Community-based Art Making:
Examining the Experience
of the Artist, Participants, and Audience
in the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding Project

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the experience of a specific collaborative art making project for the participants, audience and myself, as the artist. The research, consisting of two overlapping phases, was conducted using a series of descriptive case studies. Phase one of the study consisted of the art project itself. Phase two examined the experience of the women involved in the project, the 'audience' of the work, and myself as the artist. Insights into the experience of community-based art making projects suggest important implications. Themes included the notion of mothering as a political act and the realization that art making outside of the cultural norm is expensive, undervalued and requires extensive networking skills.

Because this form of art making has not been traditionally valued, there is a paucity of related research describing the impact of this genre of art making on those involved. This thesis is built upon the belief that examining these experiences will both celebrate community-based art making and facilitate dialogue that may encourage and validate this type of work, ultimately to be able to enhance artistic practice in art education and to facilitate art education curricula that incorporate community-based art making practice.

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To my parents; I thank you for instilling in me the love of learning and the motivation to continually better myself. To my husband, Darren; I thank you for your involvement in and unwavering support of all phases of this project. To my children, Diane Jean and Noah; I hope I have been able to role model for you what being an active mother-researcher-artist-educator is all about--and how empowering it can be!

Chapter 1 Introduction to the Research Problem

and to the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding Project

This thesis describes my own involvement in an art making project, that seeks to create dialogue on the notion of extended breastfeeding with a number of breastfeeding mothers. The research, consisting of two overlapping phases, was conducted using a series of descriptive case studies. Phase one of the study consisted of *do-ing*, or operationalizing the art project itself. Phase two examined the experience of nine of the women involved in the project and of myself as the artist, as well as experiences in presenting the work to audiences. Because community-based art making has not traditionally been valued, there is only a small amount of related research describing the impact of this genre of art making on those involved. This thesis is built upon the belief that examining these experiences will help to validate and celebrate community-based art making, as well as to contribute to the dialogue in art education on the integral nature of artistic practice in art education and on the incorporation of community-based or socially-based art making practice in art education curricula.

Terminology

In this document, the term community-based art making is used. Community-based art making is defined as a method of artistic

production that engages professional artists and self-defined communities in collective collaborative methods of artistic expression. In community-based art making, the process of community dialogue used in developing and defining the project in the community are of equal value to the artistic outcome (City of Surrey, 2003).

Research Questions

This research was facilitated by three research questions;

1) What is the participants' experience in the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding Project? (i.e. how they became involved; highlights of our meetings; significant follow-up; reflection from mom of why she chose to collaborate; process of creating image; impact of actual images on participant)

2) What is the artist's experience in the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding Project? (i.e. process of creating image; impact of actual images on myself; reflections my experiences in the project)

3) What was the viewer/audience/society's experience in the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding Project? (i.e. What would happen if images and stories of mothers who chose to breastfeed past one year of age were more readily available in our society? Would this raise consciousness about this issue (known as extended breastfeeding)?

Would it create a language to be able to discuss the benefits and challenges of extended breastfeeding? Would it encourage mothers and their families to make a more fully informed decision?)

Why was this research significant for me?

This project was an intensely personal one. My initial intentions were not academic, persay, but based on pursuing a community-based art project that I could operationalize in my everyday life. I chose to research this project after reading theory about community-based art and after experiencing grassroots art advocacy in my everyday life, where I began to have questions about the challenges and benefits of pursuing this kind of art making. My worst fear with researching this project was that the focus would be taken away from the project, away from practice and onto theory. In fact, my initial draft of this thesis was an attempt to objectively and theoretically examine the Normalizing Breastfeeding Project, so much so that I lost the spirit of the project. I believe this version of the document balances the spirit of the project with the theory and research aspects.

Introducing the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding Project

In the Fall of 2000, I attended a series of parenting workshops organized by the local public health unit. At those sessions I experienced

a collaborative and supportive information sharing group on the topic of parenting issues related to the toddler phase. At one session, my then twenty-month old daughter asked to breastfeed. Not thinking much about it, we began to nurse. I noticed a small change in the room...not discomfort, per se, but a definite change in the atmosphere of the group.

I pondered this for several weeks, discussing the scenario with other nursing moms. I reviewed my personal beliefs and the research available on the benefits/challenges/cultural issues on breastfeeding for longer than one year. Although the research indicates nursing until at least two years old is best for both mother and child (e.g. Dettwyler, 1995; Granju, 1999; La Leche League, 1997), this is seen in our western culture as being abnormal. Women who choose to practice what is know as "extended breastfeeding" exist in large numbers, but tend to go 'underground'. I started to wonder what would happen if images and stories of mothers who choose to breastfeed past one year of age were more readily available in our society. Would this raise consciousness about extended breastfeeding and encourage more mothers to make a more informed decision? And what were my reasons for doing this as an artist? As a mother? And as a citizen and registered nurse interested in overall community wellness?

Originally I chose to explore this project as an independent artist, to

explore and respond to an area that I am trying to learn more about, as well as to celebrate mothers who practice extended breastfeeding by facilitating the telling of their stories through image and text. Initial discussions with Sandra Semchuk, a photo-based artist and faculty member at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design were helpful in delineating a focus and process. It was with the support and encouragement of my graduate supervisor, Dr Graeme Chalmers, that I chose to pursue this project for my MA thesis. It seemed a logical choice as it allowed me to explore the experience and impact of do-ing this kind of art making project; on myself as the artist, on the participants in the project, and on society/people viewing the project. In this project, *art* would be used to create a context for dialogue and as an *artist*, I would become an *educator and advocate* through the art work.

In June 2001 after obtaining approval from the UBC Ethics Committee, I 'officially' started the project by contacting local moms and agencies who were somehow linked to extended breastfeeding. Many of the contacts have come through other nursing mothers by word of mouth. My purpose was always to collaborate with a group of women who practice extended breastfeeding; to facilitate the women telling their stories. It was integral that the participants take an equal part in decisions around the composition and content of the images, and that

these images could have been about any aspect that they felt celebrated them as a breastfeeding mother (i.e. did not have to include images of the actual breastfeeding).

An important part of the process was to create a visual and narrative language--to inject these images and narratives into the public realm. I felt that using non-traditional exhibition spaces were the most effective; for example posters in bus shelters and billboards, postcards, as well as more contemplative public spaces.

Collaborative Process

When I first started talking with moms about how they would like to be a part of the project, lots of ideas circulated about ways they and other moms could be involved. Workshops? Giving the moms disposable cameras? Giving the children disposable cameras? How could I as the artist facilitate the moms and children telling their own stories? In the end I made the decision to perform most of the work myself, mostly due to feedback from the first group of mothers I canvassed about ideas of how to pursue the project. These mothers had indicated that due to financial and time constraints of mothers with young children, having the artist take the images and transcribe the narratives would be an asset. I was also concerned about the extra finances needed to pursue a study with more cameras, film and other materials, as well as renting space for group

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meetings. After these informal chats with the initial moms, I invited other women to participate through invitations (see appendix C) placed in agencies and groups where breastfeeding mothers attend. Interested persons were given the opportunity to discuss the project and my intentions, as well as to indicate their own ideas and feelings as to the process and eventual outcome of the project. Hence the project initially started slowly and very deliberately as a community-based collaborative process. My original plan was to interview approximately 30 women, all locally-based. However, although a great number more than this inquired into being in the project, I ended up working primarily with ten local women for the postcards, with a number of women joining as 'distributors'. Since a number of women from outside the lower mainland requested to be involved, I expanded the project to include this group, including the creation of a web-site and the decision to create art that could be easily mailed.

As will be outlined in Chapter 3, the research process included an approximately two hour audio taped interview and photo session, with the mother taking an equal part in decisions around the composition and content of the images and the final statement to be used with the artwork. I was the photographer in each of the sessions. The images could be about any aspect that the participant felt celebrated them as a

breastfeeding mother, and did not have to include images of breastfeeding. After developing the images and transcribing the interviews, I returned to the participant to jointly decide which images and text best represented their story. Many times, this discussion brought forth further comments or stories that could be included in the final artwork.

