying, well who did you [have sex with] to get that opportunity?"

Marilyn and Alice also both noted that their chosen fields of fabric art and pottery, respectively, tend to be less prominent in the art world than some other specialties specifically because they are dominated by women. Furthermore, Marilyn felt that the field of art education, in which she also works, "is so dominated by women mainly because it doesn't have a lot of status." Sarah also commented that as a children's writer she was very

aware "that there's a deeply underlying sexism in society to do with anyone who is associated with children." Paradoxically however, as Sarah noted, the general devaluation of work connected with children can serve to favour her male colleagues. In her estimation, "men in the field are made much of, because they sort of get both advantages. They get the advantage of being men and they get the advantage of being unusual in their field."

It was particularly hurtful for any of the participants to feel dismissed or disapproved of by their peers because of such biases. For example, Sarah felt that being "disparaged" for her work with children by the writing community is "where you feel it the most" because one's peers "are supposed to be people who respect you and often they don't." Similarly, Diana's experience of having her work censored as politically incorrect by a feminist gallery was deeply painful for her for the very reason that she felt unsupported by those colleagues who she thought would have been the most supportive of her efforts. She reported that she felt especially betrayed by that experience because "it was the place that I felt the safest showing the work because it was woman-oriented."

Some of the women also reported that they felt obstructed by the expectations of others in regards to how they needed to behave in order to thrive in the established art world. In this case, the women's sense of being obstructed did not have to do so much with feeling held back as artists or as women, but as creative individuals. That is, in order to meet the demands of the marketplace as dictated by those in control of the galleries and publishing houses and so on, the women felt that they often had to compromise their integrity. For example, Marilyn said that she felt "disillusioned" with the art world because of the politics involved and her perception that one had to meet "certain expectations" in order to thrive commercially. Elizabeth also reported feeling uncomfortable that galleries would try and persuade her to do certain types of paintings based on their clients' aesthetic

preferences: "You know that [what they're asking for is to fit] the decor of someone's house and that bothered me." Susan too felt that for her to take a commercially successful approach meant that she would have to "pump out paintings." She stated strongly that "I can't be creative under those conditions."

In looking at their lives in retrospect, a number of the women said they were struck by just how many barriers they had encountered in their career development. For instance, after reading the transcript of her first interview for this study, Carol stated, "I don't think I recognized the patterns in my life so much and how many walls I've hit at full speed and backed up a bit stunned." Melanie echoed these sentiments. Indeed, in her summary of her career struggles, Melanie seemed to encapsulate not only her own experiences of being repeatedly obstructed by others, but those of the other women in the study as well:

The major experience of my career as an artist was to make it happen at all.

... It's as if the big issue in my life concerning my career is just bloody having one. Just getting it to happen was such a big deal that it made everything else pale beside it.

#### **Theme 4: Sense of being torn between the needs of self and others**

##### **Overview**

The essence of this theme is the women's sense of being torn between the needs of the self and the needs of others as they struggled to meet the demands that arose from their multiple personal and work roles. Conflicts in this area emerged for the women most noticeably in relation to their families, to the commercial art market, and to other work venues. Whatever the women's individual living situations, all of them put a high value on personal relationships. They consequently felt most torn when struggling to balance their need to have time alone to do creative work with the needs and expectations of significant

others. All of the women expressed a wish to have full rich lives that reflect a healthy balance between work and relationships.

### **The lived experience**

A major component of the women's experience of being torn was the tension between their desire and need to spend time making art alone and the internal and external pressures they felt to spend time with others or to be involved in other tasks. Solitude emerged as a sometimes rare and greatly valued commodity in the lives of these artists.

First, a number of the women in the study described the satisfaction they found in spending time alone. Diana, for example, said that she "quite likes being alone." Sarah described working alone as a "solitary but not lonely" process. And Alice reported that creative change in her work and her life generally "is always interesting" and that "privacy might let it happen" for her.

Second, as well as simply enjoying their solitude, many of the women expressed the conviction that working alone was necessary for their creativity to flourish. Most of the women felt that they required some degree of solitude--and often a separate physical space--in order to do their creative work. Elizabeth, for example, stated that "as a painter you can only do the work on your own ... you can't have other people around." Sarah too felt that she "works best" on her own and found it difficult to adjust to living with someone else: "It wasn't just saying I'm essentially not available now until noon, it was somehow the psychic energy of someone else in the house." Her experience, typical for many of the women, was that the presence of others disturbed her creative flow:

If I lose that connectedness with the world that I'm writing about it takes me hours to get back to it. ... At any individual moment, no it's not the end of the world if I'm interrupted, but cumulatively, the book doesn't get written, the



ideas don't happen. It's a funny world because it's not like you can tell what you lost 'cause it's just what you didn't get.

Diana likewise felt that her creativity was somewhat unpredictable--"you can't just turn it on"--and easily disrupted by others. For her, as for other participants, managing to get time alone was "a constant frustration." She was aware that this influenced how she interacted with friends: "it's very hard for me to hang out [with friends] because I'm always wanting to have that time away and I never feel that I have enough time."

For many of the women, taking time alone was not only difficult to arrange, it also stirred strong feelings of inner conflict and guilt. This was particularly the case when taking such time resulted in the women making themselves less available to their friends, intimate partner, or children. For example, Marilyn described how she sometimes had to consciously focus her energies on her own need to work rather than let herself be tempted by other activities, however tempting those activities might be:

There have been a number of times when I'll have said [to myself], okay, this is what you need to do. It's not about meeting someone for coffee. ... You can't allow yourself to be interrupted by any diversions or distractions right now.

Given the difficulty of balancing her own needs with those of another, especially those of an intimate partner, Marilyn questioned whether or not having an intimate relationship was really possible for her. Some of the other women also discussed the challenge of meeting their own creative needs within the context of an intimate relationship. For example, Elizabeth described how conflicted she felt in a past relationship in which she turned down a much desired professional opportunity because her partner wanted her to be available to travel with him. She later regretted that decision.

For those women who chose to live with other artists the issue of competing creative needs was especially problematic. Elizabeth reported that she found it "quite destructive" to be in relationship with another artist (a male) "because of the professional jealousy and the demands of the relationship." Both Alice and Susan were also involved with other artists in their marriages. They attempted to resolve the professional conflicts that resulted by putting their husbands' careers first, but ultimately neither woman found this to be a satisfying solution. For Susan, the agreement in her marriage was that she and her husband would "take turns" career-wise, but they split up before she felt she had "much of a turn." She initially considered her painting career to be a long term goal and so "didn't mind" the arrangement with her husband. She thought her career "might as well happen then as now. But 'then' has never happened." Likewise, Alice put considerable energy into helping develop her ex-husband's art career in the early days of their marriage. She later regretted her decision to support his creative work at the expense of her own. (Interestingly, neither of the two women in the study who reported having had intimate relationships with other women artists discussed the problem of professional jealousy or conflict in those relationships. However, they both did discuss the challenges of living with another person.)

The sense of being torn in their relationships was especially acute for the mothers in the study. The artists who were also mothers expressed the most frustration and guilt about being unable to fulfill simultaneously both important roles to their satisfaction. Melanie, for example, remembered the conflict and guilt that accompanied a particular acting job that took her away from her young daughter during the day. She said that when she was working at that job she would repeatedly ask herself:

What right do I have to make that choice? Some days [I would be] feeling absolutely fine about it. It was the way the world ran anyway. Other people

worked for eight hours, nobody gave them a hard time. ... And other times [I would be] thinking what am I doing to my baby?

Some of the women described feeling caught in a "no win" situation. If they spent time focusing on their creative work they felt guilty that they were bad mothers. However, if they spent time with their children at the expense of their own projects, they felt resentful and disappointed that they were letting themselves down. For instance, Alice described feeling "frustrated" when her children were growing up and "guilty" about some of the experiences her children did not have because of her commitment to her career:

I don't think that I was a really good mother. So that always makes me feel sort of bad because I was so studio-based. ... I think women are in just an impossible role. 'Cause we could justify [my husband] being in the studio a lot, but I was ... having to balance more things and so that meant that I felt that I wasn't doing anything very well. I wasn't giving the work enough time and I wasn't giving the kids enough time.

Like the other mothers in the study, Melanie echoed Alice's sentiments on this subject. Melanie said that she made choices as a young mother "of not working very much" in order to be with her daughter and then felt "guilty for choosing that" because she was ignoring her career. Elizabeth also experienced being torn in this way. She said that she would allow herself to be interrupted by family members when she was working because she felt her "motherly and grandmotherly side" was so important to her family. At the same time, she was aware of "the conflict between being a mother and being an artist" and how because of that conflict, she felt inhibited from being "creative in different areas."

Elizabeth's story is a good illustration of just how adaptable some of the women had to be in order to meet both their creative work needs and the needs of their families.

Elizabeth described a typical scenario in her early days as a mother and an artist:

When my children were young I used to paint in the kitchen so that I could keep track of what was going on with the kids and I would be cooking and painting at the same time. And I would sort of be stirring something and go back to painting. I don't know how I did it now with all the interruptions. ...

There would be a trellis over there and the painting stretched across it and it would be like a table, and that would be on the kitchen floor and then the kids would be running in and out ... and they would go under the painting.

Sometimes I would have [my work] on the floor ... so they would sort of go around it. But I remember one little kid coming in with my other children and walking right across the painting, my wet painting, and the paint going on the kitchen floor. He obviously wasn't used to having a mother who painted!

Elizabeth also recalled that a number of people had asked her over the years why she "didn't have very many one-man shows" (which are considered more prestigious than group shows). Her response was: "I didn't have time! What with my teaching and looking after kids and doing all the things that you have to do, I was lucky if I was able to produce at all really. ... I just couldn't get it together [for those shows]."

Not surprisingly, given the special demands of young children, a number of the mothers commented on the fact that the years when their children were small were the hardest for them in terms of their career development. Melanie, for one, said that it was no "accident" that she got her "feet planted" in her career when her daughter was older. For women like Susan who adopted a child in her early forties after she had established an art

career, the career/motherhood conflict was not as intense as it was for some of the other participants. Still, she too was aware of the restrictions imposed on her creativity by the demands of motherhood. In her view, "you have to dream to be creative and it's hard to do that when you've got a small child for sure."

Another major area in which the women described being torn was in their commitment to their own creative work versus the practical demands of earning a living. Few of the participants were able to support themselves solely from sales of their artwork. Consequently, they involved themselves with other income-generating activities. Even if they enjoyed those other work commitments, the women often felt frustrated because they could not give their full attention to either enterprise.

For example, Sarah said that she felt "torn" between her writing and her paid job: "Not in the sense that I'm supposed to be doing one, or I'm supposed to be doing the other, just that I am doing one when I sometimes wish I was doing the other." For Marilyn, the very success of one nonart job prompted her to end it. She had started a retail business selling fabric art supplies in order to supplement her income. She soon found, however, that it was hard for her to balance the time and energy demands of that business with the demands of her own art. Eventually she gave up the business because its growth began to overshadow her creative work.

One solution to this conflict that was chosen by most of the women was to teach in their creative field. Teaching was a way in which the women could continue to work in the milieu in which they felt they belonged and get paid for doing so. To work as teachers in their field also gave them visibility and recognition for their talents and expertise, and a sense of connection to others, experiences that were important to their sense of themselves as

artists. (The relevance of teaching to the women's experiences of career is also explored in Themes 2 and 5.)

Even during times when the artists were able to focus their energies almost exclusively on their art careers, they often found themselves pulled between the business and the creative aspects of their work. For example, Melanie described the large amounts of time and effort involved in "hunting up" work, selling oneself, and doing the prep work for shows. For her, as well as for the others in the study, one of the biggest career challenges has been time management:

One of my major experiences as an artist who is trying to support herself with a career as an artist is to juggle that time spent working to make the work happen business-wise and that time spent working to make the work happen artistically. ... There's a constant struggle to keep the balance so that my artistic side is fed and healthy, so that I feel glad of what I'm doing.

Also like many of the other women, Melanie described the difficulty of scheduling in time for herself. Because paid work in her field can be scarce, she said she never wanted to pass up any work opportunity. The result of always saying "yes" to work, however, was that she was "always booked:"

Sometimes I'm too busy and I'm always chastising myself for taking on too much of what I'm not necessarily mad about, like leaving my desires to the end. You know, the things that only please myself get done last in some ways.

Another way in which the women experienced feeling torn between personal values and the practical demands of an art career was in their relationships to the commercial aspects of the art world. All of the women appeared to have a somewhat ambivalent attitude

toward the companies, agents, or commercial venues in which they published, performed, or otherwise exhibited their works. This was especially true for the women who were visual artists. On the one hand, the women felt that they needed outside agents and performance and exhibition spaces in order to most efficiently generate visibility and income for their work. On the other hand, the women often felt resentful because they felt compromised artistically by the demands of these representatives of the marketplace.

Alice, for example, felt that she could have been more commercially successful in her career had she chosen to make her work more "market-driven," but she felt that to do so would have meant taking even more time away from her family commitments and her own personal creative explorations. Elizabeth also resisted and resented what she saw as the commercial demands of the marketplace. She felt protective of her artistic integrity and did not want to be compromised by bowing to pressures to produce art that was "popular." Like many of the women in the study, she felt strongly that she wanted to work at her own pace and perceived that choice to have inhibited her commercial success. She commented, "You know, I can only [sell] so much because I take quite a long time to do my work and it takes so long to get a body of work together." Diana struggled with the need to both earn money through her art and her reluctance to sell her work, especially those pieces that she felt were "intensely personal." To her, to sell her paintings "would be like selling your dreams."

The women generally believed that in order to honour their values about artistic integrity and personal freedom, they were required to sacrifice financial stability. As Marilyn described it, when it came to choosing whether to direct her time and energies towards making money or towards aspects of her life that were more meaningful (i.e., her creative work and her family and friends), she always chose time over money. Susan also was unwilling to give up precious creative time in order to make money. She believed this

was not a unique choice: "I think most artists value time more than money, after the essentials."

Even when the women had come to terms (at least to some degree) with the conflicts between self and relationships, or when the compromise between work for money and personal creative work seemed like a good one, they still felt torn between multiple roles and found the pressures involved in juggling those roles to be very stressful. Indeed, "juggling" was a word that was used again and again during the interviews. For instance, Elizabeth said she experienced "just this juggling thing all the time" in her life. And Marilyn talked about the energy it takes to raise a child and do creative work at the same time. She felt that "I'm really often under a lot of pressure and juggling a lot of things. ... It's an incredible balancing act working that all out."

Whatever the practical and creative benefits of teaching, some of the women experienced conflict in that role as well. Alice, for example, reported that she initially felt so responsible in her teaching role that she put "twice as much time" into her teaching as she observed her male colleagues doing. The result for her was that her experience of being torn between multiple commitments was intensified:

So I was putting in full-time effort for a forty per cent [teaching] job and, of course, you can't do that and then have much time left if you've got children and a studio. So I was just feeling like I was running and strapped. I was feeling very thin, stretched very thin, and busting my butt and feeling exhausted.

An often repeated refrain from the participants was that they felt frustrated with the tension between their multiple commitments and their need for time for their creative work. For example, Diana sometimes felt exasperated that she was unable to concentrate on her



artwork when she wanted or for as long as she wanted: "there's never enough time ... [my life] is just too fragmented. I get one corner [of a painting] done and then I have to stop." She added that she was looking forward to retirement from her paid work so she would have more time available for her art. Similarly, Elizabeth reported: "You're doing one thing which is what you want to do, but you should be doing something else, you know, so you're being tugged always in different directions." Melanie also told the story of how she and a few other women artists tried to start a women's theatre group, but were forced to abandon their plans because of the many other commitments that took priority.

The women's ongoing struggles with this issue illustrate their commitment to achieving a sense of balance in their lives. All of the women expressed the need to have both meaningful work and meaningful relationships. Their collective opinion was that success as a woman artist was directly related to being a fully functional woman in the world, a woman with multiple career responsibilities and multiple relationships. They saw the proper role of the artist to be very much engaged in life and with others, not as an individual alone with her art. For example, Marilyn said that one of the reasons she valued teaching was because the contact with others that she received as a teacher provided a "balance" to her private work in her studio--the more solitary aspect of her artistic life. Melanie echoed Marilyn's sentiments about the importance of balancing personal creative work and relationships with others. She said that she felt ongoing pressure to manage her life in a way that allowed her to have both experiences: "I do cram every available minute with something and ... another one of those struggles is to take the time to fit in friendships and celebrations, like birthdays and Christmases and not be a workaholic."

While the women as a whole clearly valued their independence, they rejected the idea that in order to be productive and successful they must sacrifice the fundamental experiences

of relationships--whether it be involvement with motherhood or being active in the larger community. Melanie seemed to speak for many of the women when she stated that, "living a more rounded life is important. ... This drivenness, that this society thinks is so wonderful, I mean everything is always speeding up and it's so intense and this driven desire to accomplish what, who knows what?" Similarly, Marilyn's desire to live a more balanced "holistic lifestyle" is part of what brought her to the West Coast. She said she had come to a point in her life where she felt overly career-focused and wanted a greater sense of balance. Sarah also voiced the conviction held by many of the women, that she "didn't want to become a weird, self-centred" artist and put her writing "before human relationships and social responsibility" as she had seen some other writers do.

Significantly, all of the participants who are mothers emphasized that they found motherhood to be a vital component of their experience of a balanced and abundant life. For instance, Marilyn described motherhood as "absolutely awesome" as a creative stimulus. She also reported that raising her child helped her regain a desired sense of life balance. Similarly, Carol said that childrearing for her, like the development of her art career, was "a creative process". And Melanie talked about having a "sense of the rightness of my life to have raised my daughter, to have considered it important."

A number of the women also commented that although they often felt torn and pressured by their multiple commitments, they generally experienced the multi-faceted nature of their lives as creative and enriching. For example, Alice posed the question, "Do we have to accept the male idea of single-mindedness?" And Susan said that even though "juggling" was particularly difficult for her at this point in her life "when I haven't got so much energy," she accepted it as "a factor if you want to live a rich life." Susan used the metaphor of painting on multiple canvasses to illustrate her philosophy that variety of

experience can lead to richness: "I advise students to paint on more than one canvas at once. Because you are often stuck in one endeavour and moving to another one can sometimes provide you with a new lease of life on the other." This metaphor represents well the positive side of the multi-faceted nature of the participants' careers. Despite the ongoing and challenging aspects of the sense of being torn between the needs of self and others, all of the women chose "to paint on more than one canvas" in their lives.

### **Theme 5: Sense of connection and belonging through art**

#### **Overview**

This theme involves the participants' desire to connect with others through art and their sense of satisfaction in the experience of that connection. There are three main aspects to this theme: (a) the women experienced a sense of meaning through sharing their creative work with an appreciative audience; (b) they experienced feelings of "comfort" and "belonging" through associating and working with other creative individuals, especially other women artists; and (c) they experienced a sense of satisfaction and reward in connecting with others through teaching.

#### **The lived experience**

For many of the women, sharing their creative work with an audience was a way for them both to explore their own individuality as artists and to relate meaningfully to others. For example, according to Susan, "being an artist is having the privilege [and the] opportunity to make sense of your life in a way that other people can also take part in." Similarly, Melanie saw "meaning" associated with the experience of "relating to artists or other people" through her work. Diana also commented on the interactive aspect of showing her work. In her view, an artist's work is a highly personal statement of her self and her

dreams and to share that work with an audience is to reach out to others in a very intimate way. She stated, "I feel strongly that artwork goes into the soul of ... the viewer."

In addition to valuing connections with audience members, a number of the participants expressed the opinion that an important part of their experience as artists was feeling that they were part of a community of artists and of other people who valued art and a creative approach to life. The women's convictions about the value of a sense of connection with other like-minded individuals was in direct contrast with what some of them perceived to be a stereotypically "male" approach to the experience of being an artist. That is, the women clearly rejected the image of the artist as a solitary iconoclast. They articulated instead an intense desire to be in relationship with others through their work. Marilyn expressed this position strongly:

Just being in relationship to my creativity, being in my little studio removed from the rest of the world is not what I see as an ideal situation in my life.

That's not what I work towards, because I've done that before and it was very isolating and it felt very turned-in and not enough sort of reflecting out there in a larger community.

For some of the women, a sense of connection was associated with finding a geographical home in which they felt they could fit in and thrive as artists. Susan, for example, talked about her surprise and delight in finding on the West Coast a sense of belonging and a satisfying "comfort level" with the other artists and creative people that she met. After years of travelling and living in various cities, she was pleased to discover a community in which she could see herself "functioning" as an artist in the way that she wished. Marilyn too found a sense of belonging on the West Coast. In contrast to other places where she had lived, here she felt that she had "come home" and that her art had "a

real place in the community." She reported that in the past, "it was difficult for me to be involved with the community ... but I find [now] that wherever I am, it's a really comfortable place."

For other women, a sense of connectedness and community was not associated with a place, but with a feeling of having found, in Sarah's words, "kindred spirits" in their chosen peer groups. Sarah commented that: "I think where I get my feeling of community now is among ... readers. ... I just like talking to people who read, whether it's my work or anybody else's." For Melanie, her sense of community was quite specifically tied to her artistic discipline. Her experience was that as she evolved as an artist, she found that she felt increasingly comfortable in the "gentler, kinder, more thoughtful world of people who love storytelling as opposed to the world of people who love the theatre."

For some of the women, the opportunity to collaborate professionally with other creative individuals was experienced as a very special and important source of "pleasure" and artistic "challenge." Alice, for one, discussed the "high value" she placed on working with other artists or creative people in different fields: "I think I like that whole idea of integration [with others' work] so that my work is part of the whole, rather than just my work by itself." Her experience in this regard was representative of many of the women who emphasized the value both of collaboration with other artists and of interaction with the public through their work. A "really meaningful" project for Alice was an outdoor sculpture garden that involved having a "dialogue with other people ... that could allow their creativity to be there and still let it be part of my whole piece." Alice said she also found that project especially satisfying because it was about "making a place for people to be" where the public could interact with her artwork.

Some of the participants noted that their experiences of connecting with other women artists were particularly satisfying. Marilyn, for example, expressed appreciation for the "support" she received from other women as her career developed. She also talked about how much she valued the chance to meet, work, and "share stories" with a group of women with whom she organizes an annual art sale:

There is ... the exchange of all the personal stories and the struggling that is going on in every individual's life that is also a big sharing. ... And it's just really important for each of us to allow ourselves to participate in that exchange and it seems like it gets more powerful all the time.

She further talked about having "really a joyful time" when she has the chance to work in the presence of others who are supportive of her work.

Two other examples of this aspect of the sense of connection with others through art were Diana's and Melanie's experiences. Diana described her involvement with a women artists' collective and credited her work with that group as having greatly spurred her creative growth: "It wasn't until I started working with the other women artists that I met that I really saw that there was something else there that I could go on with." Diana considered the time in her life when she had contact with so many other women artists as a "very fecund time" in her creative development. Melanie also talked about the value of artistic collaboration and characterized herself as "an actor who loves to link with other people." Like many of the participants, she found a rare sense of creative security in the community of other women artists. For example, she described her early experiences of working with other women as "extremely rewarding" because they afforded her "a safer place to work"--that is, they provided an atmosphere of "less judgmentalness" and "more room to experiment"--than she was used to in male-dominated theatre groups. She

consequently felt strongly that women's art, in order to develop, needs the attention that can be given only by "women coming together and being exposed to others' work."

The last significant way in which all of the women found that they were able to connect with others through their art was through teaching and mentoring others. (All but one of the women had formal teaching experience of some sort. Carol was the only woman who had not had this experience, but she had been involved in various informal teaching and mentoring situations.) Not only did teaching serve as a practical solution to the problem of trying to make a living from their artistic talents, it also allowed the women to stay in touch with their own creativity while sharing their enthusiasm for their work with others. For example, Marilyn said that "I'm very much an artist when I'm teaching." She described teaching as deeply "reinforcing" of her own "creative spirit" and as a way for her to express her "passion for being in relationship with children and their creative endeavours."

For Alice too, teaching and being an artist were "interdependent." She talked about experiencing teaching as a "joy" and about how it has served as an important stimulus to her own creativity at the same time that it has allowed her to connect meaningfully with her students:

Art school is quite a wonderful place and it's all this ferment of ideas and possibilities and here I was encouraging students to take risks and do all these things. So partly it was listening to what I was telling other people to do and saying, "well you can do it!" and "well I can too." ... I don't think I'd be an artist if I weren't also a teacher and ... I feel very tied-in to that whole thing of both wanting to give back to other people as well as to be doing my own work.

Alice also said that after midlife she had experienced a shift towards "giving more service to a larger community" by becoming Associate Dean at her art school rather than just emphasizing her career as a practicing artist.

Elizabeth likewise spoke with pride about her career as an art teacher: "I influenced hundreds of people. So I would say that that was very meaningful. I feel that I inspired a lot of people and I think that's probably very very important as an accomplishment." Furthermore, as was true for a number of the other participants, Elizabeth's desire to reach out to others as a teacher and a mentor extended beyond the confines of formal educational settings. This was evident in her criticism of the elitism and jargon of the "in-group" of the art community. She felt that the exclusive nature of much art discourse discourages outsiders from becoming involved with the making and the appreciation of art: "Because what you want to do is really educate people and if you write above them and use this snobbery you know you're going to alienate yourself with [them]." She felt highly motivated to introduce nonartists to different art forms and described taking great satisfaction in informal teaching activities such as touring friends through local galleries. Similarly, Carol directed energy towards facilitating communication between artists and scientists. One way in which she pursued this interest was to be involved as a panelist in an annual conference for high school students. Like Elizabeth, Carol spoke with special pride about assuming the role of a "very supportive and encouraging" mentor to "people who are thinking of being artists."

Elizabeth, Sarah, Marilyn and Susan all shared the conviction that everyone is creative at heart and that individuals can choose whether or not to explore that aspect of themselves. They each felt that teaching and mentoring were rewarding in great part because these activities allowed them to connect with the natural creativity in others. Elizabeth, for example, said that "everyone has been born to be creative" and that people need to be



encouraged to bring out that part of themselves. And Marilyn commented that: "everyone has a creative place in them whether they're an artist or not ... and I'm really interested in connecting with that aspect of everyone if I possibly can." She said that she feels "incredibly excited" to see artistic growth in her students. Sarah too emphasized that "something [she] 'absolutely believes' in as a writer and a teacher is the value of nurturing the innate creativity of children.

Susan also pointed out that part of the reward for her in being a teacher was that in that role she could positively influence other women:

If I can be a role model to other women in the way that I wanted somebody to be to me, I get a lot of reward out of that. That's why I like to teach. It makes sense. It feels like I'm passing something on. That makes me feel like I belong.

Similarly, Alice talked about the "satisfaction" of "nurturing" her students, especially the women. And Elizabeth said that one reason she decided to be a teacher was because she felt that she "could relate to women a lot more" than could the men at the art school where she taught. Finally, although Melanie was only involved in a small amount of formal teaching in her career, she too discussed using her art as a way to educate and to inspire other women and girls. For example, she said that she liked to include in every storytelling program at least one story that "has a very strong woman in it."

As the preceding examples illustrate, an important aspect of the participants' sense of connection to others through their art was that they not only experienced such connections as personally meaningful, but also that they saw them as potentially valuable to their audiences and their students. That is, they felt that their artwork itself and/or their teaching activities could serve as important stimuli for other aspiring artists. In this way, the women viewed

themselves as fulfilling the functions of the role models and mentors that they felt they had so regrettably lacked in their own creative development.

### **Theme 6: Sense of struggle to assume the identity of artist**

#### **Overview**

This theme concerns the women's sense of struggle to adopt the identity of artist. For all of the participants, the development and claiming of their creative identity was a long-term, multi-faceted, and often difficult process. This process had four major interrelated aspects. The first involved the women's inhibitions about including themselves in an occupational group that they greatly admired. The second involved the women's fear that they did not possess the requisite talent and/or credentials to legitimize their claims to be artists. The third involved their doubts as to whether or not they met internal and external criteria for the label of "artist." Finally, the fourth involved the women's inner conflicts about the appropriateness of their career choice in terms of gender role behaviour.

The process of the women's creative identity development was challenging in part because of the lack of role models in the arts. Often the women were able to feel comfortable with their identity as artists only after they had redefined the label "artist" for themselves.

#### **The lived experience**

For most of the women in the study, an important factor underlying their sense of identity struggle was the commonly held view of artists as "very special" people. To the degree that any of the women held that view, they felt that they could not measure up to the definition of the term "artist." For example, Alice recalled that when she was starting out in her career she believed that the concepts of artist and genius were almost synonymous: "I had this very exalted notion of what an artist was and I didn't think I was a genius. And I

just had this place for the artist way up here and just saw myself as more of a maker going along the way." Similarly, Elizabeth said, "an artist to me is something, someone so special that there are not that many in the world." Sarah reported that she used to feel "awe" about the writing world. And Marilyn said that when she was young she regarded the art world as appealing, yet foreign and exclusive. She would fantasize about a career as an artist, but think to herself, "How could one possibly do that?"

For most of the women, it was easier initially to identify themselves with their artistic specialty (e.g., painting or pottery) rather than to take on the full title of artist. For example, Susan said that at the beginning of her career she called herself "a painter" because "an artist is somebody who's good at whatever they do" and she did not feel that she fit that description. Moving to North America from England made it easier for her to claim that identity because she felt there were lower expectations here of what constitutes an artist:

I feel much more like using the word [here]. ... When I was calling myself a painter I thought an "artist"--this may be European--refers to the calibre of your creative power as well. In North America it certainly doesn't imply [that]. It can be a euphemism for a lay-about, so it doesn't carry with it that import that I didn't feel I quite could take on as a young person.

Carol's discomfort with the term artist also was related to its potential negative associations. She initially resisted identifying herself as an artist because she felt that art is seen to be "so unimportant in our society." Although she personally esteemed artists and their cultural role, she was reluctant to associate herself with a pursuit that she felt is so often seen as just a hobby, rather than as a serious profession.

Elizabeth was another woman who was hesitant to identify herself as an artist, especially in the early days of her career. Her discomfort with the term stemmed partly

from her belief that artists were rare and special people, and partly from her strong identification with other roles in her life. At various points she said that she saw herself as either a teacher or a mother first, before "painter" or "artist." At the time of the interviews, she said she still tended to use the term "painter" most readily.

For the participants who had taken formal art training, the external validation of their talents that training implies helped them to assume the identity of artist. For instance, Marilyn was able to say with confidence that being an artist "was who I was" only after she finished art college. Alice's experience was analogous to Marilyn's. Although Alice noticed that others were quick to identify her as an artist once she had begun doing artwork, she personally had difficulty accepting the designation. For her, going back to graduate school to get her Masters in Fine Arts served in part to legitimize her sense of identity in her own mind. Carol, too, said she really only "became an artist" in practice and in self-perception after she graduated from U.B.C.'s Fine Arts program.

Even after some of the women had clearly identified themselves as artists, privately and publicly, that identity remained fragile. For Melanie her identity struggles were closely tied to her perception of her own skills: "I was very frightened and insecure about my abilities as an actor. Very few people told me that I was any good and maybe even if they had I couldn't hear them." Another woman feared that she would not be able to trust her talents and her ability to survive as an artist if she gave up drugs and alcohol: "I was really, really scared about going back and trying to draw completely clean and sober. What happens if I can't? What happens if I only can do it if I've had something ... have I lost it?"

The women's sense of identity as artists was also connected to criteria such as: whether or not they made their living through art or worked full-time at it, whether or not they had shows or exhibitions, and whether or not they did original work. These criteria

were sometimes imposed by others and sometimes by the women themselves, and they varied in importance over the course of the women's lives.

In some cases, the fact that the women did not fully support themselves through their artwork challenged their sense of legitimacy as artists and their right to claim art as their career. For example, Marilyn reported that there was "still this little part" of her that questioned "on some level" whether she was "really qualified to put out to the world" that she was in fact an artist "if that isn't how you really make your livelihood." Sarah did not connect her identity with how much money she made through her writing, but with how much time she devoted to the task:

I suppose if I did [my writing] totally full-time I wouldn't have any choice [about taking on the identity of a writer]. I still have a part-time job, so I don't know, I don't think it would have anything to do with income really.

Carol associated her sense of creative identity with whether or not she had received public recognition for her work. She reported that for a period of time she had been strongly influenced by her ex-husband's opinion that "you're not an artist unless you've had an exhibition." Until she had taken part in a show, therefore, she felt that it was illegitimate for her to call herself an artist.

Melanie used still another criterion, that is, a real artist is a creator as well as a performer. She reported that she continues to challenge her own legitimacy on this point: "Sometimes I chide myself [that] I'm not a real artist because I ... don't do much original work." And Diana made the distinction between being an artist and being a "professional artist" with an art career. She had come to feel comfortable with the identity of artist, but felt that she did not qualify as a "professional artist" because she had never made her living

off of her art. Consequently, she reported that she did not know whether she ever really considered "art as being a career" for her.

As these varied examples illustrate, the women's sense of their own legitimacy as artists was often tenuous. Indeed, their sense of themselves as "real" artists could easily shift if they were confronted by others, or confronted themselves, with any persuasive arguments that supported the idea of their artistic illegitimacy. Given that there are no established or universally accepted external authorities in our culture that can determine precisely who is and who is not an artist, each woman had to develop a strong sense of her own inner authority about what constitutes an artist. It took most of the women many years to claim that authority within themselves.

The participants' creative identity struggles were also sometimes exacerbated by family norms and expectations. For example, Diana linked her identity conflicts with her sense that her artistic sensibilities were not appreciated by the members of her family of origin: "I couldn't really show them everything, so there's a kind of way that I don't show that [creative] part to myself either and this has to do with identity." Carol also felt that her experiences of rejection in her family negatively influenced her identity development:

I just always got mixed messages. When you're young, it's really hard to get an identity. ... [The family] sort of mistook my ambition for ... fantasy and that it wasn't really serious. That I wasn't really really honestly trying to be an artist. ... I mean if you know who you are but everybody sees something different that's always very confusing. ... I still find it difficult to call myself an artist.

Messages about appropriate gender roles played a large part in some of the women's creative identity struggles. None of the women voiced difficulties about identifying as

"workers" in the world. In fact, both Susan and Sarah noted that they had identified strongly with their fathers rather than their mothers in terms of considering paid work as, in Sarah's words, "a very important part of your identity." However, in a number of cases, gender role expectations influenced the participants' perceptions of what type of work was appropriate for them to do as women and how much attention they should give to their work. For instance, Melanie remembered that it was much easier for her to reconcile her desire to be a mother than to be an artist:

I knew I wanted a child really early on and I had no trouble pursuing that desire. I didn't ever feel that it was wrong for me to want a child, whereas I had a lot of trouble accepting the fact that I wanted to be an actor.

Similarly, Alice talked about how her identity as an artist was deeply affected by traditional gender role expectations in her marriage. She reported that for some years, even after having achieved external recognition for her artwork, she tended to regard her ex-husband as the real artist in the family and to see herself as "someone who had a nice hobby."

Like Alice, Elizabeth felt restricted in her creative identity development by her own and others' gender role biases. She felt that she had to struggle very hard to give herself permission to become the artist she wished to be within the contexts of marriage and motherhood. Elizabeth recognized that it was "the human experience that males have always expected to be in the forefront" with women as "helpmates," but felt that women, herself included, pay a high price for this role division. In her view: "Often the problem [is] that women ... find that they can't be themselves. That they've lost their identity. I mean they might love their husband tremendously, but somehow part of them has gone."

A contributing factor in the women's search for creative identity was the lack of female role models in the arts. Sarah referred to the fact that the common definition of

artists is of men who lead lives clearly devoid of many experiences common to women (e.g., motherhood). She recalled that part of her early resistance to calling herself a writer was because she associated writing with a "male" reality:

When you go to U.B.C. in the early Seventies and you go to poetry readings ... mostly it was men. ... And they always had these poems about tough inner-city violent experiences. And that just wasn't part of my life. So I felt that's what writers were. They were male and tough guys. ... So I think a lot of the off-putting things about one's identity as a writer are male things. Like, I'm a writer, therefore I am exempt from social responsibility. Oh, I am a writer so someone else does the dishes. Oh, I am a writer so I can be self-centred and egotistical. I mean, this is what I had seen in male writers that I knew.

Even when the women could identify female role models, their very respect for those role models could undermine their own sense of themselves as being worthy of choosing the same career path. Paradoxically, rather than helping them to consolidate their sense of creative identity, often the participants' admiration for other artists, including teachers, would discourage them because it threw what they judged to be their meagre talents into harsh relief. For example, Melanie said, "I was easily brought down by somebody saying, this is how you have to do it." For her, comparison with other artists led her to think, "I'm really not an artist. I'm just a crummy little person. I mean that's the negative side of comparison and I think on the low days, you can get into it."

At the same time, for women like Diana and Alice, it was important that they situate themselves quite obviously in a community of artists and that they confront comparisons with others head-on. Diana specifically linked her career identity development to her connection with other women artists during the women's movement. Similarly, Alice said, "I went back



and finished my M.F.A. and put myself in that competition of looking at myself in that context of people who had said they were serious and [had said] they were artists." The fact that she "continued to do well" in such company bolstered her sense of identity and self-esteem, but did not entirely eliminate her self-doubts. She said, "it's like I didn't quite believe it, I think."

Ultimately, some of the women were better able to take on a creative identity when they accepted a personal and sometimes less concrete definition of the word "artist." For Alice, this redefinition was connected to looking at the process of making art rather than the product. Her sense of identity shifted when she understood that being an artist:

didn't have to do so much with the quality of the end result as with the activity of doing it. Because if I had to define myself as good ... I probably couldn't have said, I'm a great artist, or that my work is all that good. ... [But] I felt that I was engaged in the activity that artists engage in, which is to transform and transcend things. ... I can say I'm an artist without assuming that people then assume that I'm some kind of genius, or that everything that I produce is wonderful.

Carol too had felt that the term "artist" was limiting. For her, being an artist was about finding a place for creativity in all aspects of her life: "artist is the way of life for me."

Notably, even when some of the women had come to feel secure with the term "artist," they frequently identified themselves with their area of artistic specialty. They said that they did so in order to conform to the conventions of certain peer groups and that this practice did not necessarily indicate discomfort with their creative identities. For example, at the time of the interviews both Sarah and Melanie easily identified themselves as artists. However, they both said that they often chose in different situations to refer to themselves,

respectively, as a writer and an actor or storyteller depending on which title seemed most appropriate in the circumstances.

However the women came to accept themselves as artists, the assuming of that identity usually had disruptive, even frightening aspects. Melanie said that she found it "very scary" to finally claim that she was an actor because of the personal and professional implications of that statement. And Sarah said, "I seem to have had to redefine myself before I could even do it, which is scary, because it's so arrogant ... I felt like people would think I was showing off."

In most cases, the struggles involved in coming to a sense of themselves as artists also put tremendous strain on the women's significant relationships. This sometimes led to the break-up of marriages or even artistic partnerships. For example, Diana said of her "traumatic" but necessary separation from her ex-husband: "There was some kind of way that at that point I realized we had to go in different ways. I had to find what my career as an artist was, as a musician. He had to find what his family was and he did." Melanie also talked about a split-up from a professional partner as being important to her sense of creative identity: "A very big part of my artistic growth was, who am I in this? Not, who am I in terms of her?"

Although a few of the women began to claim the identity of artist relatively early in their art careers--for example, Marilyn and Alice began to call themselves artists during graduate school--for most of the women, consolidation of their sense of creative identity did not seriously begin until at least age 30. For example, Sarah said that "the idea of writing as a career really didn't occur to me until I was about 30." Similarly, Melanie reported that her identity development as an artist was "a slow road" and she only began to feel clarity

about her artistic path in her late thirties. Melanie related her identity development to the increased "inner sense" of value that she felt as an artist in midlife:

I do [still] occasionally get into tailspins about I'm no good! or whatever, but I am light years away from the woman that I was through that struggle just to get myself to the place where I could say, this is how I make my living, this is how I spend my time.

And Marilyn felt that by midlife she had changed from viewing herself as being "selfish and self-indulgent" to feeling "legitimate" about her choice to be an artist.

For many of the participants, their sense of identity as women artists also increased in importance as they aged. Alice, for one, reported that her attitude about this issue had changed dramatically over time:

Twenty years ago ... I would have denied that it had a huge meaning because I think I was trained and taught at a time when you denied that there was a difference [between male and female artists]. But I think at this point I've thought about it and have gone through enough of those struggles to think that being a woman is very much an important part of the kind of work I do.

Finally, it was interesting to note that although a number of the participants reported that they continued to struggle with owning the identity of artist, they all responded with confidence to the notices requesting volunteers for this study. The women's willingness to participate in research exclusively focused on the lives of women artists suggests quite a strong sense of identity-consolidation on their part.

## **Theme 7: Sense of self-determination**

### **Overview**

The sense of self-determination experienced by participants is composed of a number of sub-phenomena including: independence, freedom, resistance to rules and limits, self-confidence and self-trust, and optimism about the future. All of the women highly valued independence and freedom of choice in their lives. They enjoyed feelings of being "in charge" of their destinies and resisted relationships or environments in which they felt that their freedom was restricted. The women's sense of self-determination was closely tied to a sense of trust in themselves. They all described the importance of having achieved a level of confidence in which their personal evaluations of their own career success outweighed the standards and judgements of others. Furthermore, they all shared to some degree the conviction that they could shape their lives as artists and as women. A basic issue confronted by all of the women as they forged their career paths was how to reconcile the necessity of earning money with the pursuit of personal and artistic freedom. Each woman made a unique decision about this matter, but all of them ultimately chose to give priority to freedom. Given the women's strong sense of self-determination and their perceived ability to make satisfying life choices, they generally approached their futures with a strong sense of optimism.