Chapter 2   Review of the Literature

A number of research areas have application to the operationalizing of this art project as well as the process of researching this specific community-based art making project. The first two sections relate to literature that informs the art project itself. Beliefs and literature underlying extended breastfeeding are explored in the first section, whereas the methodology utilised in the art project is explored through examining literature referring to multiple ways of knowing in the section 'Arts-informed Ways of Knowing: Visual Images and Narrative as Educational Strategies'. The third section examines the definition of community-based art. Finally, research and theory around the notion of examining practice is outlined.

Extended breastfeeding

In the history of breastfeeding, most women have been led to believe that the infant-feeding decision is merely a matter of personal inclination, and are unaware that breastfeeding is subject to commercial, economic, societal, and political pressures. Although many research studies find human milk superior to artificial formula (for example; Ferguson et al, 1987; Greiner, 1995; Horwood et al., 1998; Morrow-Tlucak etal., 1988; Rohde, 1988; Shu et al., 1999; Wrigley et al., 1990), the public information available on breastfeeding is typically insufficient and inaccurate, thereby

leaving many women and their families unable to make fully informed decisions.

While there is typically no question that children should be breastfed, the issue of how long they should be breastfed always provokes lively debate (Ward, 2000). In every culture there is an increase in mortality when breastfeeding ceases (Baumslag, 1995) because the protective properties of breastmilk continue to safeguard the child regardless of age. Once other food is introduced, the nutritional and social value of breastfeeding declines. In fact, the value of breastfeeding into or beyond the second year is often neglected, yet the number of pathogens a child is exposed to goes up as a child becomes older and more active. This fact is reflected in the World Health Organization's *Innocenti Declaration on the Protection, Promotion and Support of Breastfeeding* (1990, in Baumslag, 1995, p. 132), which states that;

> As a global goal for optimal maternal and child health and nutrition, all women should be enabled to practice exclusive breastfeeding and all infants should be fed exclusively on breastmilk from 4-6 months of age. Thereafter, children should continue to breastfeed, while receiving appropriate and adequate complementary foods, for up to two years of age or beyond. This child-feeding ideal is to be achieved by creating an appropriate environment of awareness

and support so that women can breastfeed in this manner. (p. 54)

As well, it is difficult to disentangle the emotional and psychological forces involved in breastfeeding (Jelliffe et al, 1978). Our attitudes toward breastfeeding are indicators of our cultural attitudes toward children, and whether a society promotes a child-centred environment or not. Should children be touched often and encouraged to enjoy the most intimate contact with their mothers, or kept at a distance in an effort to teach them self-sufficiency? Should children be comforted when crying or be left to exhaust themselves to sleep? Should children be put on a structured schedule or allowed to feed and sleep when hungry and tired? These child-centred notions have been contemporised in our western society through movements known as 'Attachment Parenting'.

Breastmilk substitutes can be useful, lifesaving devices, just as artificial insulin can save the lives of diabetics. However, the infant feeding issue is frequently misrepresented as one of individual choice between two parallel methods, the breast or the bottle, but the products are not equal and the true cost to society and the individual is seldom measured or mentioned. Women must have the right to choose how they will use their bodies and women cannot be 'made' to breastfeed. However, all women have the right to make an informed choice.

Ultimately, the entrenchment of a bottle feeding culture has

created obstacles for women to optimally breastfeed their babies; it is a culture in which breastfeeding is seen as being only a means of providing calories to a newborn. Public policy, institutional practices and negative attitudes towards breastfeeding have all minimized and undervalued the contribution breastfeeding women make to the health and well-being of their societies. Until recently, breastfeeding to three and four years of age has been common in much of the world , and breastfeeding toddlers is still common in many societies. Katherine Dettwyler, in her book *Breastfeeding: Biocultural Perspectives* (1995, p. 55) outlines the cultural context of breastfeeding;

> All of the evidence from our closest living relatives in the animal kingdom, the non-human primates, suggests a natural weaning age between two and seven years of age. Cross-cultural evidence from around the world suggests that two to four years of breastfeeding is typical of modern humans. The question "Is that child still nursing?" needs to be stricken from our conversations. Parents and health professionals need to recognize that the benefits of breastfeeding (nutritional, immunological, cognitive, emotional) continue as long as breastfeeding itself does, and that there never comes a point when you can replace breast milk with infant formula or cows' milk, or breastfeeding with a pacifier or teddy bear, without some costs to

the child.

Ultimately, however, women have been led to believe that breastfeeding is merely a matter of personal inclination, and are unaware that decisions about breastfeeding are subject to commercial, economic, societal, and political pressures.

In the next section I will review literature that speaks to the educational strategies employed in the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding project. In the process of designing the postcard art works to create a valid tool for promoting dialogue, other ways of knowing (specifically the visual and narrative) from the traditional text-based way of knowing were considered.

Multiple Ways of Knowing; Visual Images and Narrative as Educational Strategies

Modernist notions of a singular, text-based way of knowing have shifted to an acknowledgement of pluralistic ways of knowing in our post-modern culture. Under this new view, education is seen as a process of enabling persons to become different, to enter the multiple provinces of meaning that create perspectives (Greene, 2001, p. 5). Among these multiple perspectives are arts-informed ways of knowing; defined as the modes of experience brought into being by encountering or creating works of art (Greene, 2001, p. 6). Film, video, storytelling, novels,

performance, poetry, visual art, music, and photography are a few of the emerging genres in arts-informed education and research.

The arts provide rich opportunities for individual and collective meaning making. They provide a pluralistic approach to cognition and offer multiple entry points into concepts and ideas, and they can provoke individuals into newer, more complex understandings (Kesson, 1999). Curriculum theorists and philosophers of education such as Broudy (1988), Egan (1992), Eisner (1992), and Greene (1995) all argue that the cultivation of the intellect--the "capacity to generalize, analyze, and synthesize concepts" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 569)--requires the cultivation of the imagination. Learning through the arts instead of just about the arts is a very powerful tool in curriculum development and teaching practice.

The Visual Image as Educational Strategy : The symbolic language of visual art is not seen to be as accessible as text-based language even though images play a huge role in our everyday lives. Theorists such as Sandra Moriarty (1994) argue for the primacy of visual communication;

> I would like to suggest that visual communication is as much a primary system as verbal language, and that language based communication has been inappropriately privileged in contemporary Western culture. This is not to say that visual communication is more important, or language less so. The argument

here is that an equally important form of communication--visual

communication--has been ignored because of the strong emphasis

our culture and the academy have placed on language. (p. 35)

However, the semiotics of visual communication are a unique aspect of

the form and content of an artifact. There are many problems with this

conversion of artworks, which use visuals, into text; many theorists view

communication from the traditional reductive approach, as an objective

opposition between subject and object.

One of the great difficulties which results is that we tend to

approach the interpretation of images as if they can in a literal sense

be read. But we don't read images as we might read words on a

page. (Burnett, 1995, p. 59)

What does an image transmit? Barthes (1977) writes that meanings are

produced through the codes at work in representations and that while

meanings might appear to be natural, they are in fact constructed

through social and historical contexts; "from the object to the image

there is of course a reduction--in proportion, perspective, colour--but at

no time is this reduction a *transformation*. Certainly the image is not reality,

but it is at least its perfect analagon" (p.23). However, as argued by

Ellesworth (1988, 1990), images are not neutral carriers of content and that

they can be "ideological forms that inflect content with particular

meanings" (Kuhn, 1982). Burnett (1995) takes these notions further, positing that seeing and listening are only part of a process which links viewing to gender, ethnicity, class and sexual preference.

In the early 1970s, art historian John Berger made a series of programs for BBC Television called <u>Ways of Seeing</u>. In these and in his book, Berger (1972) considers how images make meaning. However, meanings do not reside in images; they are circulated between representation, spectator, and social formation (Kuhn, 1982).

The notion of the importance of visual images to the "creation of identity or the gathering and distribution of knowledge" has been addressed by Baudrillard (cited in Docherty, 1993), Debord (1967), and Duncum (2000) where visual images have become "so common they not only fuse with reality, but have also become reality" and lend authority and "truth" to specific aspects of our lives. Photography, as a process of image creation, seems in a unique position to re-present the reality of this sub-culture of women.