### **The lived experience**

"Independence" and "freedom" emerged as fundamental components of the participants' sense of self-determination. All of the women repeatedly referred to these two phenomena as they told the stories of their lives as artists.

Many of the women took obvious pride in their independence. For example, Alice said that "there's a certain stubborn streak [in me], to be as independent as possible, so even

though I've used a lot of help, I'm really proud of myself when I can do things without the help." Susan also expressed pride in the fact that even very early in her career as an artist she had chosen to make her own way and had refused financial help from her parents. Susan placed an especially high value on independence and risk-taking and felt indignant when others perceived her as having led a "safe" life. She reported that she had twice been told by men that she was "conventional" and "not living on the edge." That "accusation" left her feeling "confused" and "like the sense of freedom that I've got is under attack." Similarly, Carol said that she had "decided to be independent" at a young age. Also like Susan, Carol associated her sense of independence with a perception of herself as a social nonconformist.

Not surprisingly, one of the major factors that attracted participants to an art career was the independence and freedom that such a career could offer. For instance, Melanie reported that she loved the fact that as a storyteller she could be her "own boss." She cherished the "freedom to choose only to tell what I love to tell and ... only to tell to those people I feel like telling to." She declared with satisfaction that she had reached a place in her career where she now does work "only to please me." Likewise, Carol stated that she chose the life of an artist because "one of the things that I wanted was the freedom to pursue anything intellectually that I wanted to." She believed that being an artist would give her that opportunity: "being an artist [means] that there are no limits." And Sarah said that as a self-employed writer she appreciated "the freedom to write as I want to. ... It feels so free that no one can tell me how to be. There's no code for writers."

For some of the women, a desire to be open to the unexpected in life was closely related to their sense of self-determination. For example, Susan prized personal and artistic exploration and valued the experience of "not knowing" what was going to happen next in her life. For her, leaving the "old structure" of her family and her life in England to come

to North America was significant because it allowed her to "enter another structure" that was unknown to her and therefore liberating. In her view, the fact that "there were no landmarks," emotional or geographical, and that she did not recognize "what I was becoming" gave her an important sense of freedom. Similarly, Sarah described the time period when she was in "identity transition" from her first career as a librarian to her present career as a writer as a time when she felt open to experience and "quite free."

Concomitant to valuing independence and freedom, the participants tended to avoid relationships and environments in which they felt that they might be emotionally or artistically limited. For example, Carol said firmly: "I don't need anybody else's restrictions any more. I allow myself not to have anything to do with people who don't support me."

Many of the women experienced traditional heterosexual relationships as particularly restrictive. Marilyn, for one, had felt that her freedom as a woman and as an artist had been severely compromised in past intimate relationships. As a result, she had felt "hope and excitement" and an "incredible surge of energy" upon leaving her common-law marriage. Now she was apprehensive that a long-term relationship with a man would be a "risk" that she would be "signing [her] life away." Alice's experience was comparable. She too found that the experience of divorce, while extremely difficult, was at the same time liberating to her sense of herself as an independent artist. During her marriage she had felt ambivalent and uncertain about her involvement with art and feared that her artistic success would be perceived as a threat to her artist husband. In contrast, she experienced the break-up of her marriage as "in some ways ... a real relief:"

It's been a real sort of freeing for me. So even though I'm not always totally delighted that I'm living alone, it makes me totally free and responsible and gives me a kind of permission that I'm not competing with anybody.

The participants also expressed the desire to stay separate from any established structures or organizations that could threaten their creative freedom. A number of the women indicated displeasure with the framework and routines of traditional nonart-related employment. As Sarah said, "I have never been happy with the strictures of a nine-to-five job." The women were as likely, however, to voice dissatisfaction with any restrictions they encountered in the established art world as in more routine work environments. Consequently, they tended to avoid the mainstream of the art milieu, that is, the established educational and cultural institutions that train, promote, and support artists. Some of the women talked about purposely wanting to keep a "low profile" in the artistic community in order to maintain their independence. Diana, for one, felt that "when you don't have that low profile you also lose some of your freedom." She said that she specifically cultivated "life on the margins" of the art world because "if your profile is higher there are other intrusions into your life that stop [a] kind of poetry happening within your life and that's what I feed off for my work."

Marilyn and Susan both described their frustrations with what they experienced as restrictive aspects of the art establishment. For example, Marilyn said she felt "bored" with "the whole bureaucracy of school and the dance that you're expected to dance for the sake of recognition from the powers that be." For her, the energy that she saw was required to be part of the art establishment--"competing and networking and producing and evaluating my work in terms of what it's worth in the marketplace"--distracted her from "the natural rhythm of doing what I want to do in the world." She reported that there was a time when

she had felt "almost enslaved" by her desire to be represented by a gallery, but that now she felt "not that impressed by the status" that was to be gained through that experience. Susan also resisted the demands of the art marketplace. She said that she did not want to feel in any way that her creativity was restricted by:

what other people thought art was. ... If you start to sell your work, then there is pressure on you to do more work like that and not creatively evolve. And I always thought no, it is freedom [that is important]. There was something about freedom ... that was desirable to me and excites me, and as soon as I start feeling constraints, the excitement goes.

While all of the women continued throughout their careers to value external validation and public recognition, they also chose to liberate themselves somewhat from the evaluations of others through asserting very personal definitions of career "success." For example, Melanie said that over time her focus had changed from others' opinions of her work to "what do I think of what happened?" Marilyn also stressed that her sense of career success had become "really personal." She felt that she no longer needed to "have large applause coming from someone else out there." Similarly, Sarah stated that "all [success] is to me is just, am I ever going to be as good as I want to be, on absolutely my own terms." And Diana defined success quite idiosyncratically as "how I place myself in my ordinary world and then how would I place that on canvas?"

For many of the women, security in their own understanding of success was strongly related to their rejection of the obvious markers of career progress commonly accepted in the art world (e.g., a large number of solo shows, a high volume of sales, major critical attention, etc.). Marilyn said that, "I know that no matter what, I will continue doing what I do because that's my life and has nothing to do with whether or not it's acknowledged by the



powers that be." Elizabeth also indicated that she felt confident about her unique artistic career path: "I feel as though I was actually quite successful [in my career], but not perhaps in the usual sense, but in myself I feel that I was quite successful."

A pivotal issue that all of the women had to address at some point in their careers was, as Susan put it, "How do you balance making money and doing what you want?" As was discussed earlier, many of the women felt strongly that they wanted to receive at least some financial compensation for their artwork as a tangible indication of its value in the world. They typically felt pleased and validated when people paid to buy or see their work. That notwithstanding, in order for the women to truly embrace their sense of themselves as independent artists who honoured their own visions of success, they each had to confront the reality that they were unlikely to earn large incomes directly from their art. Furthermore, they had to learn to tolerate a high level of financial insecurity. Despite such economic challenges, in all cases the women decided that a sense of freedom was ultimately more important to them than money.

For example, Susan said that she realized early in her career that it was a sense of freedom, not money that "was getting me nearer my [career] goal." She stated that she consciously chose not to depend solely on sales of her art to make money because she did not want to be "constrained in what's possible" in terms of her artistic exploration. Her belief was that an artist cannot "combine freedom and the making of money." Similarly, Marilyn reported that:

I was never interested in status or the money part of [a career]. I loved the idea of having money, so I could do the things that I wanted to do, but I was never prepared to make the compromises that one is forced to make if that in fact is going to be a big goal in your life.

Like Marilyn, Melanie reported that she was very aware that there was a "trade-off for being a free-lance artist." However, there was no doubt in her mind that she had made the right choice. She pointed out that her experience as an artist had been that:

you get a lot of stress, you don't make a lot of money, you never know where it's coming from from one month to the next. I don't have much of an RRSP built up. I'm probably going to be a poor old bag lady when I grow up! But the trade-off is that ... I have a very free life.

Despite, or perhaps because of, whatever "trade-offs" the participants had made to pursue their careers, they all expressed some satisfaction about the choices they had made to date and optimism about their ability to make desirable choices in the future. For Sarah, it was liberating to realize that "life is choices and that there will be things that you don't do because you're writing and it's as well to face that." Similarly, Diana took satisfaction in realizing that all her major life choices, difficult though some of them may have been, had all been "in the direction of freedom." Upon reflection, Elizabeth also expressed contentment with her past career achievements, her present career status, and her future plans. When asked at age 65 where she saw herself going in terms of her career, she replied:

I'll probably just quietly go along as I have. I'm not super-ambitious and I don't politic and I don't run around entering all the shows I guess I should and [do] all the things you're supposed to do to become more in the forefront. It's probably because my life is so full as it is.

A number of the women reported that as they aged they felt increasingly in control of their lives. Melanie, for example, said that she finally felt "in charge" of her life. Clearly, this strong sense of self-determination had not come too soon: "I mean at 46 now, it's about

time!" Susan perceived that her sense of clarity about her life goals and her sense that she could achieve those goals had grown over the years. She said that at age 47 her career plans were to:

just do the things that I really want to do. ... I will try to get things on my terms a little bit more now than I would have been able to twenty years ago.

And that'll be the advantage of operating more at this stage of my life.

Marilyn also expressed assurance about her ability to create a future for herself that would be rich and rewarding. She felt that at 46 she too had reached a stage where she could successfully meet whatever career challenges came her way and reported that: "I feel confident that when I'm ready to [take the next step with my work], it'll all come together and that'll be fine." Such calm optimism characterized well the general attitude of all the participants towards their personal and professional futures.

A number of the women commented that as they reviewed their careers in the context of this study, they became aware of patterns in their lives that they had not recognized before. A frequent observation on the part of the participants was the non-linear nature of their career progress. As Carol noted, however, artists' careers only look non-linear in light of conventional criteria. In contrast, she viewed her career as following a very "straight forward path" characterized by a commitment to "creative expression." The same might also be said about the careers of the other participants. If the women's lives are framed in that way, then their strong sense of self-determination emerges as a vital thread in their lives that has served to connect their disparate experiences as artists. All of the women, whatever the differences in their personal stories, revealed themselves to be individuals of strong will who were deeply committed to the task of becoming who they felt they needed to be in the world.

## **Theme 8: Sense of being a pioneer**

### **Overview**

The sense of being a pioneer relates to the women's experiences of breaking from traditional familial, social, and gender roles in order to create unique life paths. This theme is closely associated with Theme 7: A sense of self-determination, but differs from that theme in that the sense of being a pioneer more particularly involved risk-taking behaviour and the seeking-out of new experiences in both the personal and professional realms. The feelings that most commonly attended the sense of being a pioneer were fear, excitement, and pride.

An important aspect of this theme involved the participants' positive experiences of their careers and their life paths as being non-linear and essentially unpredictable in nature. Not only did they demonstrate a high degree of tolerance for the ambiguous and unknown elements in life's journey, they also expressed through word and action the desire to explore the unfamiliar and unconventional aspects of life. Overall, the women welcomed living "life on the edge." One significant way in which they both nurtured and coped with that experience was to emphasize process in their lives, rather than outcome.

### **The lived experience**

On the whole, the participants showed a high degree of acceptance and enthusiasm for risk-taking and for inviting new experiences and challenges into their lives. As Alice said, "risk-taking is part of life." Some of the women also saw risk-taking and change as necessary for their creativity to flourish. For example, Susan said, "I think any change is creative and I think there are periods of your life without change that are detrimental to creativity." Sarah too emphasized the importance of risk-taking and change. She defined

success as an artist as meaning, in part, that she "had tried new things [and had] taken risks."

One obvious way in which the women demonstrated a pioneering spirit and a willingness to embrace change was by moving about geographically. Two of the participants, Alice and Susan, had moved to Canada from other countries. All but one of the women had at some point either lived in other countries or had travelled extensively. Living abroad or moving around the country served to introduce the women to new people and experiences which they felt ultimately contributed to their ability to produce meaningful art. As Alice summarized: "If I'd stayed in Topeka, Kansas my life would have been different. [Moving away] really was a major thing because it just let me try so many things. It was like opening this huge door."

For some of the women, moving was also connected to leaving behind what they perceived to be out-moded familial or social structures. For example, Susan considered that her art career really began when she left home at 18, when "risk-taking seemed easy." She later travelled to New York from London and "took to it like a duck to water." For her, New York provided an artistically rich and stimulating environment: "I just wanted to absorb everything that there was." Similarly, Marilyn said she moved from Winnipeg to Vancouver because: "I knew that I needed a major shift in my life ... [although] I didn't really know what that meant." That move for her was "pretty scary," not only because it took her to "brand new territory," but because she "had left behind a whole support system."

For other women in the study such as Carol and Sarah, a sense of pioneering was not as directly connected to making geographical changes (although some of the women did make such changes) as it was to making emotional and psychological changes in their lives. For example, a pivotal experience for Carol in her career and personal development was her

divorce from her first husband. Leaving the security of that marriage was a highly risky venture for her which tested her capacity to survive on her own financially and emotionally.

Sarah also talked about taking a significant risk in her life by choosing to "challenge" herself by changing her career focus from librarianship to writing. She reported that at the time she was considering becoming a writer, she asked herself, "well you're never going to know if you don't try. [Are you] going to whine away your whole life thinking, I wonder if I ever could have done that?" She said she finally made her career leap "really in the spirit of--to see if I can do this."

Another way in which some of the women exhibited pioneering behaviour was by being the first in their families to embark on an art career. Not only was it rare for the women to grow up in households in which their parents and siblings had some appreciation for the arts, but also only one of the women was from a family in which any close family members were practicing artists or members of the art community. Therefore, the women's choice to pursue art careers was a significant departure from the career norms of their families.

Furthermore, some of the women were pioneers within their artistic disciplines. Melanie, for example, left acting in midlife to establish herself as a storyteller, an unusual speciality even within the performing arts community. Elizabeth was also somewhat unique in her field by virtue of being one of only two female instructors at the Vancouver School of Art during the 1960's. Carol reported that she felt like a pioneer because she was trying to blend many disparate interests and talents in her career, including art and business, in a way that she had not seen anyone do before. And Alice and Susan became two of the few female Associate Deans at the art college where they both taught.

Some of the women commented that they were very aware that the assumption of such pioneering roles also involved a sense of responsibility. For example, Alice said:

I think of myself as an example for the next generation, even in the decision to become the Associate Dean. [I believe] more women should do these things or be given opportunities, so you break through those [barriers] by doing it yourself.

One of the more problematic aspects for the women of the experience of being a pioneer was their feeling of being deeply misunderstood in their attempts to create unique and original careers. Marilyn, for example, reported that she experienced jealousy from some of the people in her life who she felt saw her as irresponsible, rather than as creative in her lifestyle. Carol also talked about feeling "judged" by others for not conforming to traditional models of career success. She particularly resented that what she saw as her pioneering efforts were not rewarded monetarily:

For all artists I think that there's a big resentment towards the more creative you are, you're supposed to be giving this into society without any monetary gains. ... You're supposed to offer all this wonderful pioneering artistic beautiful stuff or creative ideas and solutions ... for free.

Susan also felt resentful that sometimes her pioneering efforts had gone unrecognized:

I have been accused twice that I can recall of being conventional, of not living on the edge, of making safe decisions [by male standards], really being a "Safetee" and from my perspective if I look around at other women, I haven't led that kind of life.

On the other hand, the sense of being a pioneer was also connected with positive feelings such as the women's satisfaction and pride in their own resourcefulness and creative

problem-solving abilities. For example, Susan talked about feeling proud that she was able to leave her home country of England to pursue her art career in North America:

"Uprooting oneself from one's country and barrelling off with no job contacts or anything else, to me is a risk and shows a certain amount of spunk." Susan, like a number of the other participants, felt strongly that an understanding of the experiences of women artists called for a redefinition of what risk-taking entails. The women sometimes felt that gender differences led to misperceptions about the nature of the risks taken by women artists. For example, Susan's view was that "not having a job is more dangerous [i.e., risky] to a creative male" whereas "having a job in a male world is more creative" and risky to a female.

An area in which many of the women demonstrated a particularly pioneering spirit was in their resourceful approach to career management and generating income. The women repeatedly showed that they were capable of surviving and thriving as independent artists through very creative means. For example, early in her career Carol entered beauty contests to raise money for her art studies. Later, she started her own company "because that was the easiest way to get employed." Marilyn also took delight in the fact that: "I talked my way into [Sheridan College]. I had no portfolio or ... a high school diploma for God's sake!" Later she started up a jewellery business as a way to bring in some money and also because it "gave me some little bit of autonomy in [an intimate] relationship where I didn't have very much." Likewise, Melanie worked at a variety of odd-jobs in theatre to get to know the business and later invented a job for herself as a storyteller. She said that she felt "impressed" with herself that she had accomplished something that she was "completely unprepared for." Elizabeth's comment seemed to sum up the women's experiences of



financial ingenuity: "That's one thing about artists, they usually can live quite well and very frugally and very happily."

The sense of being a pioneer was also strongly connected to the women's beliefs that they were following their own paths or dreams. Carol, for example, articulated this most clearly when she said that what was meaningful to her was "having a dream and then doing it:"

I've often felt like I'm a frontier person or a pioneer. ... I guess I'm struggling to be the pioneer and try and change things, but [I'm] also very frustrated because of how slow the change is and how little we've actually changed as women.

On the more positive side, the women's strong convictions that they were following their dreams allowed them to weather many career storms. As was revealed in Sarah's account of her career change, an attitude of optimism emerged quite consistently in the participants' stories of their lives. Although many of the women described encountering quite formidable obstacles along the way, they nonetheless tended, in general, to confront those obstacles with admirable energy and good humour and a spirit of adventure.

All the women indicated a high tolerance for non-linear career progression, that is, an openness to experience and the unfolding of their lives and an ultimate acceptance that their lives did not fit into what they saw as traditional career paths. For example, Elizabeth said: "An artist's or painter's life doesn't fit that model of going up the ladder very much at all." Correspondingly, a number of the women emphasized that the inherently unpredictable nature of an art career demanded from them a focus on the process of working, rather than on the outcome of their work. For example, Melanie commented on the challenge of confronting the uncertainty of art production. For her, to embrace the experience of working as an artist

also meant to embrace the idea of going into unknown territory with no clear sense of what the results of one's efforts might be:

My theory about [creative work as an artist] is that you're asking yourself to walk into the dark. You're supposed to go and sit down somewhere and do nothing until it comes to you, or do something until it comes to you. ... It's entirely a crap shoot. And maybe it will work and maybe it won't and maybe you'll spend four hours and get nothing and then you're going to have to go back and do it again and you don't know what you're supposed to do.

Overall, the women demonstrated a high tolerance for ambiguity and "not knowing" what would happen next in their work or in their lives in general. For example, Diana said that throughout her life she had avoided a traditional "career" in favour of an attitude of openness to experience: "I don't know ... what I'm going to do next. I guess I'll just go on working and see what happens." She related strongly to the myth of Persephone, particularly its connection to "the root level, the growth level, the circular regenerative level, you know things die and things come up, they die and so on. That's the only way that life really makes any sense to me is in the growth patterns." Marilyn echoed Diana's sentiments. In her view:

We've been brought up in a world that has some pretty defined work ethics about the way things are supposed to be and that there isn't room to play with that and I found out, that in fact, I'm capable of playing with that and adjusting it in a way that fits much better for me.

For Marilyn, this attitude also involved feelings of excitement at trying out new ways of working and creating new artistic projects and "not knowing where they're going to go."

The emphasis on the process of career, rather than the content, engendered in the women feelings of excitement and trust in the future and a strong future orientation. Here too the women's sense of being pioneers was evident. That is, the women were clearly attentive to, and motivated by, what the next challenge in their work would be. This was exemplified in Susan's comments about the ephemeral sense of completeness she would have upon finishing an artwork:

Almost simultaneously with that sense of completeness is already the feeling of incompleteness, which leads you to the next one. And that's ironic because they happen pretty well simultaneously, so people are always wanting to talk about what you're doing, but in fact, as the creator you're already onto the next one that you haven't done yet. But that's why being creative is being alive and what gives an edge to it.

A final way in which the women expressed the sense of being pioneers was through the metaphors they used to describe their lives as women and as artists. The women repeatedly used words in this context that denoted movement, investigation, and innovation. For example, Susan said that for her, "life is really one painting or one novel ... where you are going is more interesting than where you have been." Similarly, Marilyn saw life as a "journey" and "a real exploration for myself." The participants' collective attitude towards their careers is perhaps most aptly summarized in Carol's comment that being an artist "is really a lifelong learning experience--[it's] creative exploration."

### **Theme 9: Sense of harmony between self, art, and career**

#### **Overview**

This theme reflects some of the deepest feelings and convictions held by the participants about their careers. All of the women connected the choice of an art career to

their sense of identity and considered the production of artwork to be a manifestation of their core life values. Despite the myriad of internal and external obstacles the women had encountered over the course of their careers, a major factor that kept them on an artistic career path, or drew them back to it when they had drifted away, was the sense that to be an artist was the most direct expression of themselves as creative individuals in the world.

There are three main aspects to the sense of harmony between self, art, and career experienced by participants: (1) an art career enabled the women to experience a deep and satisfying sense of congruence between their sense of themselves and their work; (2) the production of art gave them a sense of meaning and purpose; and (3) the women experienced their lives as artists as a source of joy and pleasure.

### **The lived experience**

The first aspect of this theme--the congruence between self and work--involved the women's experience of their careers as being reflective of their very essence as creative individuals. All the women described in some way the centrality of art to their lives and their sense of their careers as artists as being vital to their expression of themselves in the world. Also, although they all had struggled to varying degrees to privately and publicly assume the identity of artist, those struggles did not negate the profound sense of "rightness" that the women so often experienced about their career choice.

For example, Marilyn described her work as giving her a sense of "grounding:" "My work as an artist ... [is] in tune with what my whole life is all about and ... it touches on everything I do ... how I see the world around me and how I express myself in my environment." For Marilyn, the term "artist" meant "being connected with your creative expression in the world. ... It means I can be who I really am." Similarly, Susan expressed the opinion that, "if you're being truly creative, you're really being authentic." And Melanie

said that her work as an artist "absolutely has to do with the expression of myself." Finding her artistic niche as a storyteller was for Melanie a profound experience of congruence of self and work:

Right from the first day [of storytelling], I have felt grounded and centred such as I had only experienced as an on-again, off-again phenomenon through all of [the previous] years--either breast-feeding my baby or being in love or being on stage [as an actor]. Here I felt centred all the time.

Both Diana and Sarah believed that an important function of their work was to bring personal "inner" parts of themselves into the outer world. Diana, for example, said that art "is the way I make the inside of myself outside ... it's the real Diana part of me that goes on the wall [through my paintings]." In the same vein, Sarah said that she liked the word "vocation" better than "career" as a term to denote her life as a writer because the former term felt "like it's coming more from the inside."

A few of the women associated the practice of their art with the maintenance of their mental and spiritual health. For example, Marilyn said that making art was: "Connected to my sanity ... and my sense of myself. ... [My art] is one aspect of who I am ... that is very much connected to the essence of who I am. ... [Working is] like going into your little shrine, the studio is the shrine." Likewise, Elizabeth stated that her art kept her "stable." Elizabeth's involvement with art was reflective of the deepest aspects of her self: "[Painting is] very spiritual and it's probably the closest thing that I can relate to as far as a deity or god. ... it has a very calming feeling over my life."

A second important aspect of this theme is the relationship that existed between the women's work and their sense of existential meaning-making. All of the women either implicitly or explicitly stated that their careers as artists provided them with a sense of

meaning and purpose in their lives. For example, Carol reported that "my art is my life." Elizabeth similarly stated that: "My art is my friend and it's my life. ... It's not to make a buck really. It's for me. And I don't know what I'd do if I wasn't involved in the arts in some way." Melanie also felt strongly that storytelling is "what I should be doing." And Sarah said that to imagine her life without her writing, "would feel like going through life in a fog or a cloud or not really touching things and not really engaging with the world. ... It would feel like a half-life or something."

The women's experience of their careers as having meaning and purpose had both personal and interpersonal dimensions. That is, the women experienced meaning because they believed their art and their lives as artists to be reflective of their innermost values, and also because they believed that their choice to make art had significance in the larger community.

On a personal level, many of the women saw their work as a way to explore the "personal mysteries" of their lives. Marilyn expressed this idea as follows: "I think I recognize more and more in my life that the role that my work plays for me in my life is so much connected with me [and] unravelling the mystery of life. ... [My art] gets me ... in touch with the essence of what my life is about." Similarly, Susan said that she used the "visual meta language" of her art to "make sense" of her life. Elizabeth also reported that she saw art as a way to "get to the truth." She described an important realization that she had had about the purpose of art in her life while watching a television interview with the mythologist Joseph Campbell:

I felt very linked in to what he was talking about. About mythology, religion, and so on, and how it affects your inner psyche and I think that art probably

does that to me. It's my way of expressing my inner feelings, my inner heaven.

A common way in which the women set about to explore personal meaning was to use their own experiences as the subject matter of their art. For example, Carol talked about how she had written "a lot of poetry" as a way to try to work through the devastating experience of a sexual assault. Likewise, Alice used her own image in a particular art project in order to explore, among other things, the experience of aging for women: "In that garden in Burlington I made a major female figure and I saw her as Earth Mother, the Nurturer, and I used my own face on that [piece] as an older woman."

Because the women perceived their careers as artists to be intrinsically meaningful, they were able to derive value from even the most difficult career-related experiences. For instance, Melanie was able to make sense of her recurrent struggles with self-doubt in the context of her personal process of growth as an artist. She described feeling "actively engaged" in the struggle to express herself artistically: "I still have the same demons to deal with [as earlier in my career], but I don't run away from them. I am engaged with my lack of self-confidence."

In addition to the fact that the women ascribed personal meaning to their careers, many of them expressed the strong conviction that their work as artists had worth in the greater society. One way in which many of the women saw their art (and art in general) as having value was that it gave "pleasure" to other people and added to the aesthetic richness of life. Another way was that the women felt they could express and reinforce important cultural values through their art. For example, Alice believed that it was essential to preserve the human values that are reflected in the type of handmade art that is the focus of her work:

I think if I didn't think it was somewhat useful, I would have trouble being an artist because that is pretty deep in me to be doing something that I think is useful. And I think that some of the qualities that I practice are things that are almost endangered and that includes the touching and making by hand. And so I picked those as values that I try to honour and uphold and maintain and pass on. ... I think we help [tell] the more affirmative side of the human story in making art.

Sarah also talked about the "ethical dimension" of her work. She said that for her, writing "speaks to something in me that's kind of idealistic. ... The one thing I know what I think about is the value of imagination in children. ... What I'm doing, I believe, is valuable." Likewise, Susan felt that her work had value beyond the personal. She felt that artists were important "conservators of values." For her, "preserving a single image is almost a historical act."

A third significant aspect of the sense of harmony between self, art, and career is that the participants experienced their careers as a rich source of satisfaction and pleasure. The women expressed this idea repeatedly and in a variety of ways during the interviews. For example, Elizabeth said that her involvement with art had "really enriched" her life and that when she was working she felt "really happy." Alice said that she "really liked" and "enjoyed" her work. Diana described her work as "being very satisfying" and added "what more can you ask for?" And Carol said that she was "really having a good time" as an artist: "I really like being creative. ... that's where I get my blast."

Marilyn too talked about having moments of "being overjoyed" when working. For her, however, making art was not only a source of pleasure, but also a solace and a refuge against feelings of confusion and dissatisfaction:



Sometimes when it seemed like nothing was really working or that there wasn't much clarity going on in my life, suddenly I would be with my creative work downstairs and suddenly I would sort of feel untouchable. It was like, God, how could I ever have felt like things were falling apart when life is so wonderful?

"Play" and "fun" were words that were used often in the women's descriptions of their experiences as artists. For example, Melanie said that "I really enjoy telling stories. ... That's the bottom line. It's a hell of a lot of fun to get up in front of people and do it." This attitude also held true for Alice who described her work as "a kind of play," and for Elizabeth who viewed her work as "both the work and play of making things in my studio and the work and play of teaching."

Sarah particularly emphasized how much fun she found writing to be:

The thing you do when you are a writer [and you get together with other writers], you talk about how it's all shit. But sometimes you get to know a person well enough that they let that guard down a little bit and they say something like, "isn't it fun?!" ... Society doesn't tell us that work is supposed to be that fun. ... I really do it because I love doing it. All this other stuff is great, awards and money and sense of identity and everything, but really "girls just want to have fun." ... And this is the best kind of fun I have yet discovered.

Sarah also characterized her work as a writer as so enjoyable that she did not "really even need holidays any more." For her, there had come to be "a very fuzzy line between work and play."

A common pleasurable experience for participants was their sense that when they were engaged in making art--in whatever form--they felt at one with the experience of their work. That is, they felt completely and happily absorbed in the task of creating art and that experience gave them a deep sense of satisfaction and meaning. For example, Marilyn recalled that even as a child she felt "really good" about herself when she was "making a picture ... it was like nothing else existed when I was doing that work. It was just a total total thing." Sarah felt that an important part of herself was "liberated by [the] concentrated activity" of creative work. She said that she experienced writing as "very freeing ... it's like the whole world just dissolves away at the edges. ... I flourish with work that's absorbing to all my life."

Similarly, Melanie stated that: "I seem to get the most meaning out of my life and feel the most satisfaction if I am engaged and have committed myself and thrown myself into something and given it all of what I've got." Melanie expressed a deep "passion" for her creative work. Indeed, she said that she would feel "slightly ill" if she was not performing. For her, being a performing artist:

means, on a very simple level, that I am satisfied, that I feel full, I feel content, I feel at home with myself and expansive. It makes me open to the world. And when [my desire to work is] not getting fulfilled or when I feel off-track with it in some moments, then it's a shrivelling inside me and it's physically uncomfortable and it puts a pall on life. It shadows everything.

For Melanie, as for the other women in the study, their careers as artists were not a thing apart from their "real" lives, but provided and reflected the very substance and form of their existence.

### "Career"

"Career" has been used throughout this document because it is the best term available that designates the integration of work with other important life roles (Herr & Cramer, 1988). It is noteworthy, however, that all of the women interviewed indicated some degree of discomfort with the term "career." At the same time, all of the women used the word at various times to describe their lives as artists. This may have been in part because the word "career" was used by the researcher. It may also have been because the women themselves found it to be the best choice of terminology under the circumstances.

When asked what "career" meant to them, the participants' were generally critical of the term for two reasons. First, they perceived it to have restrictive and exclusionary connotations that did not reflect their values or experiences as artists. For example, Diana objected to the word because she thought it meant "something which is set in stone and there's a way that I don't ever want to have to be so concrete about things." Similarly, Melanie said that to her, career "is a narrow thing. It's making a living." Because she had not always been paid for her work as an artist, she felt that she could be judged in the strictest sense to not have had a career at all. Carol also felt that her life as an artist did not fit the usual definitions of the term. She preferred to define "career" uniquely and personally as "lifelong learning."

Second, a number of the women saw the term "career" as referring to something "more exterior than internal" that also did not reflect their experiences. For instance, Marilyn said that to her "career" meant "something out there" that was connected to a focus on making money and receiving external appraisals of success. She felt that that "isn't how I see myself in the world now." Sarah also said she disliked the "hierarchical" and "exterior" nature of the term. She preferred to use "vocation" because "vocation feels more inner, like

it's coming more from inside, and career feels more like it's defined from outside." Alice too said she felt uncomfortable with the word "career," but could say "work" with ease. She defined her work as the "work and play of making things in my studio, and the work and play of teaching."

Elizabeth and Susan indicated the most comfort with the term, but like the other women, they too struggled to explain what "career" meant to them. Susan related her sense of career to a sense of identity: "It's something that is much bigger than a hobby, but it's something which defines your identity and what you put your time into pursuing." And to Elizabeth: "[Career is] part of your existence. It should bring in some money too."

The women's collective dissatisfaction with the term "career" reflected aspects of their experiences as artists that had emerged in the nine themes previously described. Indeed, strong echoes of some of the themes can be heard in the women's comments about the term, especially their sense of being outsiders to the mainstream of society; their sense of self-determination and resistance to external authority; and their strong sense of relationship between self, art, and career.

### **The Fundamental Structure**

While there were significant individual and cohort differences in the career histories of the eight women interviewed for this study, a fundamental structure or common story of the experience of becoming and being a woman artist did emerge. Like any story, this one has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning of the women's careers as artists can be seen in the creative exploration and identity struggles of their childhood and adolescent years. The middle can be seen in the career experimentation and the attendant challenges of their early adulthood. The end can be seen in the women's identity-consolidation and their

overall feeling of comfort with the unique career path that each of them had forged by midlife.

What follows is a description of the collective story of the career development of the women artists in this study. The nine themes previously described are woven into this narrative. Some of the key experiences and perceptions reflected in the themes arose for the women early in their lives and remained prominent as their careers progressed. Other thematic material arose and then subsided in importance at various times in the women's life cycles. None of the themes contained in the common story specifically preceded or followed others; as a general rule, they co-existed concurrently and were intricately interconnected. However, Themes 1 through 3 ("sense of being an outsider," "sense of validation through external recognition," and "sense of being obstructed") tended to emerge earlier chronologically than the other six ("sense of being torn between needs of self and others," "sense of connection and belonging through art," "sense of struggle to take on the identity of artist," "sense of self-determination," "sense of being a pioneer," and "sense of harmony between self, art, and career") which were more usually associated with the onset of the participants' adult development.

### **The Common Story**

The women felt the first stirrings of their artistic inclinations in childhood. In retrospect, none of the women considered themselves exceptionally talented or artistically prodigious as children, but they remembered experiencing joy and satisfaction in creative pursuits. The women's early interest in art, in whatever form, elicited mixed reactions from their families. All of the women grew up in families that were economically lower to upper middle-class. Only one included an artist in the immediate family circle.

On the positive side, some parents and other relatives showed interest in the young women's efforts and assisted them to explore their creativity by giving helpful advice or furnishing supplies or training. When the women's artwork was validated by parents or other family members, the women felt encouraged and good about themselves. They began to form dreams of an artistic career.

On the negative side, often the women's enthusiasm for art was not mirrored by significant others in their lives. Instead, some parents and other important figures ignored or were dismissive of the women's early creative efforts and their dreams of an artistic career. This lack of mirroring contributed to the women's earliest feelings that their creativity was not accepted or valued and their sense that they did not fit in with others. The sense of being an outsider--which was to become pervasive in the women's lives--began to take root. The sense of being an outsider was first reflected in the women's growing awareness that they were not conforming to familial or social norms and expectations, especially as these related to gender roles.

In response to the sense of being an outsider and in order to indulge their artistic interests uninterrupted, the women spent increasing amounts of time alone. Sometimes they experienced this solitude as lonely, other times as liberating because it afforded them the opportunity to focus on activities of their own choosing. By continuing to pursue art activities even when such activities were invalidated or actively obstructed by others, the young women began to assert their individuality. Over time, the women's desire for freedom and independence developed into a strong sense of self-determination about their careers and their lives in general.

As the women grew, they continued to take satisfaction from their creative pursuits. At the same time, their artistic inclinations contributed to feelings of alienation in relation to

their peers. They reported that they often felt different from others at school and in their communities. They tended to see themselves as "loners" and some of them had few childhood friends.

By late adolescence some of the women had begun to consider art as a career. However, in many cases the dream of becoming an artist contrasted sharply with familial and social expectations. Most commonly, the young women's dreams of pursuing an art career conflicted with the traditional dictum that they should devote themselves to marriage and motherhood. Even family members who had previously been supportive of the women's artistic interests, now expressed concern that an art career was inappropriate and impractical. Some of the women themselves doubted that an art career was a wise choice and began to consider more financially secure work. Others did not seriously consider art as a career option at all.

By this stage in their development, many of the women also had begun to seek out role models and mentors. Sadly, these were sorely lacking in most of the women's lives. In some cases, an interested teacher or relative, or even a famous artist personally unknown to the woman herself, served this function temporarily. Whether or not an individual's artistic pursuits were supported by such a figure, or whether or not a woman was able to find a role model with whom she could identify, strongly influenced her ability and willingness to choose art as a career. Without the vision and encouragement that role models and mentors could provide--particularly female role models--even the women who were determined from a young age to pursue an art career frequently felt at a loss as to how to translate their dreams of being an artist into reality. The women also struggled with doubts concerning their abilities as artists and their presumption in identifying themselves with an occupational group that they revered. Furthermore, the women's increasing awareness of the gender biases of

the established art community and of society in general compounded their sense of marginalization and their struggle to take on the identity of artist.

As the women gradually began to assume various social and biological roles such as intimate partner, wife, and mother, their experiences in these roles also contributed to their creative identity struggles. For example, in every case, the women felt torn to some degree between their own creative needs as artists and the needs of the significant others in their lives. This was especially true for the women in more traditional relationships and for those who were mothers. For some of the women, choosing to live alone or in lesbian relationships alleviated some of this role tension, however it did not eliminate it. The women's experiences of being torn indicated in part the high worth that they placed on relationships in their lives.

Another aspect of the women's valuing of relationships was their desire to connect with others through their art. None of the women saw themselves as working happily in permanent isolation. Although they each needed a certain amount of solitude in order to be creative and productive, they all experienced a sense of meaning and pleasure through sharing their artwork with an appreciative audience. Also, they enjoyed associating and working with other creative individuals, whether these were artists, art students, or interested people from completely different fields.

Upon review, it can be seen that by early adulthood the women had begun to divide themselves into three career groups corresponding to three distinct career paths. The first group chose art as a career and permanently adhered to that career choice. The second group initially chose an artistic career, then abandoned it, only to return to it later in their lives. The third group initially chose a career other than art and then later embraced an art career.



Two of the women in the study can be classified as belonging to the first group (Marilyn and Susan). These women stayed working in an art-related field throughout their lives. They entered art school soon after high school and quickly embarked on an art career. Their careers were marked by periods of creative identity struggle and self-doubt. They also both experienced some degree of resistance and criticism of their career choice from family members, intimate partners, friends, and acquaintances, and suffered significant inner conflict due to relationship and mothering responsibilities. Despite these challenges, they were not dissuaded from pursuing their chosen career path.

Four of the women in the study belonged to the second group (Elizabeth, Carol, Diana, and Melanie). These women originally chose an art career, but then gave it up at some point in favour of more traditional or practical work. The choice to change careers was made either because the women found that the challenge of earning a living through their art had become too great and/or they capitulated to familial and social pressures to choose a more "sensible" career. However, despite these women's efforts to develop and to sustain careers in nonart fields, ultimately they found that the pursuit of a more conventional career was not satisfying. All of the women in this group experienced alienation, frustration, and unhappiness in their jobs which led eventually to pivotal inner crises. After a period of painful self-reflection, each of these women recommitted herself to an art career. All of the women in this group had made that recommitment by midlife.

The third group in the study was composed of two women (Alice and Sarah). By early adulthood these women had put aside thoughts of an art career or had never seriously considered one. They chose instead to follow a more "practical" career route from the start. Like the second group, however, this group suffered a gradual but increasingly intense level of dissatisfaction with their nonart careers and a sense of being disconnected from their

creativity. Again like the second group, this group's commitment to an art career was precipitated by a career crisis and self-reflection, and finally a sense of inner resolution that led to a commitment to an art career. Like the women in the second group, both women in this third group had made the choice to pursue art as a career by the time they had reached midlife.

At whatever point the women chose to seriously embark on their art careers, positive and negative feelings about that choice surfaced. Furthermore, although the women all ultimately felt deeply satisfied with their careers as artists, ambivalent feelings about their careers sometimes persisted until late in the women's lives.

Sometimes the women's ambivalent feelings were prompted by practical concerns. For example, financial hardship was the norm for all three groups of women, especially when they were starting out in their art careers. None of the women were always able to earn their living from the sale or performance of their works. In order to increase their income, the women most often chose to earn money through activities closely related to their creative work such as teaching art or music, or working in a field such as graphic design. Not only did these related activities provide a source of much needed funds, they also provided a socially acceptable way for the women to pursue their art interests and to share their enthusiasm for art with others.

At other times, the women's ambivalent feelings had less tangible sources. All of the women were engaged in long-term struggles to consolidate their creative identity. This struggle was characterized in great part by the women's lingering doubts about their legitimacy as artists. At various times, all of the women feared that they did not possess the appropriate talents or credentials, or in other ways had not met the requisite criteria to validate their claim to the title of "artist" (or, in Sarah's case, to the title of "writer"). They

also contended with internal and external admonitions about the apparent gender-inappropriateness of their career choice. In order to resolve this identity-conflict, the women typically had to consciously redefine the term "artist" for themselves.

While the women's career development involved struggles on many fronts, certain characteristics and attitudes served to help the women survive and flourish in their careers. First was their sense of determination to live life on their own terms. All of the women highly valued independence and freedom of choice and were generally willing to make whatever social and economic sacrifices that were necessary to maintain a sense of freedom in their lives. Second was the sense of themselves as pioneers. They took pride in being unconventional and of being the first in their families or their peer groups to have certain experiences or achieve particular career goals. The women also showed themselves to be highly resourceful, especially in regards to finding employment and surviving financially. They demonstrated a remarkable resilience and an ability to wait and to confront whatever obstacles were put in their path, both practical and emotional. The women were noteworthy too for their high degree of tolerance for ambiguity and change, and their collective attitude of openness to experience.

Finally, the women's sense of their careers as expressions of their deepest selves allowed them to weather many struggles and hardships. The experiences of joy and wholeness that came with their involvement in art were powerful and substantial. For some of the women, the sense of meaning and purpose that they derived from their careers and from making art was akin to a spiritual experience.

By midlife all the women had placed themselves firmly on an artistic path and were generally secure in their identities as artists. They also expressed optimism overall about

their personal and professional futures and confidence in their abilities to manage the vagaries of an artistic life.

Because the nature of "becoming" and "being" an artist is ongoing, what is conceptualized here as the "end" of the story does not imply a finite end to the women's career experiences. Their careers are a process not a product. In the words of one of the participants, for artists "real life is in the act."