The notion of image as educational strategy has been explored by several theorists and researchers, as visual images have an inherent power to communicate meaning (De Bevoise, 1999). Elliot Eisner (in De Bevoise, 1999, p. 43) states that:

experience itself is rooted initially in a world of images. Ordinary

experiences are, in a sense, multimedia events that focus on images, and education shapes the way in which those images are experienced. The world that we occupy is a world of sight, sound, taste, smell, and it is an interactive world. It is an image-filled world, and without access to that world or without the ability to experience the qualities that constitute the world in which we live, I think no education could go forward. Images are at the core of education because they constitute the concepts that represent the distilled residue of experience. (p. 43).

Narrative as Educational Strategy; Narrative refers to the structure, knowledge, and skill required to construct a story (Gudmundsdottir, 1995). Bruner (1987) states that the mind is equipped with two modes of cognitive processing, paradigmatic (designed to develop propositions subject to empirical test) and narrative (designed to comprehend and develop stories). By using narrative form, we assign meaning to events and invest them with coherence, integrity, fullness and closure. When we place events drawn from our experiences within an order provided by narrative, we also invest them with a moral significance (Gudmundsdottir, 1995).

Narratives are a valuable transformative tool, as they allow us to understand the world in new ways and help us to communicate new

ideas to others (Clandinin et al, 1990). They allow us to discover new meanings by assimilating the experiences of others, by achieving close, empathetic, communal identification (Ong, 1982). In order for the narrative to exist, the reader must reconstruct the text; it is through this dialogue that experience is transformed into pedagogical content knowledge, defined by Gudmundsdottir (1995) as a practical way of knowing the subject matter.

This literature review has addressed literature focused on the operationalization of the art project. In the final two sections, I examine research that addresses the examination of the experience of *do-ing* this art project, specifically definitions of community-based art making and artistic practice as a way of knowing.

Community-based Art making

Art and art making play important roles across cultures. However, in the recent past, Western culture has valued a modernist approach to art making in which art is seen as only an object and the artist is seen as a transcendent individual who is separated from society. In contrast, postmodern approaches focus on the context/s of art making and the potential of art to transform socio-cultural values. The artist is seen as nurturing a connective aesthetic (Gablik, 1995) where the locus of creativity is based in dialogic collaborative, interactive and

interdependent processes (Irwin, 1999, p. 36). Gablik (1995) states "giving each person a voice is what builds community and makes art socially responsive. Interaction becomes the medium of expression, an empathetic way of seeing through another's eyes" (p. 82).

Over the past two decades this postmodern notion has also been reflected in art education, theorizing the need for a shift from a focus on the disciplines of the fine arts to a wider range of visual art and cultural issues, a focus coming to be known as visual culture studies. In his book Celebrating Pluralism, F. Graeme Chalmers(1996) asks the questions "What is art? What is it for? What constitutes good art? Who decides these things? By what standards?" (p.26) to examine traditional notions of visual art. He posits that if we look at an expanded and more inclusive definition of art making across cultures, we will find that artists can take many roles, as ascribers of meaning, ascribers of status, catalysts of social change, enhancers and decorators, interpreters, magicians, mythmakers, propagandists, recorders of history, sociotherapists, storytellers, and teachers (p. 35). This expanded view of art making is known as visual culture.

Community-based art making practice emerged in the mid-1970s, expanded in the 1980s, and some argue has become institutionalized in the 1990s (Felshin, 1995). Characterized by the use of public space to

address issues of sociopolitical and cultural significance, community-based art making seeks to encourage community or public participation as a means of effecting social change. Defined as "arts-centered activity that contributes to the sustained advancement of human dignity, health and/or productivity within a community" (Felshin, 1995, p. 5), community-based art making tends to be process rather than object- or product-oriented. It usually takes place in public sites rather than within the context of art-world venues. Most often, it takes the form of temporal interventions, and employs mainstream media techniques such as billboards, posters and newspaper inserts. A high degree of preliminary research, organizational activity and orientation of participants is often at the heart of its collaborative methods of execution (Felshin, 1995). Typically, a large base of support is necessary for long-term impact on the community.

Participation is at the centre of the community-based art making process. Individuals are empowered as they acquire a voice, visibility and an awareness that they are part of a greater whole. The personal thus becomes political, and change, even if only of public consciousness, becomes possible. With this kind of artistic practice, participation can also be a dialogical process that changes both the participant and the artist (Felshin, 1995, p. 12).

Traditional notions of art making tend to preclude the notion that good art, public service and community development are mutually exclusive. For those artists practicing community-based artmaking, there is a strong belief that artists and communities can partner to serve the public good and, most important, that the arts could be a powerful agent of personal, institutional and community change (Cleveland, 1998, p. 5). As well, a growing body of research supports their usefulness; improved economies, academics and self-esteem, the reduction of violence and recidivism and an increase in employment and community cohesiveness are among the outcomes that have been documented (Cleveland, 1998, p. 7).

Artistic Practice as a Way of Knowing

The triangle of educator, researcher, and artist is seen to be integral to the formation of an art educator in order to develop a well rounded scholar (Irwin, 1999), based on the three kinds of thought posited by Aristotle (In Sullivan, 2000); knowing (theoria), doing (praxis) and making (poesis). As researchers, art educators need to continually ask questions and seek answers; as stated by Dewey (1943, p. 55), "learning to teach *well* requires being conscientious students of our own practice" . As artists, art educators are focussed on the creation of artworks (e.g. Ball, 1990; Gablik, 1991; Pazienza, 1997; Szekely, 1978) where the pedagogue draws

on his or her own creative struggles, personal insights, and practical experience as an artist. Each of these aspects can inform and support teaching practice as art educators.

This thesis is based in the belief that art educators need to actively participate in, and can learn from, artistic practice. Hands-on artistic practice, or the creating of art, is the 'process of coming to know something--of meaning making' (Heck, 1998). Nadaner (1998) argues that artistic practice can be used to inform and extend theoretical ways of knowing (p. 168). Thorne & Hayes (1997) state that this experiential knowing process, known as praxis, is based on the spiral notion of reflection upon practice toward the refinement of theory and therefore the enhancement of practice (p.10).

Presently, many theorists have argued that each of these three ways of being as art educators has not been valued equally; 'text is privileged over vision, and discourse is privileged over presentation' (Nadaner, 1998, p. 179). As well, there is often a split between the theories of art education and between the actual practice of art education (Gude, 2003). If curriculum planning is based solely on one way of being, there is a risk that a unimodal curriculum will be developed, instead a postmodern approach in which a variety of approaches and positions can be seen as equally valid (Gude, 2003).

Summary

In this chapter, I have explored some of the theoretical foundations for the art making as well as the research phase of this thesis. In the next chapter, I continue a discussion about the underlying assumptions of this study as they relate in particular to the methodology of the research. In the chapters that follow, I consider the ways that the issues raised in this chapter arise in the experiences of the participants, audience, and artist of the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding project.

Chapter 3   Study Design and Methodology

This qualitative research is a series of descriptive case studies (Merriam, 1988; McMillian & Schumacher, 1997; Stake, 1995). The specific concepts being investigated in this study were the experiences of a specific visual art project by three groups of people; the participants, the artist, and the audience. Case study methodology allowed for an investigation of these concepts and for a presentation of the resulting data as rich or thick descriptions (Mason, 1996). Qualitative case study research can be used to explore the processes and dynamics of practice from a holistic perspective; defined as "an intensive holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon," the interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than in a specific variable, in discovery rather than in confirmation (Merriam, 1988, p. xiv). A case study approach is seen to be the best methodology for addressing these problems in which understanding is sought in order to improve practice.   This methodology has been chosen to achieve as full an understanding of the phenomenon as possible (Mason, 1998).

Using this framework, data has been collected primarily in the form of interview transcripts, and secondarily through observations (in the form of my visual journal) and documents (newspaper clippings). The focus on the interview allowed me to probe the participants' ideas, reasons,

experiences, and responses in order to determine their experience within the project. Stake (1995) indicates that "qualitative case study research is highly personal research" (p. 135).

Rather that working with one single case study, I worked with nine participants plus myself. Therefore this research is considered a collective case study (Mason, 1995). Although the obligation of case study research is "to understand this one case" (Stake, 1995, p. 4), a sample of a few cases provides an opportunity for observing differences and commonalities. This comparison can in fact extend the learning about the case and lead to greater understanding of a single case (Stake, 1995).

My own experience as related to the project and research was significant because I would need to be able to perceive, understand and interpret what was being said by the participants and audience. Stake (1995) indicates "we recognise that case study is subjective, relying heavily on our previous experience and our worth of things" (p. 134). However, the choice of a case study methodology, with good design related to maximizing reliability and validity, is reported to be suited to situations where it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context (Merriam, 1988, p. 10). My experience as a breastfeeding mother, art educator and artist can be seen as facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the groups under study.

Selection of Participants

After securing ethics review clearance at the University of British

Columbia, I initiated the research phase of the Normalizing Extended

Breastfeeding Project. Participants in the art making phase of the project

were self-selected from invitations placed in spaces and agencies where

extended breastfeeding is practiced (see Appendix C). Those

participating in the project were invited, as part of the first interview, to

speak of why this project had interested them and why they had made

the decision to call the researcher-artist. A majority of the participants are

breastfeeding mothers.

Data Collection

Data collection took place as semi-structured interviews (McMillan

& Schumacher, 1997) for the participants, and as field notes for the artist

and audience . Appendix B gives a list of questions that were used for the

interviews. This list of questions served as a guide to conduct the

interview(s); additional questions were asked as a result of the participants

responses. The flexibility offered by a semi-structured interview allowed the

pursuit of topics introduced by the participants, the clarification of

comments through further probing, and the delving more deeply into a

topic with additional questions; initial research questions may be

"modified or even replaced in mid-study" by the case researcher (Stake, 1995, p. 9). In this study, the research questions and therefore interview questions were more focussed by the end of the art project.

Permission was obtained from the participants at the beginning of the session to do an audio recording of the interview(s). Typed transcripts of the first interview were given to the participants at the second interview, such that they could make corrections, changes or additions. These transcripts were also used as a tool to facilitate further discussion.

The data collection was mostly in the form of the interview transcripts, but did include field notes (in the form of a visual journal) and the narrative and visual images used in the postcards that were used to facilitate further dialogue on the topic area. The data for the experience of the artist and the audience is determined from field notes written during and after the completion of the project.

Timelines

The ideas and initial discussions for the art project itself started in January 2001. However, the research study officially began in June 2001, after many of the details had been worked out and the ethical review was approved. Collaborations and interviews began in June 2001, with final decisions about the artwork format in October 2001. Most of the

interviews occurred during the summer of 2001, before the birth of my

second child in July 2001. Although I kept in contact with the participants,

during the period of July 2001 through December 2001 I was not focused

on this project, but on my newborn son. In January 2002, I purchased a

new printer and began to print out postcards. The design included an

image of the mother and child with narrative on one side of the card,

with a brief overview of the project, research questions, and contact

information on the back of the card (examples are found in Chapter 4:

Presenting the Data). The website was developed in February 2002. During

the period of January 2002 through October 2002, new participants, in the

form of postcard deliverers, joined the project. In October 2002, the

project was mostly wound down.

Role of the Researcher

My involvement in this study was that of a participant and observer.

I was acting in the role of "insider" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997), as a

full participant in the phenomenon of the study, but also as "outsider" as I

have attempted to objectively analyse the data gleaned from the

interviews. Qualitative researchers frequently cite personal or professional

experiences that enable them to empathize with the participants

(McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 413). As I describe in my own case

study, there were several occasions during the study when my past experiences allowed me to recognise subtleties in the participants' experiences. For these reasons, trust seemed not to be an issue.

Data Analysis

As this study employed a collective case study format, an early commitment to common topics facilitated later cross-site analysis (Stake, 1995, p. 25). Data has been analysed during the process of the life of the project, focussing on the period at the end. A preliminary data analysis took place following each interview, however the bulk of the data analysis has occurred after the project has completed. I have analysed the data by "inductively organizing the data into categories and identifying patterns among these categories" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 501). As this study presents several cases, data is gathered about each of the cases before examining common themes between the cases.

Upon completing the initial interview transcriptions, I re-read all the interview data, selected comments that related to the research questions, then wrote a summary note on the transcript. A similar process was taken for the field notes on the experience of the audience and artist. During the reading and summarization process, several themes

emerged. Sub-topics also emerged and were categorized according to those themes. These sub-topics were grouped to create a profile of each of the nine participants organized by the three major themes, and the "categories were grouped for synthesis and interpretation" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 509).

Reporting the data

Profiles, in the form of thematic reporting, are used in order to present the findings of this study. For each participant in the study, the raw data was organized into themes, based on the questions asked at the interviews and the research questions. Profiles are context-sensitive (Eisner, 1998) and are able to closely maintain the individuality of each participant (Stake, 1995, p. 126).

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in its generalizability. The participants are small in number, and the data is specific to these ten individuals. However, Stake (1995) stated that "the case is one among others" (p. 2) and that we study them "for both their uniqueness and commonality" (p. 1). Although qualitative case study methodology has been criticized for its limited generalizability, using a multisite case study can increase the transferability to other settings. In this way, case study research can "examine a specific

instance but illuminate a general problem" (Merriam, 1988, p. 139). In fact, Stake (1995) reminds us that we do not study a case primarily to understand other cases, and that our first obligation is to understand one case (p. 8). Providing 'thick' description in case study methodology increases the possibility of consideration of the findings to other cases, thus increasing its potential applicability (Merriam, 1988, p. 14).

The reliability of the study is limited by my role as participant and observer. However, the concern about observer bias in the case of the participant interviews was minimized by audiotaping the interviews and by verifying data via the interview transcripts with the participants. The reliability of the narratives constructed from my fieldnotes is limited, as it is based on subjective experiences and relies on the throughness, or lack thereof, of my note keeping. A second limitation is the use of a mostly unimodal method for data collection (i.e. interviews). Triangulation, in the form of more visual data and focussed interviews with myself and with members of the audience, would have enhanced the reliability of this study.

Chapter 4 Presenting the Data

In this section I will present data on nine of the participant mothers primarily based on interviews with the participants, supplemented by images and narratives of the mothers as created for the postcard artworks. Using a thematic reporting format, several pieces of data are presented for each participant; a brief introduction to the participant and her family; an image of the mother and child from the postcard; the story of how they became involved; highlights of our meetings; significant follow-up; reflection from mom of why she chose to collaborate; process of creating image; impact of actual images on participant.

Data is also presented on the experience of the artist and audience in the form of narrative reflections, based on field notes composed during and after the project in the form of my visual journal.

Profiles of the Experience of the Participants in the Normalizing Breastfeeding Project

Participant #1: Kathy and Lee

Kathy is a 42 year old PhD student in marine biology. Her family includes her husband, who has completed his doctoral work, and her son Lee, who was two years old at the time this project started. Kathy has strong beliefs in creating a child-centred environment and often speaks

of being inspired by the 'attachment parenting' movement. She strongly believes in co-sleeping/family bed, natural birth, organic foods, minimizing childcare.

Image 1: Kathy and Lee

How she became involved: Kathy and I met at the series of parenting groups where this project started. We developed a friendship over chatting at other parent and child activities on campus, even discussing swapping childcare at one point. She was part of my initial discussion about how this project could proceed, and was one of the first participants to be interviewed.

Highlights of our meetings; Kathy was my first participant. I visited her alone, neither of our children were there. We met for 2 hours; talking first and then creating some images. Two weeks later, I dropped off images and the transcript of our discussion to her home.

Significant follow-up; Kathy and I did not actually end up creating a postcard together. We lost touch when her husband was offered a post-doctoral position outside of the city.