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

### Summary of Purpose and Results

This research study investigated the meaning and experience of career as it is lived by women artists. Eight women artists over age 40 were interviewed about their experiences of career over their life span. The interviews and the analysis of the interview content were conducted according to the tenets of phenomenological inquiry, particularly as set forth by Colaizzi (1978). The analysis of the commonalities in the participants' experiences over their life course was also informed by the principles of narrative research, particularly as set forth by Cochran and Claspell (1987) and Cochran (1990).

An analysis of the interview data resulted in the identification of nine themes and a fundamental structure--or common story--of the participants' experiences of career. The nine themes are: (1) Sense of being an outsider; (2) Sense of validation through external recognition; (3) Sense of being obstructed; (4) Sense of being torn between the needs of self and others; (5) Sense of connection and belonging through art; (6) Sense of struggle to assume the identity of artist; (7) Sense of self-determination; (8) Sense of being a pioneer; and (9) Sense of harmony between self, art, and career. The common story is a synthesis of the participants' collective experiences of career: that is, their experiences of becoming and being artists over the course of their lives. In addition, commonalities in the participants' definitions of the term "career" were identified.

In order for the significance of these results to be assessed, this chapter includes an interpretation of the results in light of previous literature pertaining to the career development of women artists and women in general. This is followed by sections detailing: the implications of the results for future research, counselling, and theory; the recommendations that follow from those implications; and the importance of story.

### **Interpretation of Results**

This study may be unique among studies focused on women artists due to its phenomenological methodology. As a consequence, its results can be compared only in a general sense to previous research results in the field, most of which emerged from quantitative studies. Also, this study was not theory-driven and was not designed to test the validity of any particular theoretical perspective. These qualifiers notwithstanding, an examination of the results reveals that the findings of this study are compatible with much of the previous research and theory on the career and identity development of women artists (and to a lesser degree, of women and artists in general). Some of the issues that were revealed in the analysis of the themes and the common story already have been addressed in the psychological and educational literature. Some have not, however, and in those areas, the findings of this study add significantly to our current knowledge-base about women artists' lives.

The following interpretation focuses on how the results of this study relate to and expand upon what is known so far about women artists' experiences of career. The two areas of established theory and research that are most relevant in this context are: the relatively small body of literature about women artists' career development, and the larger body of literature about women's career development. References to other related literature are included as appropriate.

#### **Women Artists' Career Development**

As indicated in Chapter II, there is only a small amount of theory and research that addresses women artists' career development. Much of the literature that does exist in this area has not focused specifically on women artists, but has been based on studies of the career-related behaviour of gifted, talented, and creative individuals in general. Also, only a

few of the published studies that have focused on women artists and their career experiences have used qualitative methodology (e.g., Bepko & Krestan, 1993; Kerr, 1985; Sang, 1989); none have taken a phenomenological approach. Little is known, therefore, about women artists' distinctive or subjective experiences of career. Nevertheless, several interrelated internal and external variables which may uniquely affect women artists' career development have already been identified by various writers and researchers (e.g., Bateson, 1989; Donaldson, 1984; Kerr, 1985; Sang, 1989; Stohs, 1991, 1992). The most salient of the identified internal variables are: the relationship between creative and personal identity development; feelings of illegitimacy and self-doubt; feelings of guilt and conflict about nonart commitments (especially relationship commitments); feelings of isolation and marginalization; lack of role models; and the importance of work as a means of self-expression and pleasure. The most salient of the external variables are: lack of social support for career choice; gender role socialization; sex discrimination; and limited occupational opportunities in the workplace.

The results of this study suggest that all of these previously identified variables played a role to some degree in the participants' experiences of career. However, the results also indicate that some of these variables played a greater or lesser part in the participants' experiences than might have been expected based on a review of earlier research.

### **Internal Variables**

Most of the internal variables uniquely affecting women artists' career development are directly or indirectly connected to women's creative identity development (i.e., their identity development as artists) and especially to their struggles to claim the designation of artist. As Rodenstein, Pfleger, and Colangelo (1977), Sanborn (1979), and Sang (1989) have all hypothesized, the development of women artists' creative identity is closely aligned with

the development of their personal identity. According to this perspective, women artists experience their work and their roles as artists to be intrinsically connected to their other life activities and roles. These theorists and others have also proposed that for artists, occupational choice is closely related to life style choice; that artists tend to express their life style values (e.g., nonconformity, freedom of movement) in both personal and professional realms; and that artists typically use their work as a major means of self-expression (Herr & Watanabe, 1979; Hoyt & Hebler, 1974; Levine, 1989; Rodenstein et al., 1977; Sanborn, 1979; Sang, 1989).

The results of this study similarly suggest that a strong relationship exists between women artists' creative and personal identity development. The participants explicitly discussed the connections among the various roles in their lives (e.g., artist, teacher, and mother) and the fluidity with which they often moved between those roles. Overall, the participants experienced the close alignment of their creative and personal identities as meaningful and pleasurable. For example, the women expressed satisfaction in bringing an artistic sensibility to bear in all areas of their lives. Some of the women talked about seeing the creation of art and their role as artists as integral to their experience of all aspects of their lives, including the "creative" process of mothering. They also enjoyed the "fuzzy line" that existed for them between work and play. It was clearly important for these women to achieve a sense of harmony between the various aspects of their lives, and to feel that they were able to express themselves creatively and meaningfully as artists in the world through both work and nonwork activities.

The results also indicate that the strong relationship between the participants' creative and personal identities sometimes had problematic aspects that contributed to their struggles to consolidate their identities as artists and to pursue their careers. Many of the factors that



influenced participants' struggles in these areas correspond to factors identified in previous theory and research that has addressed the impact of multiple role conflict on talented women's creativity (e.g., Bepko & Krestan, 1993; Kerr, 1985; Rodenstein et al., 1977; Sanborn, 1979; Sang, 1989).

For example, Sang (1989) observed that a major internal barrier to women artists' career development is their inability to take themselves and their career choice seriously. As a consequence, women artists commonly have difficulty in arranging time for their creative work, especially in the face of personal and family pressures. Similarly, the participants of this study reported that they struggled with feelings of illegitimacy and guilt when they chose to give primacy to their creative work. Furthermore, this struggle was manifested for participants (as it was for the participants in Sang's study) most particularly in regards to arranging time and solitude in order to do their artwork. Even though the women considered a certain amount of uninterrupted time alone to be a necessity for creative work, they found it hard to claim such time if doing so meant that they would be taking attention and energy away from significant others. Time alone was also often difficult for them to arrange logistically because of demands from others and multiple role commitments.

A number of researchers (e.g., Bateson, 1989; Donaldson, 1984; Foley in Piirto, 1991; Sang, 1989) have commented on the special difficulties and stresses that talented women experience when they attempt to juggle multiple commitments with their personal creative needs. Likewise, all of the participants in this study reported feeling torn between the needs of self and others as they tried to meet their many personal and work responsibilities. As one of the women reported, she felt guilty if she put herself first and resentful if she put herself last. The mothers in the group found the task of balancing their mothering responsibilities with the emotional and practical demands of their own artwork to

be especially challenging. The extraordinary lengths to which some of the women in the study went in order to maintain their art careers and also raise their children (often as single parents) bring to mind Donaldson's (1984) observations that the quest for artistic freedom for women who are mothers is "always epic--sometimes triumphantly so, sometimes tragically, but always heroically" (p. 234).

Of course, the experiences of role conflict and role strain, and such attendant feelings as guilt and resentment, are certainly not restricted to women artists. At the same time, the results of this study suggest that women artists may experience conflict about the role of work in their lives in a somewhat unique way because unlike other women, they often must confront their own and others' judgements about the inappropriateness of their career choice. For example, some of the participants said that even when they felt creatively fulfilled and personally successful as artists, they also felt guilty because they perceived the nonconformity of their lifestyles to be emotionally and financially hard on their children. Similarly, some of the women reported that they often received mixed messages from others about their artistic pursuits which engendered feelings of anger, guilt, and self-doubt about their choice to be artists. For example, sometimes the women would receive praise from others for their creativity and also criticism for choosing a career that was seen to be impractical and self-indulgent, especially for a woman with children. Women who have chosen more gender-traditional careers may not be as vulnerable to this particular type of internal and external judgement.

Some researchers (e.g., Bepko & Krestan, 1993; Kerr, 1985) also identified self-doubt about their talents as a major impediment to creative women's career and identity development. Bepko and Krestan, for example, reported that "the theme of having too little talent and fear of not being good enough" (p. 113) emerged as significant in their study of

women and creativity. According to these researchers, many creative women have "energy that goes unexpressed" (p. 112) because they are blocked by their fear of being insufficiently talented. Similarly, all of the women in this study reported that feelings of self-doubt about whether or not they had the requisite skills and talents to succeed in their chosen fields, or even to justify calling themselves artists, interfered with the commitment and energy that they directed towards their art careers.

The women's doubts about the legitimacy of their choice of an art career and their ability to "qualify" as artists may also have been negatively influenced by traditional and restrictive associations to the term "artist." According to Battersby (1989), McCaughey (1985), and Wyszomirski (1985), "artist" as it is typically used and understood in our culture has androcentric connotations that necessarily exclude women. For example, artists have commonly been thought of as solitary male geniuses, heroes, and outsiders. Also, women have traditionally been underrepresented as creative artists and have had secondary status in the arts. Furthermore, creativity has historically been seen as incompatible with procreativity.

The experiences of the participants in this study confirm in a number of ways the relevance of such issues to an understanding of women artists' careers. First of all, several of the participants commented specifically on how they had hesitated to identify themselves as artists because they believed artists to be, as one woman said, "way up there." Many of them found it easier initially to identify themselves with their artistic speciality or with an associated role such as art teacher because those identifications seemed to them both more precise and less presumptuous than to equate themselves with such a rarefied group as "real artists." Also, some of the women said they had to overcome their association of the concept

of artist with men and "male tough guys" before they could see themselves as having a legitimate role as a female creator of art and as fully deserving of the title of artist.

Second, many of the participants in this study reported that they had initially felt limited by their own and others' perceptions (which they had internalized) of an artist being a "single-minded," isolated, (and certainly childless) loner. This finding is somewhat paradoxical because the women also reported that they themselves frequently felt isolated, alienated, and marginalized in many areas of their lives. It is consistent, however, with the findings of previous researchers (e.g., Baker, 1973; Kerr, 1986) who observed that women artists often feel marginalized socially and economically both inside and outside of the established art world. As a result, they often must persist in their work in a unique kind of social and emotional isolation (Baker, 1973).

For the participants in this study, the sense of themselves as outsiders--and also as pioneers--was pivotal in their career and creative identity development. For one thing, their experiences of feeling "different" from others coupled with the high value that they placed on risk-taking and freedom, contributed greatly to their choice of an occupation (and sometimes an artistic specialty) which is non-traditional for women and socially marginal. At the same time, such experiences generated inner conflict for the women about their sense of personal and professional "belonging." On the one hand, they felt proud of their status as outsiders and as pioneers. On the other hand, they wanted to fit in and feel part of a community.

Without minimizing the impact of these particular experiences on the participants' career development, it is again important to note that such experiences may not be completely unique to artists. Any individual--female or male--who chooses to step into a non-traditional career field or unexplored personal territory might feel at times like an outsider or a pioneer.

A third factor that may affect women artists' career and identity development is the long-standing bias of the art establishment in favour of art subjects that reflect stereotypically male experiences (e.g., war) and artistic mediums that have historically been the preserve of male artists (e.g., painting). Subjects that reflect female experiences (e.g., childbirth) and mediums that have been the historic preserve of women (e.g., weaving) have traditionally been devalued in the art world and considered to be of minor importance (Battersby, 1989; Donaldson, 1984; Wyszomirski, 1985). Experiences such as childrearing and domestic activities have also conventionally been judged by teachers, directors, critics, and other authorities in the art world as distracting to an artist's creative development (Wyszomirski, 1985). For the participants in this study, the process of creative identity development often involved their decision to claim distinctly female life experiences as legitimate subject matter for their art, and to view such experiences as enhancing rather than detrimental to their creativity and to their lives as artists. This finding can be likened to those of Donaldson (1984) in her study of the effects of pregnancy on women artists' artwork. Donaldson found that instead of dividing art from life, pregnancy and motherhood broadened women's artistic vision and their sense of themselves as creators in the largest sense of the word.

Furthermore, despite their sense of themselves as outsiders and pioneers, the women in this study strongly resisted the idea that being an artist meant accepting a "single-minded" approach to life and to work which devalued the role and the importance of relationships with others. They wished to feel deeply committed to their work and to have the opportunity to be intensely focused on their work for periods of time--to be able to act with what Donaldson (1984) referred to as a "singular determinedness"--but they did not want their work to be the only important component of their lives. As was discussed earlier, a major issue in the career and identity development of these women was their struggle to integrate

their commitment to relationships with their need to attend to their individual creative projects. All of the participants stated that they wanted to experience a balance in their lives between solitude and relationships, and between independence and interdependence. Indeed, the cultivation of such a balance, or what Arnheim (1990) described as "a particular blend of involvement and detachment" (p. 1) from others, may be a necessity for artists in order for them "to fulfill their vocation of showing others what the world and life are like" (p. 1).

The value that the participants placed on integrating relationships into their lives as artists was also manifested in their need and desire to share their work with others (e.g., audience members, students, and other artists), and the special satisfaction and creative stimulation they experienced in working with other women artists. Similarly, Kerr (1986), Levine (1989), and Schuster (1990) all observed that gifted and talented women take meaning, support, nurturance, and pleasure from interactions with others about their work. Schuster particularly stressed the important role of relationships in the context of work. She found that "interactive communication" stood out as the most salient characteristic contributing to meaning and value in the work lives of the gifted and talented women that she studied. Furthermore, as Arnheim (1990) noted, artists in general like to share their work not only so that they may feel appreciated, but also because they may become "so fully inspired by the benefits of artistic activity [that they feel] impelled" (p. 1) to make this experience available to others.

The desire to share their work and their art expertise appeared to be at least part of the motivation for the women in this study who chose to pursue art education as well as art making. In every case, the decision to teach was partially a practical one: teaching allowed the women to stay in their career field and have an income. However, the women all stressed that they felt satisfied and rewarded with teaching and mentoring activities. As Kerr

(1986) suggested, sharing work with others or working alongside others may be important for exceptionally creative and talented women because it enhances their sense of connection to other similar women and may mitigate the isolation that they often experience.

It is also interesting to note that all of the participants talked about the joy of sharing their art and their passion for creativity and emphasized that they saw all people as potentially creative. They described themselves as individuals who had simply chosen to put energy towards developing that aspect of their personalities. While it may be true that everyone is naturally creative, that particular conviction on the part of the participants is noteworthy for its self-effacing nature. One can only wonder whether or not the urge to characterize themselves as "not special" in terms of their talents is representative of other women or men who have achieved success in a non-traditional realm. This finding is reminiscent of research done on gifted women's attributions of success that has suggested that women often attribute career success to sources outside of their abilities such as chance or luck (Callahan, Cunningham, & Plucker, 1994).

As the results show, the relationships among the participants' needs for independence, solitude, and internal validation, and their needs for dependence, relationships, and external validation are quite complex. Unfortunately, little has been written in the literature pertaining to women artists' careers that explores such relationships in any depth. Levine (1989) briefly explored the relevance of Winnicott's (1965, 1971) theories about the importance of the relational context of human development and creativity to artists' desire to share the products and the process of their work, but other theorists have not followed up on these or related ideas. Consequently, the impact of these often conflicting needs on women artists' career development is not yet well understood.

The highly subjective nature of career progress and success in the arts is also a factor that has been found in other studies to affect women artists' experience of career. A number of writers (e.g., Bepko & Krestan, 1993; Chicago, 1977; deKooning, 1973; Sang, 1989) have observed that success for artists is not necessarily associated with upward mobility and financial gain as it may be in more conventional occupations. In contrast, success as an artist may be evaluated according to highly personal and subjective criteria that may not be accepted by any definable social institutions or external standards.

Correspondingly, all of the women in this study ultimately rejected--at least to some degree and often after much inner struggle--traditional external criteria of career success in favour of more personal and individual criteria. However, the women's rejection of extrinsic rewards such as monetary and public recognition was never total. The results indicate that the participants' attitudes towards different forms of external validation (especially money) were often complicated, full of ambivalence, and for some of them, never entirely resolved. These findings parallel those of Bepko and Krestan (1993) who observed that the presence or absence of traditional forms of external validation can play a key role in influencing women artists' career commitment and satisfaction. According to these researchers, any woman who is serious about being an artist "needs to take responsibility for figuring out how important achievement is to her and what role ambition and money play in her life scheme" (p. 114).

An important variable that contributed to participants' struggles to consolidate their creative identities and to define career success for themselves was the lack of appropriate role models and mentors. Here again, the findings of this study echo those of previous research. For example, Walker et al. (1992) observed that the careers of gifted and talented women have been found to be significantly affected by the lack of role models and mentoring in their environments. Likewise, the participants in this study discussed at length and in a



variety of contexts the negative impact of the paucity of role models and--to a lesser degree, of mentors--in their lives. Most particularly, the lack of role models and mentors exacerbated participants' sense of being outsiders and their sense of struggle to take on the identity of artist.

Another variable that has been shown to play a major part in women artists' career development is the sense of meaning that women artists (and perhaps all artists) find in their involvement with their work (i.e., their art making) and their careers as a whole (Levine, 1989; Sanborn, 1979). Indeed, Arnheim (1990) defined artists as "persons who live essentially with their work" and who have a "passionate involvement" with it (p. 1). Similarly, the women in this study talked about the profound sense of meaning and purpose that they experienced through their careers. A major part of this experience of meaning had to do with the intense nature of the women's involvement with their creative work.

The experiences described by participants of total involvement and satisfaction with the process of art making fit with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) theory of optimal experience based on the concept of "flow" which he defined as "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it" (p. 4). According to Csikszentmihalyi, meaning-making is closely related both to a sense of flow and a sense of purpose:

Creating meaning involves bringing order to the contents of the mind by integrating one's actions into a unified flow experience. ... People who find their lives meaningful usually have a goal that is challenging enough to take up all their energies, a goal that can give significance to their lives. We may refer to this process as achieving purpose. (p. 216)

Viewed from the perspective of Csikszentmihalyi's theory, it may be that the participants in this study found their careers as artists to be so very meaningful and purposeful because they were able to experience their work as an experience of flow.

The relationship of a sense of meaning and pleasure through work to women artists' career development is an area that has only been touched on in the literature. However, the fact that the participants in this study took such a great degree of pleasure from the creation of art and from their lives as artists suggests that to date the significance of this aspect of women artists' experiences may not have been fully recognized and explored.

Also, the participants repeatedly referred to their work as joyful and fun. In fact, not only did many of the women consider there to be a "fuzzy" boundary between work and play, they also expressed that work and play were often the same to them. Indeed, the ways participants described their careers are consistent with the ways in which leisure experiences have sometimes been described. For example, Tinsley, Hinson, Tinsley, and Holt (1993) found that "work" was most frequently described as "providing extrinsic rewards, accomplishment, learning, and altruism" (p. 447). In contrast, "leisure" was commonly characterized as "providing enjoyment (i.e., intrinsic satisfaction), companionship, novelty, relaxation, aesthetic appreciation, and intimacy" (p. 447). These latter characteristics are ones that participants might easily have used to describe the benefits they derive from their creative work. Tinsley et al. theorized that work and leisure experiences are "neither psychologically interchangeable nor orthogonal" (p. 454). The results of this study suggest that while work and leisure may not be identical for women artists, there may be a particularly close relationship between their understandings of these two experiences. This is a relevant point especially because the positive effects of leisure activities have been found to

include better mental and physical health, life satisfaction, and personal psychological growth (Tinsley & Tinsley, 1986, 1988).

### **External variables**

Previous researchers have also found various interpersonal obstacles and sociocultural barriers to be significant problems affecting the lives of gifted and talented women (e.g., Garrison, Stronge, & Smith, 1986; Kerr, 1985; Noble, 1987, 1989; Sang, 1989). Examples of these are: lack of social support for career choice, gender role socialization, sexism, and limited occupational opportunities in the workplace. What are briefly described below are the particular ways in which such external variables influenced the careers of the women in this study.

The results of this and other studies have indicated that a lack of social support for the choice of an art career is a major barrier that may affect the lives of many women artists. For example, whereas many working women may experience a lack of support for devoting their energies to a career or for choosing a career that is non-traditional for women, research has found that artists may be criticized because their career choice is seen to be self-indulgent and frivolous. Kaplan (1990), for example, noted that in a private-enterprise system the arts are considered to be a "nonproductive activity" and therefore of less value than other forms of work. A career in art may be considered by some to be especially inappropriate for women because women are traditionally expected to put others' needs (including creative needs) before their own. For instance, a woman artist (especially one who is also a mother) may be criticized not only for having a career at all, but particularly for having a career that is seen to be self-indulgent as well as economically precarious. Also, as Kerr (1986) stated, creative women are often given double messages about their abilities. On the one hand, they are encouraged to make the most of their talents. On the other hand, they may be told that a

career such as art is an inappropriate career choice. The women in this study struggled with these same issues and their experiences in this regard contributed to their sense of being torn, as well as to their sense of alienation from significant others in their lives and from society in general.