Reflections from Kathy of why she chose to collaborate; Kathy spoke eloquently of how important breastfeeding was to her, especially as an older mother and a biologist. She spoke of being very aware of the social pressures to wean Lee as he grew older. She felt her knowledge base as a biologist has helped her to continue with breastfeeding, and her self-identification as "I've always been the sort of rebel in the family". She was pleased to be able to be involved in the project as it promoted something she sees as natural and healthy.

Process of creating image; Kathy and I created 15 images together; some with Kathy breastfeeding, some with Kathy and Lee playing and reading together. All images were taken inside with natural light.

Impact of actual images on participant; Kathy seemed to be uncomfortable at first. As this was my first time interviewing a participant, I was nervous as well. Kathy did not end up choosing one specific image

and narrative for the postcard as they moved away and we lost contact.

Participant #2: Farah, Zubin, Arman and Ruzbeh

Farah is a 36 year old woman with two children. She is a strong
health and wellness advocate with a PhD in Public Health. Her
background includes writing a book on midwifery, teaching at the local
school of medicine, and grassroots activism with natural birth and
parenting. Her husband is also an academic.

**Breastmilk is a most precious gift
we can give our little ones; it's
nature's perfect food... liquid love.**

Farah, mother of Zubin, 3 years

Image 2: Postcard Front for Farah and Zubin

How she became involved; Farah and I met at Toddler Story Time at the
local library in October 2000. She was bubbly and friendly, and her three-

year old son Zubin was intense yet shy. We connected immediately. She, a PhD graduate five years ago, with a strong knowledge base in midwifery and public health, and myself a fledgling masters student in art education. We quickly developed a strong friendship and spent long hours comparing notes about childrearing, mothering, and breastfeeding. We also shared a commonality of both being pregnant. She was a large part of the initial discussions of how the project developed.

Highlights of our meetings: We met for the interview in her home. We were alone, as her husband had taken Zubin out for a walk. We spoke at length about her experiences with breastfeeding and with political action about promoting breastfeeding. Her son and husband arrived at the end of the taped interview. We created images together--Farah was very specific that she wanted the act of breastfeeding to be the focus for the images. As she breastfed Zubin, he fell asleep. For the final three images, she asked if her husband could be included.

Significant follow-up: Our discussions continued almost every time we met, informally as friends, and formally in the interview follow-up. Farah took the longest time of all the moms to decide which image best represented her as a breastfeeding mother.

Reflection from Farah of why she chose to collaborate: Farah was very excited to participate as she saw the project as parallel to her beliefs

about breastfeeding;

"I'm always having to find ways to accommodate this need for bonding, especially because he is a little boy. I want him to have that real tenderness that he still has...loving and incredibly, incredibly tender as a little boy. I want that kind of energy to continue to be nurtured in him. That caressing softness that gets engendered by breastfeeding is going to encourage him to express his whole being, and not just his masculine self that our society encourages. He is such a boy in every way...anything I can do to encourage this softness...And I really feel that the breastfeeding encourages this...we live in this world that batters them emotionally at every stage, so whatever we can do to keep them strong and whole...and listening to their own self. Whatever examples we can set as parents are helpful..."

"I still keep meeting women who don't want to breastfeed...or just want to breastfeed for 6 months. I just find that so tragic...for all of us. It is just such a beautiful experience as a mother...to bond in a way that is impossible with any other experience. It is the most intimate way to be close to another human being...such a spiritual and emotional moment for both...It is the most precious gift we can give our children...nature's perfect food. Liquid love."

Process of creating image: It was very important to Farah that all the

images we created reflected her breastfeeding. We took 14 images of her in different positions breastfeeding Zubin on the couch. In the last three images she requested to have her husband present in the image.

<u>Impact of actual images on participant</u>: When we met again to discuss the images, she specifically chose an image with her full family present as it was important to her that she reflect the involvement of partners/family in the breastfeeding relationship.

Participant #3: Leanne and Oliver

Leanne is a mother who is also a practicing artist. At the time of the project, her son was three years of age, and she was seven months pregnant with her second child. She is very active in the International Breastfeeding Advocacy Group, La Leche League, and was in fact studying to be a leader. Leanne described herself as leading a very child-centered life. Her husband is a physician.

I breastfeed because I think it is the ideal form of mothering. I believe so strongly in that physical connection from internal to external...that breastfeeding is that link. That he gets to eat what I have made with my body...It goes into his body...that we continue that physical link between us. And it is a window for us to connect...physically just holding and touching...the value of touch. I feel so strongly about that.

Leanne, mother of Oliver, 3 years

Image 3: Postcard Front for Leanne and Oliver

How Leanne became involved: Leanne was informed of the project through another La Leche League leader. She was particularily interested being as artist herself, and had many great ideas about the progression of the project.

Highlights of our meetings; Leanne and I met three times. At the first interview, we were not able to create images, as Oliver had fallen asleep. We spent over an hour talking about her experiences with breastfeeding and her beliefs about tandem nursing (nursing two children at once). At the second interview, I brought my daughter. The visit was spent creating

images and watching the kids playing together.

Significant follow-up; Most of our follow-up was via email, as Leanne was busy installing two exhibitions and being a mom to her new daughter. As well, Leanne and her family relocated to Australia.

Reflection from Leanne of why she chose to collaborate; Leanne spoke passionately about her interest about being in the project; "I am actually quite political about my breastfeeding...I feel quite militant about breastfeeding. I feel I have a responsibility to stand up for my and Oliver's right to breastfeed".

Leanne spoke eloquently about her beliefs; "I breastfeed because I think it is the ideal form of mothering. I believe so strongly in that physical connection from internal to external...that breastfeeding is that link. That he gets to eat what I have made with my body...it goes into his body...that we continue that physical link between us. And it is a window for us to connect...physically just holding and touching...the value of touch. I feel so strongly about that.

Process of creating image; We took several images of Leanne playing with Oliver outside, looking at worms and running around the yard. The images created inside were more contemplative, with the dyad snuggling on the bed, sometimes breastfeeding, sometimes not.

Impact of actual images on participant; It was very important to Leanne

that we chose images of her breastfeeding. She felt they were beautiful, both because of the theme of the project and because of the composition and lighting of the images.

Participant #4: Nerissa and Waverley

Nerissa is a graduate student in Civil Engineering. She lives with her husband Ryan and daughter Waverley. She shares a paid position with her husband working with children's activities. Nerissa does not consider herself to be particularly political. Although she is passionate about breastfeeding, a large part of why she practices extended breastfeeding is due to her daughter's food allergies. Nerissa was told to continue breastfeeding as long as possible, as Waverley needed to be on a lactose free diet until 4 years of age.

Image 4: Nerissa and Waverley

How Nerissa became involved; Nerissa and I met through the neighbourhood children's activities. She expressed interest in the project as I described the underlying beliefs and process.

Highlights of our meetings; Nerissa and I met at her home. I brought my daughter to play with Waverly while we talked. Unfortunately, the children's activity was a bit distracting, but we managed. We created several images together, all inside using natural light.

Significant follow-up; Nerissa called me when she became pregnant with second child. She wondered about resources for tandem nursing and breastfeeding during pregnancy. I supplied phone numbers and sites on

the Internet that she could use to research these topics.

Reflection from Nerissa of why she chose to collaborate; Nerissa spoke of her beliefs about breastfeeding, especially in her culture;

"I do remember people asking me how long I was going to breastfeed, and I think at the time I said 'oh about a year, but we'll see...' but I hadn't really thought about it, so it was just to keep people happy.

L: Do you feel like you have some sort of a response tucked in the back of your brain for when people ask you about why you are still breastfeeding?

N: I don't really think about it that much, because a lot of our close friends know all about Waverly's allergies. So I think I do cop out a bit and sometimes do use that as excuse. I really haven't had that question come up that much. I did notice in Panama, my mother would use the allergy reason a lot. So if people asked me I would try not to use that excuse too. I mostly said 'Why not!'. I knew I wasn't going to convince anybody, so I wasn't thinking about the benefits of breastfeeding, and the closeness. A lot of people tend to focus on the nutritional aspects as opposed the closeness or the physical needs. "

Nerissa went on to state that " It makes me happy to think that my breastfeeding influences a lot of people so that when they have children its totally normal to breastfeed."