Some researchers (e.g., Hollinger in Smith & Leduc, 1992; Post-Kamer & Perrone, 1983) have also observed that gifted and talented individuals are often pressured by others to fulfill their potential. Interestingly, this did not appear to be the case for the participants in this study. Rather, many of the women experienced a notable absence of encouragement--as well as active discouragement--for any career aspirations, especially from their parents. Such experiences contributed to the women's sense of themselves as outsiders and to their experience of being obstructed in their personal and career development.

Another major obstacle to women artists' career development is the lack of opportunities in the workplace. For women artists, the lack of work opportunities is due partly to the structure of the artistic workplace itself which provides few opportunities for ongoing employment for any artists, female or male, and partly to pervasive sex discrimination in the arts. A number of writers and researchers (e.g., Chicago, 1977; McCaughey, 1985; Sang, 1978; Wyszomirski, 1985) have commented on the prevalence of sexist attitudes and behaviours in the art world and how these serve to block women artists' full participation in that milieu by restricting opportunities for training, employment, recognition, and financial compensation. Likewise, the results of this study suggest that the careers of the participants were seriously affected by such sociocultural barriers. Some of the ways in which the women in this study experienced sex discrimination in the arts were: lack of recognition for their work, difficulty in obtaining exhibitions and employment, sexual harassment, and sexual assault.

One emotional consequence of the lack of opportunities for the women in this study was that they often felt deeply discouraged and questioned their choice of career. One practical consequence was that the women as a rule had relatively low incomes and commonly experienced periods of severe financial instability in their lives. Also, many of the participants found the difficulties they encountered in the art world to be particularly disappointing and disheartening because they had expected that that environment would be more tolerant of differences and more welcoming of social change than the "outside world."

The response of the participants to the lack of job opportunities was not entirely negative, however. Although they sometimes lamented the lack of work or income opportunities, ultimately the lack of such opportunities did not prevent them from pursuing an art career. The women sought out what art-related work that they could in order to supplement their art incomes. This usually took the form of teaching. As a group, they appeared to be reconciled to the fact that the major rewards that they would derive from their careers would not be financial. Clearly, the "impracticality" of their careers was not paramount in their choice to pursue art.

### **Women's Career Development**

Many of the experiences and issues that emerged as significant for the participants in the results of this study are analogous to those that have been described in the major theories and models of women's career development (particularly those of Astin, 1984; Gottfredson, 1981; and Hackett & Betz, 1981). For example, a number of theorists and researchers in the field have discussed different internal and external variables that can influence women's careers. Some of the main identified internal variables are self-concept (Gottfredson), self-efficacy expectations (Hackett & Betz), and personal motivations and expectations (Astin). Some of the main identified external variables are gender role socialization (Astin, Hackett &

Betz) and the "structure of opportunity" (i.e., environmental factors) (Astin). The content of the themes and the common story in this study show that the internal and external variables that influenced the career progress of the participants were similar on the whole to those previously identified. That notwithstanding, the particular variables (and the interactions between them) that have been explored in the major theories thus far do not appear to account for all important aspects of women artists' career experiences.

### **Internal Variables**

The theories formulated by theorists such as Gottfredson (1981), Hackett and Betz (1981), and Astin (1984) all help to explain the impact of the internal variables affecting career development that were discussed by the participants. For example, consistent with Gottfredson's theory about the role of the self-concept in occupational aspirations, self-concept was found to be a major factor in the participants' experiences of career. This was particularly evidenced in the women's comments about their sense of being outsiders and pioneers, their sense of being torn between different life roles (e.g., between their self-images as artists and mothers), and their struggles to assume their creative identity. The concept of "job-self compatibility" described by Gottfredson is particularly salient to an understanding of the research results given the participants' high degree of overall career satisfaction and the sense of harmony between self, art, and career that they described. All of the artists in the study who had at some point pursued other occupations reported experiences of "job-self incompatibility" when they were not following an artistic career path. Their sense of discomfort with that incompatibility led them to reassess and redirect their career choices.

Gottfredson's (1981) theory, as well as Super's (1990) related and more comprehensive theory of career development, also help explain the linkages between the

participants' self-concepts, their choice of an art career, and their different personal and professional roles. For example, the fact that many of the women chose to become role models and mentors for other women considering an art career is compatible with both Gottfredson's and Super's assertions that individuals choose to assume career-related roles consistent with their self-concept. In this case, the women demonstrated that they valued the image of themselves as nurturers and helpers (images which were undoubtedly influenced in part by gender socialization). Also, the participants reported that one advantage of the unstructured nature of an art career was that it allowed them simultaneously to play various roles important to their self-concept (e.g., artist, teacher, worker, mother, and intimate partner). As Super pointed out, an individual's various life roles interact and the addition of any new role may supplement or conflict with existing roles. Because an art career is by nature quite flexible, it may more easily permit a synthesis of a woman's many life roles than would a more conventional career.

The results of this study are also similar to some of Hackett and Betz's (1981) findings about the influence of cognitive factors such as self-efficacy on career-related behaviours in women. Consistent with Hackett and Betz's perspective, the participants articulated strong internal inhibitions that they felt had restricted their career options at various points in their lives. For example, many of the women discussed how their sense of being obstructed by others and their sense of being outsiders to their families, their peers, and even their gender resulted in feelings of insecurity and illegitimacy about their skills and their career goals. Feelings of guilt and the sense of being torn between multiple desires and responsibilities also contributed to low self-efficacy expectations for the women, especially in the early years of their careers. However, it is notable that even while the participants struggled with feelings of low career self-efficacy, they were also strongly influenced by

other factors such as their valuing of change and risk-taking behaviour. Many of the women described situations in which they had felt afraid that they would fail at a task or a goal, but pushed themselves to try it anyway. As one woman said, she chose to become an artist "really in the spirit of--to see if I can do this." The women's determination to feel in charge of their lives, to challenge themselves, and to "pioneer" into new career or creative territory may help explain why they did not allow their inhibitions and self-doubt to permanently change their career focus.

Another factor which strongly influenced the participants' career development was the lack of appropriate career-related role models. Hackett and Betz (1981) stressed the importance of vicarious learning through observation to an individual's expectations of personal and career efficacy. As was discussed earlier, the women in this study felt they had few professional role models available to them. Consequently, they had few opportunities for vicarious learning about the nature of women artists' careers.

Aspects of Astin's (1984) sociopsychological model of career choice are also relevant to an understanding of the results of this study. A number of the internal variables that participants identified as playing a part in their career development are comparable to those described by Astin, although others fit less well into Astin's theory. For example, Astin hypothesized that work behaviour is intended to satisfy three basic needs: survival, pleasure, and contribution. In reference to the first of these needs, the women in this study rarely associated an art career--or at least their work as producing artists--with meeting their survival requirements. To the contrary, in most cases the women struggled to free themselves from the necessity of earning a living based on their artwork alone. They typically chose to work for pay in related areas to supplement their art income (e.g., art education). The women's ambivalence towards using their art careers as sources of financial



security emerged strongly in regards to: their desire for validation through external recognition (some of the women felt it was important to be financially compensated for their work even if they did not depend--or did not want to depend--on their art for their living); their sense of being torn between their personal needs and values and the needs and values of others (such as those of the commercial art world); and their sense of self-determination (none of the women were willing to compromise their sense of personal freedom for financial gain).

However, the women in the study did view their careers as a source of pleasure and of contribution, consistent with the two other sources of motivation proposed by Astin (1984). Participants discussed both these needs most directly in relation to the sense of harmony they experienced between self, art, and career. The women felt that the creation of art brought joy and meaning to their lives. They also reported that through their work as artists and teachers they felt able to make a valuable contribution to society.

It is interesting to note that Astin (1984) had hypothesized that artists might demonstrate this very pattern in their careers. However, she presented artists' differential attention to survival, pleasure, and contribution needs as an example of vocational "maladjustment." Her statement that "artists may be overly preoccupied with pleasure and contribution to the exclusion of survival" (p. 125) follows from the presupposition that an "ideal career" should reflect equal attention to all three needs. Unfortunately, in this regard Astin's perspective appears to be biased against individuals like artists who choose alternative career experiences.

### **External Variables**

In addition to internal variables, a number of external variables influential to women's careers have been identified in various theories of women's career development, some of which are similar to factors and experiences described by the participants in this study.

Probably the most significant external variable to have affected the participants' career development is gender role socialization. As many researchers (e.g., Astin, 1984; Hackett & Betz, 1981; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987) have stressed, gender role socialization has a profound and pervasive effect on women's career development. The results of this study show that participants' experience of their careers were influenced at every stage of their lives by the social norms and values that, as Astin (1984) proposed, are inculcated by the individual through play, family, school, and early work experiences. For the women in the study, gender role socialization was a factor in almost every one of the major career-related experiences they described and it surfaced in some important way in nearly all of the nine theme descriptions and in the common story. In short, gender role socialization contributed to: the women's sense of themselves as outsiders in their families, in the art world, and in society in general; their sense of being obstructed by others in their career progress, both overtly and covertly; their complex feelings about external validation of their work and their career choice (e.g., on the whole they rejected the values of the commercial art world and yet sometimes also wanted their work to be recognized and financially rewarded in that world); their sense of being torn between their individual creative needs and the needs of the significant others in their lives (which others and the women themselves often judged to be more pressing and "legitimate" than their own artistic needs); their sense of struggle to claim the identity of artist; and their sense of themselves as pioneers in a career milieu that they often perceived as androcentric and misogynist.

Another external variable that Astin (1984) saw as important to women's career development is "the structure of opportunity"--that is, the various environmental factors--that can be associated with a particular career. Notably, the results of this study suggest that the structure of opportunity for an art career at any given time in the participants' lives was less influential than internal factors in their choice to become and to continue as artists. Although many of the women did discuss concerns such as the lack of job opportunities in the arts, the economic instability of an art career, and their personal financial responsibilities, none of them considered these concerns to be as important to their choice of an art career as were personal issues. Rather, they all ultimately gave precedence to variables such as self-concept, work motivation, and work expectations. This finding suggests that Astin's model may not sufficiently address the importance of personal variables in women artists' career choices. It therefore challenges the full applicability of her model to the career development of this distinctive group of women.

When considering Astin's (1984) concept of the "structure of opportunity" in the context of an art career, it is also important to bear in mind that although art as a career is neither mainstream nor traditional for women (Statistics Canada, 1993), none of the major theorists who have focused on women's career choices and behaviours usually include art in their discussions of non-traditional work (or indeed, include art in career-related discussions at all). It can be hypothesized that by such an omission, the very theory and research that purports to help women better understand their experience of career may sometimes inadvertently serve to further socially marginalize women artists.

### **Career and Identity Development**

As was discussed previously in this chapter in reference to the literature on women artists' career development, the results of this study suggest that a strong link exists between

women artists' career and creative identity development. The participants used their work as an important means of self-expression in their lives and saw their roles as artists as inseparable from their other life roles. The results also suggest that the participants' relationships, and their valuing of relationships, played a major role in their career and identity development. In these ways, the results support the relevance of attempts such as that of Forrest and Mikolaitis (1986) to integrate established career theory and women's identity theory towards an understanding of women's experiences of career.

Consistent with the relationship-oriented perspective of identity theorists such as Gilligan (1977, 1982), Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), and Josselson (1987), all of the women in this study emphasized the importance of relationships in their lives, their difficulties in balancing work and relationships, and their struggles to identify themselves as artists, as well as mothers, spouses, partners, and so on, in a professional milieu that has traditionally promoted artistic isolation and independent action over relationships and cooperation with others. The internal conflict experienced by many of the women between their personal needs for solitude and individual creative activity and their care and concern for others was often intense. Such conflict commonly resulted in the women feeling frustrated, confused, and doubtful about their career and life choices.

Frequently, this conflict also resulted in the experience of role strain as the participants attempted to juggle the multiple demands in their lives. This finding echoes those of Rossi (1980), Washor-Liebhaber (1982), and others that underscored the elevated stress and difficulties that women face when they have to make choices about how to balance various life roles and responsibilities. For the women in this study, the sense that they were constantly juggling personal and work-related commitments sometimes left them feeling "stretched very thin" and exasperated that they were able to complete few tasks to their

satisfaction. The women found the experience of role overload to be especially threatening to their capacity to do creative work. It was hard for them to maintain the clear-minded and intense focus that they needed to do their artwork if they also felt that they had to consider the needs of others.

### **The Common Story**

The results of this study reveal not only the salience of particular internal and external variables to the process of the participants' career development, but also the fundamental structure, or common story, of that process itself. The common story, when viewed in its entirety, has a number of aspects that warrant special attention. These include: the three distinct career paths that were followed by the participants; the generally discontinuous and fluid nature of their careers; and the importance of midlife to their career and creative identity development.

### **Career Paths**

The results overall are based on the premise that certain experiences were shared by all of the women in the study. These shared experiences are reflected in the descriptions of the nine common themes and the general structure of the common story. Included within the general structure of the common story, however, are three distinct career paths that were followed by different sub-groups of participants. The first path reflects the experiences of those women who chose art as a career early in their lives and who stayed committed to that choice. The second path reflects the experiences of those women who initially chose an art career, then abandoned it, only to return to it later in their lives. The third path reflects the experiences of those women who initially chose a career other than art and then later committed themselves to an art career.

It is beyond the scope of this study to analyze in depth why any individual participant might have chosen one path or another. (That would entail a case study approach.) Also, there are few obvious personal similarities (e.g., age, family-of-origin position, early socioeconomic status, relationship patterns, or parental status) that serve to link the subgroup of women who chose each path. However, an analysis of the general factors that motivated the different participants to follow particular paths reinforces the relevance of many of the internal and external variables that have been examined in the preceding discussion.

For example, the two women who followed the first and most consistent of the three career paths were involved quite early on in their careers with teaching art and continued teaching art in some form throughout their lives. Their close involvement with art education seemed to serve two purposes. First, although both of the women struggled financially (especially during the years when they were single parents), they were able to depend on teaching income to complement or to replace direct income from their artwork. This freed them somewhat to pursue the art that they chose without having to bow to commercial pressures. Second, these women seemed to experience a high degree of "job-self compatibility" (Gottfredson, 1981) in their roles as teachers. They felt personally rewarded and creatively stimulated by teaching art to others. As a consequence, the energies that they devoted to that task often benefitted, rather than detracted from, their own art making.

Social and gender role pressures seemed to play a particularly large role in influencing the four women who followed the second path--that is, who originally chose art as a career, then gave it up, but returned to it later. For two of the women in this subgroup, repeated experiences of confronting gender-related obstacles in their families, in the art world, and in society at large prompted them temporarily to abandon their commitment to

their art careers. In short, these women felt defeated by the sociocultural barriers they encountered. The two remaining women in this sub-group did not feel as obstructed as the others by overt gender discrimination, but by more subtle familial and social pressures to choose a more "practical" career. The length of time that the four women in this sub-group pursued alternative careers varied from approximately three to fourteen years. Eventually, however, each woman experienced some degree of "job-self incompatibility" (Gottfredson, 1981) and decided that in order to fully honour her personal values and need for creative expression she needed to once again pursue a career in art.

Similar pressures influenced the choices of the two women who followed the third career path. These women chose in early adulthood to pursue "sensible" careers, in great part because of family and social pressures. Significantly, these women chose stereotypically female professions: social work and librarianship. In each case, the women genuinely cared about the professional field that they entered and the choice of that field reflected important personal values. At the same time, each woman experienced her nonart career as insufficiently creatively rewarding. As with the women who followed the second career path, these women ultimately gave precedence to personal values and their need to express themselves creatively through their work. And as with the women who followed the first path, both of the women in the third sub-group relied on working for pay in art-related fields to support their art making. One woman became a writer and continued working part-time in her original professional field of librarianship. The other woman became a potter and sculptor and began teaching art to support her creative work.

### **Career Discontinuity**

Regardless of the individual career path taken, when the participants' experiences are viewed as a whole, a pattern of discontinuity and fluidity emerges. Even those women who

had stayed in an art-related career throughout their lives experienced disruptions and interruptions in their career progress. The non-linear pattern of the participants' common career story fits with much of the recent psychological and sociological literature that suggests that women experience career as inherently discontinuous, fluid, and cyclical because of their ongoing efforts to balance work and family commitments (e.g., Astin, 1984; Bateson, 1989; Marshall, 1989). It also corresponds to previous research findings about the career patterns of women artists, as well as of other gifted and talented women, (e.g., Baker, 1973; Bateson, 1989; Schuster, 1990) that suggest that the lives of creative women tend to be characterized by discontinuity and personal, professional, and financial change and instability.

A number of factors may have contributed to the overall career pattern of the women in this study. For example, consistent with observations by Bielby and Bielby (1988) and Pleck (1985), the participants perceived that greater demands were made on them than on their male partners within the context of their family roles. Also, similar to the findings of several previous studies (e.g., Fitzgerald & Betz, 1984; Herr & Cramer, 1988; Stohs, 1991, 1992), the careers of the participants were dramatically altered by the experience of motherhood. Sometimes the women's mothering responsibilities slowed their formal career progress. Sometimes those responsibilities temporarily stopped their formal career progress altogether (although as Donaldson [1984] suggested, the experience of mothering may also have contributed to their artistic creativity and therefore to their informal career progress). Furthermore, the participants' careers may have been especially fluid and discontinuous compared to more traditional career paths because of the inherently unstable nature of art careers and the particularly difficult time that women artists may have in finding paid work



in their occupational field (Baker, 1973). Almost all of the women in this study experienced long-standing financial and employment struggles directly related to their choice of career.

Correspondingly, the structure of the common story lends credence to feminist challenges of traditional theories of career development (e.g., to the theories of Havighurst, 1953, 1972; Levinson, 1978; Vaillant, 1977; or Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986) that linked career-oriented tasks to specific ages and/or that equated career progression with a patterned sequence of (paid) work experiences. The non-linear and discontinuous careers of the women in this study do not fit well into such models of "normative" career progress. This finding confirms the general relevance of theoretical attempts (e.g., Astin, 1984; Gottfredson, 1981; Hackett & Betz, 1981) to design models of career development that would more accurately reflect the realities of women's multi-faceted lives. The non-linear and discontinuous nature of the participants' careers also helps explain their discomfort with conventional views of "career" and their reluctance to use that term to describe their lives as artists. Most of the women in the study perceived "career" to refer to a fairly rigid and linear sequence of work behaviours and felt that their lives did not conform to such a traditional pattern.

At the same time, the structure of the common story does bear out some aspects of the more traditional approaches to career and career development. For example, both Levinson (1978) and Super (1990) proposed that adult life encompasses shifting periods of stability and transition that affect career development. Certainly, such shifts and transitions were part of the experiences of the women in this study. Levinson also hypothesized that a personal Dream or vision of "self-in-adult-world" (p. 91) is a powerful motivating factor in an individual's choice and development of a career. Although few of the participants talked specifically about having a motivating "dream" or vision about becoming an artist, many did

report that they felt strongly motivated to become the people that they "needed to be" in the world. This finding is consistent with both Levinson's and Super's hypotheses about the importance of individuals' development and implementation of their self-concepts through work. An analysis of the common story also reinforces the perspective proposed by several established theorists who have focused on life span developmental processes (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986; Super, 1990) that identity development and career development are closely linked.

In spite of such similarities, there appears to be no one theoretical perspective that adequately reflects the realities of both career and creative identity development for women artists as these are reflected in the common story of the participants' experiences of career. It may be that only a theory that fully articulates and integrates the connection between these two developmental processes can adequately explain the complex experience of career in women artists' lives. Such a theory might need to incorporate aspects of the already established theories of life span development (e.g., Super, 1990), women's career development (e.g., Astin, 1984), and women's identity development (e.g., Gilligan, 1977, 1982; Josselson, 1987).

It may also be helpful in understanding women's artists' experiences of career to conceptualize their lives by way of a non-linear metaphor or symbol. For example, Sagaria (1989) proposed using the image of an artist making a quilt as a metaphor for a woman making a career. In Sagaria's view, "the finished quilt is a 'portrait' connecting women's multiple and often complex and conflicting roles" (p. 13). A different image that could also be useful is that of a spiral. For example, Rapoport and Rapoport (1980) suggested a triple helix as an appropriate model to represent multiple transitions and the critical influences of such variables as age of marriage, timing of childbearing, job changes and so on, in an

individual's life career. Similarly, Marshall (1989) called for career theory to "bring together the archetypically female spiral and the archetypically male arrow" (p. 285), the two core and interrelated patterns of human development. According to Marshall, such an expanded notion of career development would "affirm cyclic life patterns and the different paths of individual growth" (p. 286). With modifications to include women artists' unique experiences, a model of development which incorporated some form of a spiral as described by these theorists might work especially well to reflect women artists' experiences of career. Indeed, a version of such a model has already been suggested by at least one artist. Joan Gould (1988) said that she experiences her life as a writer as taking the form of a spiral. Gould's perception was that: "My life has a swing to it, but also an unending surprise. ... I swing in loops, always kept in my path by my relation to my family, which is the spiral's core" (p. 7).

### **The Importance of Midlife**

Another important finding to emerge from an analysis of the common story was the significance of the period of midlife in the participants' career and creative identity development. All of the women referred in some way to a sense of "coming into their own" as artists in midlife. Even those women who had known from an early age that they wanted to pursue careers as artists and had consistently worked in an art-related area talked about a shift in their sense of identity and purpose as artists when they neared or reached their forties and fifties.

This finding is consistent with recent research into the changing career patterns of both women and men that suggests that midlife has become an increasingly significant time of change and reassessment in the lives of many individuals (e.g., Albert, 1992; Bronte, 1993; Sheehy, 1995). Midlife may be a particularly important time in women's careers

because by that stage of life many women have either completed the major tasks of mothering, have resolved not to have children at all, or feel that they are better financially and emotionally equipped to challenge some of the traditional gender role restrictions that usually accompany women's experiences of motherhood. They are therefore freer to concentrate on their work lives in a way that they may not have been able to do previously. In addition, as Baruch, Barnett, and Rivers (1983) observed, because of important social changes in recent decades, contemporary women in midlife are able to enjoy more freedom than ever before to "enhance their sense of Mastery" and "to explore and develop the 'doing' side of their lives" (p. 41). According to Kessler (in Gallagher, 1993), the turning points for women in midlife may involve a recognition of inner strength which can catalyze creative twists and curves in their life course.

A number of studies specifically focused on artists and other gifted and talented women (e.g., Piirto, 1991; Schuster, 1990) have also found that midlife may be an especially rich and productive time for such women in terms of their careers and their overall life satisfaction. For example, in a follow-up study of the career patterns of 35 gifted women (five of whom were artists), Schuster found that a high degree of life satisfaction was the norm for this group at midlife.

The results of this study strongly indicate that the participants experienced increased senses of freedom, mastery, inner strength, and life satisfaction in their middle years similar to those described by the above-mentioned researchers. Each artist went through a period of personal and professional transition in midlife and each emerged with a clearer sense of herself as an individual and as a artist.

The results suggest that midlife may be a particularly rich and fruitful time for women artists for several reasons. First, the generally loose structure and autonomy required of art

careers (the majority of artists are either fully or partially self-employed) suited the needs and the temperaments of the participants, all of whom had multiple role commitments and varied personal and work responsibilities. It also allowed them to increase their focus on their creative work at their own pace as they gradually completed other life tasks (e.g., single parenthood). Second, although there are some speciality areas within the arts such as dance and theatre that put a premium on youth (particularly for women), maturity is an asset in many fields of art. As a consequence, the women generally found that their age and their cumulative experience enhanced their ability to produce the kind of work that they wished. Furthermore, the increased personal and professional confidence that they had gained over time allowed them to take rewarding artistic risks that they would not have taken earlier in their lives. Third, consistent with Chicago's (1977) and Sheehy's (1995) observations about the lives of creative women, the artists in this study found that as they aged, they felt increasingly motivated to use art and other forms of self-expression to explore their life experiences and deeper emotional and spiritual aspects of themselves.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The results of this study provide valuable information about how the participants experienced and made meaning of their careers, their career development, and their identities as artists. Specifically, the results: (a) uncover the commonalities that exist for this group of women artists in their perceptions of their career development over their life span; (b) make explicit some of the career-oriented choices and decisions made by these women, as well as the personal and social factors that they perceived to be involved in these choices and decisions; (c) reveal the fundamental structure of their lives and career development; and (d) increase our understanding of how these women developed their identities as creative artists

and how their identities as artists evolved over their life course. These results have significant research, practical, and conceptual implications for counselling psychology.

The preceding interpretation of the results reveals that the findings of this study are generally consistent with much of the established research and theory on the career and identity development of women and women artists. At the same time, that interpretation brings to light a number of important issues that expand upon our present knowledge in this area and that warrant further attention in future research studies and in the theoretical conceptualizations that may follow from such studies. In addition, an examination of the results suggests a variety of practical implications for counsellors who work with women artists or with women who are considering a career in the arts. Some broad conceptual implications relevant to the study of careers and career development in general may also be drawn from the results.

### **Research Implications and Recommendations**

Before cataloguing the different issues that are deserving of future research attention, it is important to note that the research results as a whole present an impression of collective well-being and happiness on the part of the participants. This impression conflicts with some common perceptions of artists as "troubled geniuses" and "psychologically tortured" souls. For example, recent research studies (e.g., Jamison, 1993; Kavalier-Adler, 1993; Rothenberg, 1990) and reports in the popular press (e.g., Angier, 1993; Jamison, 1995; "Madness, creativity linked," 1995) have focused on the psychological difficulties of creative individuals, particularly the link between creativity and mental illness. However, the results of this study challenge the applicability of such perceptions to all women artists.

The participants in this study experienced their work and their lives as artists to be in great part, highly meaningful and purposeful, as well as pleasurable. These are experiences

that many people hope to associate with their careers. Given that the women in this study reported such a high degree of life and work satisfaction, it would be useful for future researchers to investigate if such experiences of satisfaction hold true for other women artists and if so, to further explore what behaviours, personal qualities, attitudes, or experiences might contribute to women artists' sense of fulfillment with their careers and with their lives as a whole.

For example, one factor that may be of significance to women artists' positive experiences of their career is the fit between their personality characteristics and their career choice. Although this study was not designed to explore the personalities of the participants, a review of the results suggests that the women in the study may possess certain personality characteristics that are consistent with those already attributed to artists. For instance, artists have been described as sensitive, independent, adventurous, risk-taking, resilient, flexible in their thinking, and intellectually original, among other traits (Roe, 1946; Barron, 1969; MacKinnon, 1978; Guilford, 1967; Torrance, 1966). The participants in this study appeared to have similar characteristics as judged by their career-related behaviour and their own self-descriptions.

Of course, none of these personality characteristics and intellectual abilities are unique to artists (female or male). However, they may have contributed to the participants' choice of a career that is unconventional and non-traditional for women and to their ability to cope with the emotional, social, and practical challenges of a career that is fundamentally less structured and predictable than many other occupations. Future researchers could investigate the relationships between personality characteristics and career or creative identity development for women artists (or for women aspiring to be artists), as well as the influence of characteristics such as resilience and risk-taking ability to women artists' sense of self-

efficacy and their ability to manage the change and flux that is so much a part of artistic careers.

Another factor that appeared to contribute to the career and life satisfaction of many of the participants in the study was the "fuzzy" line that they said they experienced between their sense of work and play. It would be useful to know if women from other occupational groups also desire, or feel that they would benefit from, the blurring of the boundaries of work and leisure or work and home life. Also, even though the participants expressed satisfaction overall with the fluidity of their life roles, it was a major challenge for all of them to juggle their multiple role commitments and to balance their personal creative needs with the needs of others. Research that identified some of the ways in which women artists cope with the transitions between different life roles might help other women in their struggles to balance their personal and work lives.

Moreover, the results of this study indicate that strong relationships existed between the participants' personal and creative identity development and between their career and creative identity development. In addition, self-concept and "job-self compatibility" (Gottfredson, 1981) appeared to be highly salient variables in the participants' experiences of career. Further research is needed to explore more closely the nature of the relationships among women artists' personal and creative identity development, their career development, and their self-concepts. The results of such research could have implications not only for our understanding of women artists' lives, but also for the broader fields of women's career and identity development.

Similarly, the results of this study suggest that the participants de-emphasized external variables such as the workplace "structure of opportunity" (Astin, 1984) and emphasized internal variables such as "job-self compatibility" (Gottfredson, 1981) in their choice and



experience of career. Also, the results suggest that the participants adopted very personal and subjective criteria for career progress and success that often had little relationship to how these concepts have been understood in some traditional career models (e.g., Havighurst, 1953, 1972; Levinson, 1978; Vaillant, 1977) or in our culture in general. More research is needed in order to fully understand the role that personal values may play in the occupational choice and career development of women artists. The results of such an investigation could have implications not only for other artists who are struggling with the same or similar issues, but also could be relevant for other women in careers that are non-traditional or non-linear in nature, and that correspondingly challenge the validity of traditional models of career progression and conventional ideas of career success.

The results of this study also indicate that a major factor contributing to the participants' career and creative identity development was the influence of relationships in their lives. The women frequently felt torn between the needs of self and the needs of others, particularly because their form of creative work demands such a high level of personal commitment, involvement, concentration, and solitude. Unfortunately, as was noted earlier, few studies have been undertaken that explore the complex relationships among women artists' needs for independence, solitude, and internal validation, and their needs for dependence, relationships, and external validation. More needs to be known about the effects of these often conflicting needs on the career development of women artists and of other creative women.

Also, as the common story of the participants' experience illustrates, some of the participants took different career paths than others. A number of important research questions follow from this finding. For example: What, if any, are the links between women artists' early socialization experiences and later career behaviour? What factors

contributed to, or detracted from, their ability to stay involved in and committed to an art career? What cohort differences might contribute to women artists' experiences of their careers? Based on the answers to such questions, how might counselling psychologists most accurately conceptualize and facilitate the career development of women artists and of women in general?

It is noteworthy that midlife emerged as a particularly important time for the participants in terms of career change and commitment. The women in this study reported that they felt that they "came into their own" during that stage in their lives. As Sheehy (1995) among others has pointed out, a particularly large cohort of women and men will be reaching midlife within the next few decades. This demographic shift has already prompted a dramatic increase in the amount of both professional and popular literature on the subject of women and midlife and midlife in general (e.g., Albert, 1992; Friedan, 1993; Hollis, 1993; Siegel, 1983). Still, there is much to be learned in this area. More research needs to be done on how the careers of women artists and of other women are affected by the biological, psychological, and social changes that women may experience at this time of life.

Research is also needed that looks at the differences in experience between and among various groups of women artists. The participant group in this study was fairly homogeneous. Future studies in this area would benefit from the inclusion of women with personal characteristics other than those of the women in this study (e.g., women of colour, women from other cultures, a wider age range of women, etc.). Future studies would also benefit from comparisons between artists in different life situations--for example, between childless women and women with children, or between single women and women with full-time partners. It also would be useful to compare the experiences of women artists with the

experiences of men artists and with the experiences of women from other occupational groups.

In addition, few qualitative researchers have focused specifically on women artists' experience of career (or of other occupational groups of women for that matter).

Considering the richness of the data that can be drawn from studies such as this one, more studies using phenomenology or other qualitative methods are recommended in order that we may understand more fully the depth and breadth of women's definitions and experiences of career.

Also, although art can be considered a non-traditional career for women (Statistics Canada, 1993), it has rarely been included as such in the theory or research related to non-traditional work. Future research studies which address women's experiences in non-traditional careers would more accurately represent the experiences of all women in such careers if they included women artists in their participant groups.

Similarly, much of the theory and research pertaining to women artists' careers has been published under the rubric of the career behaviour of the gifted and talented. However, many of these studies (e.g., Phelps, 1991; Post-Kammer & Perrone, 1983; Schuster, 1990) do not define key concepts such as "giftedness," adequately describe the composition of their participant groups, or clearly distinguish the results relating to different sub-groups of participants such as women artists. It may be that the experiences of women artists are significantly different than those of other gifted and talented women. Future researchers in this field need to more carefully describe their participant groups and to investigate how the experiences of women artists may be similar to or different from other women described as gifted and talented.

### **Counselling Implications and Recommendations**

In terms of practice, the results of this study have important implications for the personal and career counselling of artistically creative women and girls. As several writers (e.g., Fredrickson, 1986; Kerr, 1986; Perrone, 1986) have observed, creatively talented individuals, particularly girls, are often under-served by career and other counsellors. Indeed, Walker, Reis, and Leonard (1992) pointed out in their study of gifted women that "the lack of quality guidance counselling was cited [by the women] as the most inadequate of all educational services" (p. 201) and that it was a major concern in their vocational development. Such findings are particularly regrettable because gifted and talented women may need special assistance from counsellors due to the unique personal and social obstacles that they may encounter in their career development (Noble, 1987). The results of this study suggest that counsellors would best serve the needs of women artists if they understood and addressed with these clients some of the distinctive issues that women artists may face as they attempt to forge a career in the arts. A number of specific counselling recommendations in this context are described below.

Perhaps of most relevance to counselling practice is the finding that for women artists creative identity development may be a long and difficult process, often involving intense feelings of illegitimacy, self-doubt, guilt, and resentment. This finding implies that counsellors who work with women artists need to recognize the long-term nature of this process and to validate and support their clients' struggles in this area over time. This recommendation challenges that of Phelps (1991) who suggested that counsellors should help gifted and talented college women towards "resolution" of their identities in order to provide a framework for the development of their post-college vocational plans. Given that the results in this study indicate that creative identity development is a long-term process and that

midlife may be a particularly significant time in the career and identity development of women artists, counsellors should recognize that identity consolidation for this group of women may not be attained until well into adulthood.

Also, the close links that were found in this study between the participants' career and identity development, and between their work and personal lives, support recent recommendations for practice made in the counselling literature (e.g., Betz & Corning, 1993; Davidson & Gilbert, 1993; Super, 1993) that have emphasized the importance of career counsellors addressing with their clients both career and noncareer issues (e.g., personal issues, identity, and meaning). The results of this study imply that a "blurring" of the boundaries between "career" and "noncareer" issues in career counselling might be especially important in counsellors' work with women artists.

Similarly, the finding that the women artists in this study took so much meaning and pleasure from their careers has important implications for career and life planning, and for the type of career guidance that counsellors may give to women artists. As Bronte concluded in her research on longevity and careers, "loving your work is not only important and valuable in maintaining a long career, it may be vital to staying healthy as well" (p. 357-358). Bronte's conclusion is relevant and timely for career counsellors, given that current demographic projections are that within a few decades many people can expect to work well into their sixties and seventies (Bronte, 1993; Sheehy, 1995).

For career counsellors to encourage clients to find work that they love to do is not a radical notion. And to the extent that enjoyment and meaning in work are related to health and well-being, the lives of the women artists profiled in this study and the choices that they each made regarding employment, creative work, freedom, and money may be illustrative for other women considering a career in art. Of course, for a variety of reasons not all women

can work at what they love to do. However, the results of this study suggest that for the participants, a sense of personal and occupational identity as artists was more important to their sense of life and career satisfaction than whether or not they earned their income exclusively through art. This finding underlines the importance of counsellors exploring with women artists (or aspiring artists) issues connected to creative identity, achievement and status needs, personal definitions of success, financial expectations, and commitment to the long-term process of artistic career and identity development. It is also important for counsellors to inform clients who are considering becoming artists about the realities of an art career. As the results of this study indicate, art may be a deeply rewarding career for women, but it is also a difficult one in many ways and very challenging to pursue on emotional, practical, and financial levels.

In addition, as Kerr (1985) pointed out, it is important for counsellors to let all gifted young women know that the most critical years in the development of many professional careers coincide with the prime childbearing years. In some ways, early entry into an art career may not be as crucial for career "success" as it is other occupations (e.g., medicine or law). For one thing, the inherent flexibility of an art career may make it somewhat easier for women to enter and to pursue later in life than some other occupations. For another, the nature of an art career may allow for easier transitions between various life roles for women artists. At the same time, the results of this study suggest that the conflict between relationship needs--especially mothering needs--and personal creative needs were highly salient in the lives of the participants. In light of that finding, young women considering a career in art should be helped by counsellors to realistically assess the choice, timing, and sequencing of their life and work goals.

Furthermore, the results of this and other studies (e.g., Bateson, 1989; Bepko & Krestan, 1993; Sang, 1989) indicate that women artists' sense of being torn between the needs of self and others is a major factor in their career development. The women in the study frequently felt pulled between their needs for independence and solitude and the needs of significant others in their lives. This finding has implications for individual, marital, and family counselling. Counsellors who are aware of the particular ways in which women artists may feel torn between work needs and relationship needs can better help artists and their family members understand the emotional and practical consequences of such role conflicts in women artists' lives.

Also, considering that the participants in this study reported that they felt restricted by gender role expectations throughout their careers, it would be particularly appropriate for counsellors to include a feminist perspective in their work with women artists. Counsellors need to be informed about the unique ways in which women artists may feel obstructed by gender role socialization and sex discrimination in order that they can help their clients contextualize and make sense of such experiences. For instance, many of the participants in this study reported that they experienced pressures in their relationships to reduce the amount of time and energy that they spent on their careers. A number of participants also reported that they experienced overt and covert sex discrimination in the art world. A feminist perspective in counselling could help clients like these women understand the social context of such experiences, and their negative effects, so that they do not assume unnecessary personal responsibility and blame for their career difficulties.

The results also suggest that the experience of being outsiders (i.e., feeling alienated and marginalized) was present for the participants in this study throughout their lives. This finding, plus the findings that the women desired connection with others through their

artwork and that they highly valued relationships, all have implications for group counselling. For instance, Levine (1989) studied women in an ongoing art therapy group and concluded that the essential factor for the group members

in their being willing and able to make art, [and] to express themselves through art media, was the feeling of connection in relationship and the safety that arose from it for them. ... The creative process for women in [that] group placed a value upon interaction, nurturance, support, and interconnectedness. (p. 325).

Based on Levine's findings and the findings of this study, it seems likely that women artists would benefit from having contact with similar individuals in a group setting. Such a group could take a variety of forms (e.g., be short-term or long-term, include art therapy, or be career-or personally-focused, etc.).

The findings of this study imply that counsellors might also assist women artists by addressing--either individually or in a group format--the negative effects of the lack of role models in their lives. The results suggest that the lack of role models and mentors in the lives of the participants contributed significantly to their sense of being outsiders and of being obstructed in their career progress. One way in which counsellors could help mitigate the negative effects of the lack of role models would be to help women artists identify role models in their present environments. For example, counsellors could refer their clients to books by other women artists or about their experiences, or encourage them to make contact with other artists in comparable life situations. It would undoubtedly benefit women artists to know how similar individuals have integrated their families and careers, dealt with sex discrimination in the art world, and confronted feelings of illegitimacy and doubt, and so on. Introducing clients to the stories of other women artists may also serve to inspire them to



explore new career goals. As the singer, songwriter, and artist Joni Mitchell stated, many women artists feel limited by a lack of inner permission to follow their dreams. In her view, "permission is far more important to an artist than encouragement [from others]" (in Lacey, 1994, p. C1).

In addition, women artists who rely primarily on outside sources for employment (e.g., actors and dancers) may require special help in managing their careers. Counsellors who work with artists need to make themselves aware of resources that may be available in the art community to help such individuals. For example, two programs that address the special needs of artists in career transition and that have been described in the counselling literature are a program for actors (Ormont, 1989) and one for dancers (Pickman, 1987). Both these programs offer individual counselling focused on helping performers change their careers and "renew their sense of purpose in life" (Ormont, p. 109) when they are no longer able to work in their chosen artistic field. If such programs are not available in the community, counsellors could consider adapting Ormont's and Pickman's models to a group or workshop format.

A final recommendation concerns the importance of the terminology that counsellors may use with women artists. The results of this study indicate that the participants collectively felt extremely uncomfortable with the term "career" because they perceived it to refer to a narrow and rigid conceptualization of work that they felt did not apply to their lives as artists. By the consistent use of such terminology, counselling professionals may unintentionally contribute to the experience of alienation on the part of this distinctive occupational group. Based on the researcher's experience in this study, a woman artist may be more drawn to discuss her "life as an artist" and a sense of "being an artist," rather than her "career as an artist" or a sense of "having a career" as an artist.

### **Conceptual Implications**

A deeper understanding of some of the issues that were revealed in this study of women artists' career development may potentially contribute both to our understanding of the process of career development for women and for career development in general. As both women and men's roles in our society evolve over time, and as social and technological changes affect the type and availability of jobs in the labour market, the life and work patterns for both sexes are becoming gradually less linear and rigid, and increasingly more cyclical and flexible. Also, any individual who chooses to diverge from traditional career paths may expect to encounter increased stress and internal and external conflicts related to that change similar to many of those experienced by the participants in this study.

The results also reinforce the utility and timeliness of explorations into the nature and meaning of work for women (e.g., Chester & Grossman, 1990) and recent challenges to accepted definitions of concepts such as "work," "nonwork," and "career" (e.g., Richardson, 1993) in the career literature. It may be that in order to formulate a theory that would adequately reflect the realities of the lives of women artists, as well as other creative and talented women, we may need to reexamine our notions of what comprises and differentiates each of these three concepts. The participants in this study emphasized identity, commitment, and passionate involvement with their work (paid and unpaid) in their descriptions of their lives as artists. The women did not restrict their sense of their careers or their sense of work to any external or institutional structures. In that regard, each of their careers could be characterized as "boundaryless" (Arthur, 1994; Bird, 1994) and also as a deeply rewarding and individualized "path with a heart" (Mirvis & Hall, 1994).