<u>Process of creating image</u>; Nerissa and I created several images together, some breastfeeding and some just playing and reading together. All were taken inside using natural light and natural poses.

<u>Impact of actual images on participant</u>; Nerissa felt very self-conscious, commenting she didn't like some at first. She ended up choosing an image of them playing together.

Participant #5: Heather and Clem

Heather is a registered nurse from the United States. Her husband is a musician. Together, they live in a funky section of the city in which this project took place. Heather proudly spoke of eating organic foods and practising a child-centred life.

Image 5: Blurred Image of Heather and Clem

How Heather became involved; I met Heather through a classmate at the local art college where I was taking a course.

Highlights of our meetings; At our first meeting, we met at her home with both of our children present. At first, we chatted inside while our children played with toys. We decided to go outside to the playground for the remainder of the meeting. In total, we spent about four hours together that first day. The second meeting took place in my home ; we visited for about an hour and then spent time playing with the images we had taken, by altering the images after they had been digitised.

Significant follow-up; Heather and I continued to correspond through email. She also visited me shortly after Noah was born, bringing snacks and a gift.

Reflection from Heather of why she chose to collaborate; Heather referred to her background as a health care professional as integral to why she chose to participate. She spoke of the benefits of breastfeeding; "I feel like it is helping...with the nutrients he might not otherwise get if he is not drinking cow's milk...

The main reason I do it is that its best for him and for me...I always have it with me. There are inconvenient things about it...but those sacrifices are well worth it.

I think it is a comfort for him. He settles down. Some things I've

read...there are different opinions and drawbacks. So I'm trying to follow my intuition and to set limits...do it in a way that is not taking away from him."

Process of creating image; Heather and I created both indoor and outdoor images, although the bulk were using natural light outside. Heather was particularly self-conscious.

Impact of actual images on participant; Heather was quite concerned about privacy. She chose an image of the act of breastfeeding, but we used the blur function of Photoshop software to make the image look less like her. She was also very specific that she bring the image home to discuss it with her husband first. For this reason, I never pushed her to create a postcard. Although I sent several emails to let her know about updates to the project, she did not let me know her decision about the image and story. Therefore, a postcard was not created for Heather and Clem.

Participant #6: Sheryl and Jacob

Sheryl operates a Montessori childcare centre in her home, along with her husband Stacey. Although they both worked outside of the home prior to Jacob being born, they made the decision to pursue paid work in their home in order to promote a child-centred lifestyle. They also

take in homestay students. Sheryl is very impassioned about

breastfeeding and natural parenting, although she is quick to state that

she herself was not breastfed.

Image 6: Sheryl and Jacob

How they became involved; After I posted an invitation on the local

parenting website, Vancouvermamas, Sheryl was one of the first people

to approach me about the project.

Highlights of our meetings; At our first meeting, an earthquake occurred

about 20 minutes into the interview! At the second interview, Sheryl,

Stacey and Jacob were all present, along with several of the children who were there for daycare. My daughter was also present.

<u>Significant follow-up</u>; Sheryl moved to another province, and although we corresponded via email, she did not make a final decision about the image and story she wished to use in her postcard. The last time we spoke, Jacob had stopped breastfeeding.

<u>Reflection from mom of why she chose to collaborate</u>; Sheryl was keen to share her beliefs about breastfeeding; "For me the biggest thing with breastfeeding him, from day one but especially now that he is not as fragile, calming effect of nursing. Priceless.

"I have to listen to me, not everyone else. And as every day passes, I get stronger and stronger with that feeling that people try to give me advice and criticisms. I let it go in one ear and out the other, because I know what is best. Before I used to try to convert people, I was trying to teach them. But now I don't even give people facts. I just say 'this is what is right for me, its between Jacob and me'. I just put the energy into doing it.

It changes so drastically when he gets older. He is here, but his feel are two feet past my body...he takes up the whole couch. Its strange. You don't <u>see</u> pictures of three year old boys nursing from their moms. You see pictures of moms cradling their babies as they are nursing."

He is a totally different child on the days he does not have his nursing and cuddle time in the morning. And I think 'what would I do if I didn't have breastfeeding'...he would be such a different child. I think there are profound differences between children who are breastfed and those who are not. I sometimes feel sorry for the women who gave up early in trying to nurse, I think they have missed out on something. We're still breastfeeding and he is three, so we must have done something right! If someone would have told me I would still be nursing Jacob when he was three, I would have told them they were crazy. But its amazing how much your life changes when you become a mother. Everything just changes so drastically. I can sort of understand why people without kids, it is totally a different world. But I expect people with kids to understand. The work relationship makes it more difficult to breastfeed. You really have to want it.

When he is sick, I just know that I have this super-food that you just can't get anywhere else. And its good for your self-esteem and well-being to know that no one can make anything better than what I am just making naturally. And knowing that he will be getting over his cold quicker is amazing..."

Process of creating image; Sheryl was quite shy about having her image taken. Alhough we had discussed the process beforehand, she became

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a bit flustered and stated she needed to have a shower. All images were taken inside her home, using natural light.

Impact of actual images on participant: Sheryl was very pleased to see the final images. She did comment on the natural light and how it emphasized the calm nature of the images. A postcard was not created for Sheryl and Jacob.

Participant #7: Erica and Kea

Erica is a student living with her husband Jamie in a rented house with friends Keri and Riley, who also chose to be a part of this project. Although Erica had only been breastfeeding for eight months, she was very keen to be involved in the project.

I used to see toddlers breastfeeding, and thought it looked really strange. I couldn't imagine me doing that, but now that Kea is a toddler herself, I can't imagine NOT breastfeeding her!
She's still my baby!

Erica, mother of Kea, 14 months

Image 7: Postcard Front for Erica and Kea

How Erica became involved; Erica and I met through Vancouvermamas website. She had also heard of the project through the La Leche League meetings she was attending.

Highlights of our meetings; Erica and Keri met in their home with our children. We talked and watched our children play for a while. We retired to the kitchen to create images, as this was where the most natural light ocurred. Afterwards, we walked to the local community centre to attend a La Leche League meeting together.

Significant follow-up; Erica was always very keen to participate, emailing me for updates. She was the first to allow me to put her image on the project website.

Reflection from Erica of why she chose to collaborate; Erica spoke of the normality of breastfeeding in her own life, and how she wished this for other mothers; "When I was pregnant, Jamie's mom was sending me articles about how there are so many chemicals in breastmilk that it is best not to breastfeed. I sent her articles right back pointing out that formula made with pesticide water is not any better than breastmilk with pesticides. Breastmilk is still better. It is interesting how any negative thing about breastfeeding and all of a sudden formula is better."

Process of creating image; Erica was very keen to create images and asked that they all reflect the act of breastfeeding.

<u>Impact of actual images on participant</u>: Erica was very pleased with the images produced, and chose an image that showed her and Kea obviously engaged in the act of breastfeeding.

Participant #8: Keri and Riley

Keri is a single mother, living with Erica and her family (see previous profile) in a rented house. She had also only been breastfeeding for eight months, but was very keen to be involved in the project.

Over the last two years breastfeeding has provided me with a few challenges and more cherished moments than I could ever have imagined. It has made me question some beliefs and strengthened others. Above all it has helped me form an unbreakable bond with my beautiful daughter. Through all the changes and milestones that have occurred from newborn to toddler the one constant has been those big blue eyes staring up at me from the breast.

Keri, mother of Riley, 22 months

Image 8: Postcard Front for Keri and Riley

<u>How Keri became involved</u>: Keri and I met through Erica (see previous profile).

Highlights of our meetings; Erica and Keri met in their home with our children. We talked and watched our children play for a while. We retired to the kitchen to create images, as this was where the most natural light occurred. Afterwards, we walked to the local community centre to attend a La Leche League meeting together.

Significant follow-up; Keri moved out of the home she shared with Erica and we lost touch for awhile. We finally reconnected and created the postcard together.

Reflection from Keri of why she chose to collaborate; Keri also spoke of how important the breastfeeding relationship was to her as a mother; "In my mind, I assumed everybody wants to breastfeed. It was never a decision about whether I would breastfeed or not. I find I make assumptions that everyone is breastfeeding."

Process of creating image; Keri, like Erica, was very keen to create images and asked that they all reflect the act of breastfeeding.

Impact of actual images on participant; Keri, like Erica, was very pleased with the images produced, and chose an image that showed her and Riley obviously engaged in the act of breastfeeding.

Participant #9: Jennifer

Jennifer is a advocate for natural living and social justice who lives

in a city in the southern USA. She is not a mother, but states she hopes to be in the future.

How she became involved; Jennifer contacted me through the project website after she had stumbled upon it.

Highlights of our meetings; Jennifer joined to help distribute postcards. She was very enthusiastic and offered to help pay for the mailing costs. significant follow-up--Jennifer emails me on occasion to ask for more postcards and to let me know of other social justice causes I may be interested in.

Reflection of her experience of participating;

"Hi Laurel,

Just wanted to let you know I've been giving out the cards and "forgetting" them in the ladies' restroom, the ballet studio where I take class, my voice teacher's house (who's gay, but I thought, what the heck, every person's acceptance counts) stuck just inside little nooks and crannies at the gas pumps. I leave them on the table in restaurants with my tip. I've even gotten my grandmothers to hang one on their fridges. Gave one each to my aunts, who really flipped out and were more uncomfortable than anyone I've ever seen. It's been fun. And I have to say quite intersecting to see what bf mommies are really up against. Not being one myself, I don't have first hand experience, but have heard

many stories. I just don't see what the big ruckus is.

I hope you've been receiving many requests for the cards. As you know, I've passed your email address around in hopes that a huge chunk of my friends and acquaintances will contact you and help pass the cards out. I actually only have a couple left. So I'd like to have some more.
Thanks again. This is a great thing!"

In this section, I have presented profiles of nine of the women who participated in the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding project. In the next section, I outline my own experience as the artist.

Narrative Reflection of the Experience of the Artist in the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding Project

In this section, I summarize my field notes that reflect my experience as the artist. Using the research questions as areas of thematic reporting, I present autobiographical data in several areas, including tangible artworks, finding an audience, the process of creating my image, the impact of the image on myself and my family, and impact on my personal ('insider') and professional ('outsider') lives.

Tangible Artworks

In order to create a visual language, the images and narratives of

the participants' extended breastfeeding experiences needed to be injected into the public realm. My original thoughts were to use similar methods to artists Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer, who created artworks with publicly displayed LED (light emitting diode) signs, posters in bus shelters and billboards, t-shirts, postcards, and even shopping bags. The ultimate goal would be to insert these images and narratives in public spaces. I had considered local community centres and the Public Library systems of the lower mainland as primary spaces to be used.

I felt the artworks to be displayed needed equal weight given to text and image, as well as being focussed on the entire experience of mothering. I originally considered two formats; works for installation on walls will be 11 by 17 on foamcore backs (posters) and portable works printed on postcards with an outline of the project on the back.

My final decision was to produce portable artworks that could be carried, mailed, or inserted in magazines. The art could be made in my own home as a part of my daily life. So I bought a printer with high resolution and postcard paper. I designed the back of the cards, then the front. I wanted to have some way to support the postcards informationally, but not to dominate the project. I therefore decided to create a website that would add to the process of the project. I was also approached to create larger versions of the postcards as posters--an

invitation from a local public health nurse--to put in the waiting room at her clinic. Ultimately I wanted the artworks to be tangible. Portable. Easy to place into public spaces. Like currency.
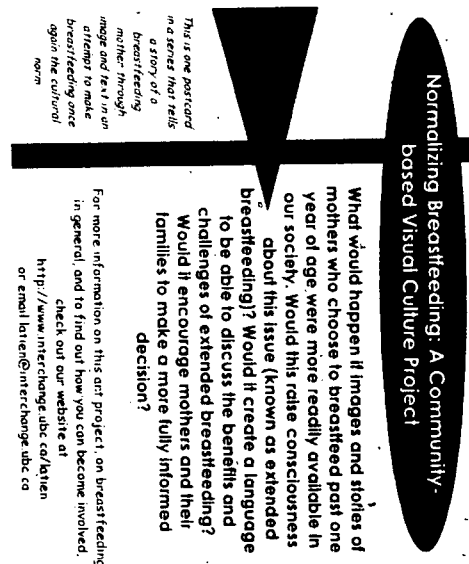
Image 9: Postcard Back

Finding an Audience

The process also included the dissemination of the artworks into the public realm. I wanted this to be as much a part of the collaborative process as the first phase, so I focussed on inviting participants (present and new) to hand out the postcards. Through similar channels to the original invitations to participate (see Appendix C), with the addition of the website, many 'delivery' participants emerged.

**Thanks for checking out
Normalizing Breastfeeding, the
Visual Art Project devoted to
making breastfeeding once again
the cultural norm.**

This website is a work in progress. If you have links or other resources to
contribute, please let us know at latien'a interchange.ubc.ca.

Visual Art that   Normalizing   Breastfeeding
Educates/Advocates   Breastfeeding   Information and
                            Project   Links

Questions, comments, want to get involved? Contact the
artist.

Breastfeeding Ring
[Join Now | Ring Hub | Random | << Prev | Next >>]

Image 10: Webpage Homepage

In May 2001, I submitted a proposal to exhibit this project as part of

the "Art Among Our Shelves" exhibition partnering the Surrey Public Library

System and the Surrey Art Gallery. If this proposal had been accepted, I

would have had $2000 to spend on the project. Other possible

partnerships included the Vancouver Regional Health Board Public Health

Programme. Due to time constraints and lack of funding, I was unable to

follow through on discussions to present this project to the Public Health

Nurses in the Children's programme. Partnerships which did materialize

were publicizing the project at the Guinness Record Breastfeeding

Challenge for World Breastfeeding Week in Oct 2002 and partnering with

Moms for Milk in Saskatchewan. Initial discussions with the Friends of

Breastfeeding Society included a separate project which involved

creating a calendar of images of breastfeeding women to celebrate

World Breastfeeding Week. This unfortunately did not materialize, due to changes in the Friends of Breastfeeding Society group structure and my lack of time for creating the images.

Ready . . . latch on!

On that command, women from over 120 countries tried to enter the Guinness Book of Records yesterday for the most babies breast-fed simultaneously. In Vancouver, at the University of B.C.'s Chan Centre, more than 135 moms from the B.C. Children's and Women's Centre took part in the campaign to raise awareness of breast-feeding's health benefits for babies.

Image 11: Newspaper Article on the Breastfeeding Challenge

I was also able to present this project at several conferences and to several groups of students in both my art education and nursing classes. Responses were varied, but most times ended with mothers who had experienced breastfeeding approaching me, eager to share their stories, triumphs and struggles. Incredibly personal stories of mothering and caring were shared as the classes left the room and the mothers were left sharing experiences. I felt I had helped to remove barriers and create a safe place to discuss these extraordinary/ordinary moments. I do not know for sure if anyone actually came to a different decision about breastfeeding as a result of being touched by the project. I may never

know. But it feels as though putting the energy out there to create a dialogue has been worth the effort.

**Personal ('insider') versus Professional ('outsider')**

I, too, shared an image and narrative of extended breastfeeding on the postcards. It was an integral part of the philosophy that I participate and role model my beliefs as part of the project as an 'insider'. The creation of the images for myself was in collaboration with my husband, who physically took the pictures while I guided him on what I conceived in my mind. We took images at several stages of the project (e.g. while I was pregnant, and after Noah was born) and in different situations. The image I ended up using reflected my belief that if I was to support these women in portraying themselves in the act of breastfeeding, I needed to do it myself. I therefore used the image of tandem nursing with my two children.