Artistically creative women like the participants in this study who have established non-traditional and rewarding lives may prove useful role models for any individual striving

to create a distinctive and satisfying boundaryless career or life path. As Bateson (1989) wrote, our traditional assumptions about what constitutes an ordinary successful life (i.e., early decision and commitment to a career, followed by educational preparation that launches a single rising trajectory), have not been valid for many of history's most creative people and are becoming increasingly inappropriate today. The women artists in this study have confronted not only the multiple role responsibilities demanded of any working woman, but also the ambiguity, discontinuity, and complexity inherent in an artistic career. An understanding of their lives may help us identify strategies of career flexibility that may ultimately assist creative women (and men) in other occupations to adapt to the myriad social, economic, and technological changes that continue profoundly to affect our expectations and experiences of career and our lives in general.

### **The Importance of Story**

It is expected that the preceding discussion of the results will be of use and interest primarily to professionals in the field of counselling, psychology, and education. However, the themes and the common story depicting women artists' lives that were revealed through this study may also serve an important function as resource material both for women artists and for other women who, while they may not identify themselves as artists, may identify with the experiences of artists. Heilbrun (1988) suggested that in order for women to make sense of their reality, they need to hear the stories of other women so that, as individuals, they do not feel isolated, lonely, or unhappily different. Stories are therefore vital sources of information because they provide possible and alternative life "plots:"

What matters is that lives do not serve as models; only stories do that. And it is a hard thing to make up stories to live by. We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts. They may

be read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to us, like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives. (Heilbrun, p. 37)

Given that there is so little information available in the psychological literature about the meaning, nature, or experience of career for women artists (or for women in general), the individual and collective stories that have emerged from this research may provide useful insights for the women artists who participated in the study (and who have been given access to the findings) and for other women who are contemplating a career in the arts.

Indeed, this has already proved to be the case. In reviewing the themes and the common story prior to the final validation interview, a number of the participants expressed how "pleased" and "moved" they felt to see their stories reflected back to them. Several of the women commented that they felt reassured knowing that they were not the only ones who had such experiences. A few of the women also said that they were eager to share the results with friends and colleagues who were struggling with some of the same career-related issues.

### **Conclusions**

This study investigated the meaning and experience of career as it is lived by eight women artists. The study's results illuminate nine major experiential themes in the lives of the participants, the meaning to them of the concept of "career," and the common story of their experiences of career over their life span. In so doing, the results reinforce and build upon many of the findings of previous research studies pertaining to the career and identity development of women artists, add substantially to our knowledge-base in that field, and point to a number of important areas worthy of future research attention.

Women artists are a relatively small and specialized occupational group. However, studies such as this one of women artists' experiences may prove relevant even beyond that specific population. Women in similarly non-mainstream and non-traditional careers may also stand to benefit from a more complete understanding of how creative and resourceful women such as artists have learned to manage various life roles and the attendant conflicting demands on their time and attention. An understanding of the ways in which women such as the artists in this study have fashioned deeply satisfying and meaningful lives for themselves may be especially helpful to gifted and talented young women from a variety of disciplines--and the counsellors who work with them--as they plan for a future that will include longer life and career expectancy for most everyone.

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## APPENDIX A

### Bracketing Information

#### (Pre-Data Collection)

#### Researcher's Personal Reflections

To embark honestly on a study of women's career development, I should acknowledge my own experiences in this area. As has been true for many women, my career path has been circuitous and my employment history discontinuous. I am aware, however, of one underlying theme in my career progression: an interest in all aspects of the visual and performing arts. That interest, constant through numerous starts and changes in my personal and work life, has prompted my choice of participant group for this study.

Because I value highly the arts and artistic creation, I have found myself drawn over the years to creative women and their stories. I have always been especially fascinated by those women who so valued creative expression that they chose careers as artists. To me, the lives of the women behind the novels, plays, poems, paintings, and musical works can be as interesting as the artworks themselves.

I was stimulated to undertake this particular research study because of a number of questions that have intrigued me over the years about women artists. Whenever I have found myself in intellectually or creatively unchallenging jobs, I have marvelled at the artists I knew who accepted materially and socially tenuous lives in order to have the freedom to express themselves in their own work. The stories of women artists who have struggled to find their personal and creative identities and to develop a sense of creative autonomy in their lives have particularly inspired me as I have continued to strive to live creatively and authentically in my own way.

At those times when I looked to the stories of women artists for inspiration and guidance, I would often wonder: What motivates these women? How do they create their art in the face of personal and social obstacles? Where do they find the time, the money, the energy, the will, and the inspiration to persist with their artistic visions? What form do their lives take? I first sought the answers to these questions in personal conversations, artists' biographies and autobiographies, and the literature in psychology and education related to the career and identity development of gifted and talented women. But such informal research provided little sense of connection or pattern among individual stories or an understanding of the collective experiences of women artists. At the same time, as I learned more through my studies in counselling and psychology about adult, career, and identity development, I began to refocus my questions about women artists and their lives: Where does an artist's career begin and where does it end? What shape does it take? How does a woman make sense of her identity as an artist and her identity as a woman, when both of those identities are in many ways devalued in our culture? My aim with this research study is to explore some of these questions. My hope is that it will shed some light on the realities of women artists' lives.

### **Researcher's Reflections on the Literature**

In addition to my personal insights, I can also identify several presuppositions based on my review of the literature on women's career and identity development and women artists' career development (see Chapter II). These presuppositions are derived from my analysis, to this stage, of the complex interplay between women artists' experiences as both women and artists in our culture.

One presupposition is that women artists can be expected to have struggled both with limiting personal and cultural expectations due to gender socialization and with pervasive sex



discrimination in the arts world. As a result, women artists, like other gifted and talented women, may find the process of identity development, including creative (i.e., artistic) identity development, particularly problematic due to their double oppression as women and as artists (Kerr, 1986; Sang, 1989).

A second presupposition is that a major issue in women artists' career and identity development may be their struggle to balance relationship and work commitments. Indeed, Sang (1989) identified the challenge of arranging time for one's art as a significant problem for many women artists because they feel compelled to put the needs of others before their own. Of course, the conflicting demands of personal and work responsibilities create stress for many working women. For women artists, however, the commitment to career may be further inhibited by the general tendency to devalue the work itself as self-indulgent or of dubious practical or economic value.

A third and related presupposition is that women artists may feel conflicting expectations in terms of their career development precisely because of their special talents. As a number of writers (e.g., Garrison, Stronge, & Smith, 1986; Ruth & Richards, 1974; Schwartz, 1980) have observed, while women in general are expected to take on supportive and nurturing roles, talented and gifted women are additionally expected to assert their own talents through meaningful careers.

Fourth, given that women artists may find it hard to develop a creative identity, that they may experience major stress from balancing work, relationship, and self needs, and that they may experience discordant personal and social expectations in relation to the development of their talents, it might be expected that women artists will experience career development as a non-linear, discontinuous, and fluid process. Not only are women artists influenced by the many gender-related factors that contribute to the non-linear and cyclical

nature of women's careers in general, they are also influenced by the particular vagaries of the artist's life (e.g., difficulties in finding art-related work or in selling one's work, financial instability, and social marginalization). They are, therefore, unlikely to experience the linear and stage sequential progression reflected in traditional models of career development.

Finally, my review of a number of women artists' biographies and autobiographies (e.g., Carr, 1946; Chicago, 1977; Dormann, 1985; Robinson, 1989) has led me to conclude that many women artists do not begin to truly consolidate their creative identities and experience a sense of "coming into their own" in their careers until midlife or later. As the American artist Judy Chicago stated, "between twenty and forty is when you build all your connections, you build your base. It's at forty that you really come into your maturity as an artist" (interviewed in Rountree, 1991, p. 22).

### **Pilot Interview**

In order to help frame the general research question for this study, I conducted a 90-minute interview with a 47 year old female multi-media artist. "Anna" had grown up in a working-class home in North Vancouver. Her father had been the main, although intermittent, breadwinner; her mother, a traditional homemaker. Anna had worked at a series of disparate jobs, from janitor to legal assistant, and experienced a number of life roles which she identified as child, menial worker, traveller, mother, student, and artist. Although creating art had been important to her since she was a teenager, it was only within the past five years that she had concentrated on that activity and identified herself as an artist. At the time of the interview, Anna was working part-time as a civic employee and attending art college. She considered her part-time job to be the means to realize her dream of being a practicing artist.

Several salient issues emerged from this interview. Anna defined career as a "preoccupation with something." For her, the sense of commitment to and identity with a particular pursuit was what differentiated a career from a series of jobs. Anna was unwilling to call any of her paid jobs "careers" because she felt that they were generally negative, sometimes even degrading, experiences with which she did not want to identify. Although Anna defined career clearly, she was reluctant to use the term because she associated it with middle-class aspirations and a middle-class freedom of choice which she felt had not been available to her. Anna also felt that it was important to have a motivating dream in one's life: her dream had been travel. When she felt she had lost her dream about travel she (temporarily) lost her sense of purpose. Now that her dream is to be an artist, she feels she has regained a sense of meaning and purpose in her life. Finally, for Anna, mentors and role models had played a very important part in helping her conceptualize and realize her dream.

The pilot interview has influenced my approach to this study in several respects. First, it confirmed the importance of allowing participants to define the term "career" for themselves. (Anna defined the term in a very individualistic way.) Second, it highlighted the potential importance of a guiding dream or life vision, and the influence of role models and mentors in the life of an artist. (Anna's idea of an over-riding dream recalls Levinson's [1978] concept of the Dream.) Third, it corroborated the view that an artistic career challenges cultural norms about appropriate roles for women. (Anna perceived that many people regarded an artistic career as illegitimate and self-indulgent, especially for women. Internalizing others' criticisms, she criticized herself for even wanting to pursue the "self-indulgent" life of an artist, thus delaying the full pursuit of her artistic dream until midlife.)

**APPENDIX B****Letter to Arts Associations and Educational Institutions**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am presently contacting a number of amateur and professional arts associations, educational institutions with fine arts, performing arts, and creative writing specialties, and local arts managers for the purpose of soliciting volunteers for a study I am undertaking on the career development of women artists. This study is for my doctoral dissertation in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia and is being carried out under the supervision of Dr. Judith Daniluk.

The aim of my study is to investigate the general question: What is the meaning and experience of career as it is lived by women artists? In order to address this question, my study will explore women artists' recollections of their experience of career over their life span. It is hoped that this research will contribute both to the understanding of how women artists' conceptualize and experience career and to the knowledge of how women artists develop their identities within the context of their careers.

Would you please post the enclosed invitation for volunteers to help in my research. I would also appreciate your bringing this notice to the attention of anyone who meets the following criteria. Participants should:

- (a) be women over 40 years of age;
- (b) identify themselves as artists (e.g., identify themselves as a writer, poet, painter, photographer, actor, or dancer, etc.);
- (c) consider their art to be a major value in their lives and a primary life activity;
- (d) consider themselves currently active in their artistic field.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 669-2124 or my supervisor Dr. Judith Daniluk at 822-5768. Let me thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Gerrie Brooks, M.A.

Encl.

## APPENDIX C

### Poster Soliciting Volunteers

#### ATTENTION: WOMEN ARTISTS

(Writers, musicians, visual and performing artists, etc.)

I am studying the **career development** of women artists for my doctoral dissertation in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. The aim of my dissertation is to investigate the general question: **What is the meaning and experience of career as it is lived by women artists?** In order to address this question, my study will explore women artists' recollections of their experience of career over their life span. It is hoped that this research will contribute both to the understanding of how women artists' conceptualize and experience career, and to the knowledge of how women artists develop their identities within the context of their careers.

Would you be willing to be **interviewed** for this study? Your participation would involve a minimum of three personal interviews with me about your career experiences as a woman artist. Each interview would take approximately two hours and would be tape-recorded. Your participation would be completely voluntary and you could withdraw at any time. Also, your anonymity would be protected and any information you provide would be treated confidentially. Participants should:

- (a) be women over 40 years of age;
- (b) identify themselves as artists (e.g., identify themselves as a writer, poet, painter photographer, actor, or dancer, etc.);
- (c) consider their art to be a major value in their lives and a primary life activity;
- (d) consider themselves currently active in their artistic field.

For further information please contact me at 669-2124 or call my U.B.C. Research Supervisor, Dr. Judith Daniluk, at 822-5768.

Thank you,

Gerrie Brooks, M.A.

**APPENDIX D****Letter to Gallery Directors**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am presently contacting a number of amateur and professional arts associations, educational institutions with fine arts, performing arts, and creative writing specialities, and local gallery directors for the purpose of soliciting volunteers for a study I am undertaking on the career development of women artists. This study is for my doctoral dissertation in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia and is being carried out under the supervision of Dr. Judith Daniluk.

The aim of my dissertation is to investigate the general question: What is the meaning and experience of career as it is lived by women artists? In order to address this question, my study will explore women artists' recollections of their experience of career over their life span. It is anticipated that this research will contribute both to our understanding of how women artists' conceptualize and experience career, and to our knowledge of how women artists develop their identities within the context of their careers.

I am hoping that you may be able to help me reach suitable volunteers for this research. One of the women artists you represent might enjoy taking part in the study. Would you please read (and perhaps post) the enclosed invitation for volunteers. I would also appreciate your bringing this notice to the attention of anyone who meets the following criteria. Participants should:

- (a) be women over 40 years of age;
- (b) identify themselves as artists (e.g., identify themselves as a writer, poet, painter photographer, actor, or dancer, etc.);
- (c) consider their art to be a major value in their lives and a primary life activity;
- (d) consider themselves currently active in their artistic field.

Please contact me at 669-2124 or Dr. Judith Daniluk at 822-5768 if you have any questions. Let me thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Gerrie Brooks, M.A.

Encl.

## APPENDIX E

### Letter to Participants

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for volunteering to participate in my study on the career development of women artists. This letter is to inform you of the purpose of the study, its format, and to confirm the terms of your involvement should you agree to participate.

I am studying the career development of women artists for my doctoral dissertation in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. The aim of my dissertation is to investigate the general question: What is the meaning and experience of career as it is lived by women artists? In order to address this question, my study will explore eight women artists' recollections of their experience of career over their life span. It is hoped that this research will contribute both to the understanding of how women artists' conceptualize and experience career, and to the knowledge of how women artists develop their identities within the context of their careers. Such information will help mental health professionals better serve the counselling needs of artistically creative women and girls.

Your participation in this research will involve a minimum of three personal and confidential interviews with me about your career experiences as a woman artist. Each interview will take approximately two hours. The interviews will be tape-recorded and transcribed. In the first interview, I will ask you to tell me about your career as an artist. In the second interview, I will ask you to review the transcript of your first interview and to add, if you wish, any further information about your experiences. In the third interview (to be conducted after I have analyzed all participants' transcripts), I will ask you to review for accuracy my summative description of the common career-related experiences of women artists.

Portions of the interview transcriptions may be included in my final dissertation document. In this use and in any possible future use of this material, your anonymity will be completely protected. Each participant will be identified by a pseudonym.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have any questions about this study please call me at 669-2124 or contact my U.B.C. Research Supervisor, Dr. Judith Daniluk at 822-5768. Thank you again for your participation in this project. I value your cooperation highly and look forward to meeting you.

Yours truly,

Gerrie Brooks, M.A.  
Encl.

## APPENDIX F

### The Meaning and Experience of Career for Women Artists

#### Participant Consent Form

I hereby consent to participate in the above-named project, a research interview study aimed at exploring the what career means for women artists and how women artists experience their careers over the course of their lives. I am aware that this study is being carried out by Geraline Brooks, a doctoral student in the Department of Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia and I have spoken to Ms. Brooks personally about the purpose and design of this research. If I require further information, I may contact Ms. Brooks at 669-2124 or her research supervisor, Dr. Judith Daniluk at 822-5768.

I understand that I am agreeing to participate in a minimum of three private, audio-taped interviews. The purpose of the first interview is for me to talk about my experiences as a woman artist. The purpose of the second is for me to review the transcript of the first interview and to allow me to further describe my experiences, if I so wish. The purpose of the third is for me to assess the validity of Ms. Brooks' summative description of the common career-related experiences of women artists. My total time investment in this project will be approximately six hours (each interview will take approximately two hours).

I understand that portions of my interview may be included in the final write-up of the study and I know that in this, or any other possible future use of the interview material, I will not be identified. All information I give will remain anonymous and confidential. Instead, I will be identified by a pseudonym which I may choose. I also understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw at any time.

I have been assured that the results of this study will be shared with me, if I so wish, upon completion of the project.

My signature below acknowledges my consent to participate in this research project. It also acknowledges my receipt of a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX G

### Research and Interview Questions

#### **General research question:**

What is the meaning and experience of career as it is lived by women artists?

#### **Principal interview question:**

Would you please tell me about your life as a woman artist, as if you were telling me a story; for example, when did your life as an artist begin, how did it progress, and what is it like for you now?

#### **Introduction:**

The following statement will be read by the interviewer to all participants at the beginning of the first personal research interview. If during the initial screening interview any of the artists indicate that they would prefer to be described with a term more particular to their professional discipline (e.g., if an individual prefers to be called a writer or a poet rather than an artist), the appropriate term will be substituted in the orienting statement.

#### **Orienting Statement:**

Before we begin this interview I would like to give you a little background on this research study so that you will understand what kind of things I am particularly interested in learning about you and your life as an artist.

This research study grew out of my interest in the life and career experiences of women artists. There has been very little academic research done in this area. There have been a number of studies done on the personal and career development of women in general, but very few which have focused specifically on women artists. As a consequence, there is very little information available about how the careers of women artists evolve, what factors

influence women artists' career development, and what is important or meaningful to them in their careers, in their personal lives, and in their growth as individuals and as artists.

The purpose of this interview is for me to gain some insight into your experiences as a woman artist. I am particularly interested in learning about your personal perceptions of your career and what your career means to you. The main question that I would like to ask you is about how you have experienced your career over the course of your life. When you answer these questions, please feel free to talk for as long as you want in order to describe your experiences to your satisfaction. Also, as we go through the interview, sometimes I may ask you to clarify what you mean or I may ask for a little more information about a particular subject. Does that feel comfortable to you? Do you have any questions before we begin?

Now I would like to ask you my main question--this question is about you and your life as an artist. Often people find it easier to talk about themselves as if their lives were a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. In a moment I will ask you to describe your experiences as a woman artist in that way. I realize that you presently identify yourself as an artist, so when you talk about your life as a story, it is of course with the understanding that your life as an artist is ongoing. Does that make sense to you? Is there anything you would like to ask before we begin this part of the interview?

Let's begin. Would you please tell me about your life as a woman artist, as if you were telling me a story; for example, when did your life as an artist begin, how did it progress, and what is it like for you now?

**Additional interview questions:**

There are a number of issues that have been identified in the psychological and educational literature as important to an understanding of women's and artists' experiences of

career. These include: (a) the impact of personal and family relationships on an individual's career; (b) traditional gender role expectations; (c) difficulty in assuming the identity of "artist;" and (d) sex discrimination that may interfere with women artists' access to training programs, financial resources (e.g., public or private grants), exhibition or performance opportunities, and appropriate employment. When these issues are addressed by a participant, I will use probes and other active listening skills to explore them. For example, if a participant brings up the subject of children or childcare responsibilities I could respond as follows: "You mentioned how important your children are to you, could you tell me a little bit more about how you think your relationship with your children and your role as a mother has affected your artistic career?" Also, if in the course of the interview a participant has not described what the term "career" means to her, I will ask her to do so.

The following are questions that will be asked of each participant if she has not covered these areas in the process of telling her story:

- How do you view your experience as an artist now?
- How do you view yourself as an artist in relation to other artists that you know?
- How do you view yourself in relation to the nonartists that you know?
- What meaning does being an artist have for you?
- What meaning does being a woman artist have for you?
- Where do you see yourself going from here in terms of your career?
- What exactly does the term "career" mean to you?

## APPENDIX H

### Timeline Analysis

At the end of the second interview each participant was asked to complete a timeline analysis exercise (Heppner & Johnston, 1989) to help focus her thoughts on the development of her career over her life course. In this exercise, each woman was invited to depict the progression of her life as an artist in graph form, indicating "high" and "low" periods and relating these to ages or stages in her life. Many of the women reported that they found this exercise to be very "interesting" and "revealing." Most of them also found it quite difficult to do because it required them to conceptualize their lives in a linear way (and some of the women prided themselves on being "non-linear thinkers"). As would be expected, the styles and content of the resultant timelines differed greatly. For the purposes of this study, the comments that participants made about the content and the process of the exercise were considered of more relevance than the timelines themselves.

**APPENDIX I****Participant Consent Form****(Re: Write-up of Study Results)****The Meaning and Experience of Career****for Women Artists**

This is to confirm that as a participant in the doctoral dissertation research conducted by Geraldine Brooks (Department of Counselling Psychology, University of British Columbia), I choose to be identified by the name of \_\_\_\_\_ (first name only) in the final write-up of Ms. Brooks' study.

I understand that in the final write-up or in any other possible use of the study results, I will be identified by the above name only.

Participant's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_