This project involved my whole life. It was not something I could put away in my studio and lock away. From using my own finances and resources to doing the project in the context of my everyday life, this project was done with my children/studies/teaching/etc all co-existing around me. I began to wonder about mothering as a political act; What is it to be a mother in our postmodern society? Before I had children, I

never thought further than mothering as just raising children...but here I was venturing into territory where I was mothering as a feminist activist and social contributor. Could mothering have a political agenda as well? One resource I determined was the Association for Research in Mothering (ARM), out of York University in Ontario. ARM is self-described as "the first international feminist organization devoted specifically to the topic of mothering-motherhood" with the mandate of "providing a forum for the discussion and dissemination of feminist, academic and community, grassroots research, theory and praxis on mothering-motherhood" (ARM, 1999). I also responded to a call for subjects for a research study at the University of British Columbia on beliefs about mothering. Taking part in this study also triggered me to reflect on my beliefs and values, and the dominant discourse about mothering. Through these experiences, I was introduced into the multitudes of perspectives in the writings and research of motherhood.

Impact of Images on Myself and My Family

There were moments that I felt uncomfortable at my body being portrayed on some of the postcards, but I continued to put forth my postcards as a role model for the project.
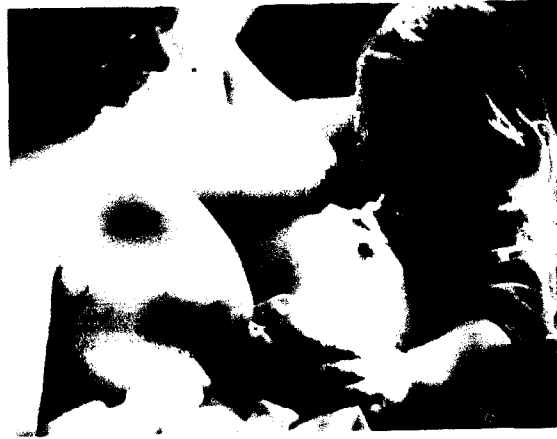
When I was pregnant with Noah, I wondered about nursing both of them at once. Would I feel 'touched out'? Would it help with the transition? I'm so glad I have done it...its wonderful to see the bond growing between them! ·

Laurel, mother of Diane Jean, 2.5 years and Noah, 3 weeks

Image 12: Postcard Front for Laurel, Diane Jean and Noah

My husband was always supportive of the image creation process and never questioned my final choice of image. He was very supportive of my desire to present an image of the act of breastfeeding on the postcard and on the website.

Ultimately, this visual art project sought to create a language through image and narrative to communicate and celebrate a subculture of mothers who choose to breastfeed their children past the "usual" 1 year age. Drawing from theorists who posit that a common language is needed to speak or conceptualise of a concept, and from

notions that especially visual images lend authority and "truth" to these concepts, I proposed that because there are few images of extended breastfeeding, this concept is not addressed in our day to day lives. In this art project, a visual language (which is seen in our present (western) culture to especially give authority) creates a context for dialogue. Through this process, images and the notion of breastfeeding past one year of age aspire to become "so common they not only fuse with reality, but have also become reality" (Debord, 1967).

In the final section of this chapter, I present data on the experience of the audience in the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding Project.

Narrative Reflection of the Experience of the Audience in the Normalizing Breastfeeding Project

I have no definitive answers to my research questions in this third area. I had no specific feedback from e-mails, the website, or the participants about people's attitudes changing. My only definitive feedback was the direct impact I experienced when presenting to groups of students, at conferences, or to potential new collaborators. When presenting to groups of people 'outside' of the project, I was struck by mothers (of any age of children) approaching me afterwards to share their stories of breastfeeding. Many stayed long after the presentation to chat and linger, long after the rest of the class had left. Had I created a

safe environment in which to share these stories? On two occasions, members of the 'audience' reported to be collecting information for family and friends who were trying to have children, or were currently pregnant. They seemed to be more engaged in the discussions of styles of parenting and dominant discourses of childrearing.

Often, however, the most feedback I received was from 'the converted'--mothers who already had strong belief systems in support of extended breastfeeding. I received regular feedback from women who just wanted to voice their support for the project; although I did not record specific numbers, these emails numbered in the hundreds. The project was passed on by word of mouth and email forwarding to several other breastfeeding advocacy groups, who in turn would email me for more information to give to their members. In short, the most impact I can determine for the 'audience' is for those who would consider themselves 'insiders'. It seemed to contribute to the momentum already present in the political breastfeeding movement.

Summary

In the preceding sections, I have presented data on the experiences of the participants, artist, and audience. Using thematic reporting, I have attempted to gain insight into my research questions. The next section attempts to interpret and discuss the data, ultimately drawing

conclusions and implications for teaching and for future research.

Chapter 5 Interpretations, Discussion, and Conclusions

As the data from this study were interpreted and conclusions were drawn, the three research questions were reviewed and used to organize the three sections of this chapter. The first two sections present conclusions about the experience of the participants and artist in the Normalizing Breastfeeding Project. The last section reflects the third research question, about the experience of the audience.

Interpretations

Experience of the participants in the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding Project

Five themes were identified from the data presented in the previous chapter; child-centeredness, defining self as a breastfeeding advocate, a belief in the normalcy of breastfeeding based on a knowledge base, beliefs about politics, and risk-taking.

All of the mothers in the study defined themselves as purposefully leading **child-centered lives**; for example, minimizing childcare, eating organic foods, co-sleeping, seeking paid employment that could be done in their home. They all saw breastfeeding as a logical part of this perspective on childrearing.

The majority of the participants in the project approached me to become involved. They saw themselves as having a strong belief system

about mothering and breastfeeding and were inspired to operationalise these beliefs. Most of the mothers **defined themselves as advocates** to the dialogue on extended breastfeeding. Many belonged to at least two breastfeeding groups and had a circle of friends who considered themselves to be breastfeeding friendly. They considered themselves to be highly informed about the issues surrounding extended breastfeeding and their **belief in the normalcy of breastfeeding was based on a theoretical knowledge base** (for example, a background in biology, midwifery, or public health).

Differing views were found among the participants related to **beliefs about politics**; a majority of the participants strongly defined themselves as becoming involved in the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding Project because of a desire to make a political statement. Stating such reasons as "being a rebel", "wanting to set an example" and "having a responsibility", several of the mothers were pleased to be able to operationalize their beliefs about breastfeeding through this project. A smaller number of participants declined to define their motives politically, choosing terminology such as "just setting an example". All of the mothers, however, voiced a desire to use the project as a way to put action to their beliefs about mothering and breastfeeding, and felt a positive boost to their self-esteem in the process.

Three of the participants specifically spoke of the **risk-taking** they felt in their experience of participating in the project. One of the mothers chose to alter her image based on her discomfort, as well as needing to confer with her partner about the image she chose.

Experience of the Artist in the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding Project

Six themes were identified from the data presented in the previous chapter; immersion, role-modelling, ebb and flow, mothering as a political act, and technical challenges.

The notion of **immersion** was a theme that arose from the data. As the artist in this project, I lived many of my roles simultaneously and created the project on a daily basis, instead of the Western notion of creating works alone in a studio space. From going to the playground with my children and happening to meet potential collaborators, to participating in a research study on mothering that impacted my reflections about what it is to be a mother-artist, to role modelling my beliefs about what it is to be a mother/artist/researcher, each area of my life impacted on the others to fuel the learning/research/creative process.

The theme of **role-modelling**, or operationalizing/ do-ing my beliefs inherent in this project was another thread woven throughout the data. I

would proudly breastfeed in public. I would try to promote a more child-centred environment by bringing my children into my art project and research. In role-modelling artist as researcher and artist as change agent, I presented to my groups of art education and nursing students, as well as colleagues in each of those areas. I was trying to live the art process on an everyday level.

The project gained and lost momentum at many points in the project, and I had to come to terms with a natural **ebb and flow** within the project. For example, when my son Noah as born, most of the aspects of the project took a backseat to the mothering role. Another example was finances; as a graduate student with two children, my husband and I simply ran out of money to fund the film, website, postcard paper, printer, stamps, etc. so the project coasted again.

What is **mothering**? What is my style/beliefs about mothering? Living this project has enabled me to examine and reflect upon my beliefs and values about mothering. Do mothers act politically? Is it possible, as Green (1999) states, to live feminism through mothering? To actively participate in one's childrens' lives and proudly value the work one does as a mother, as well as educating and politicizing those around her as she role models her beliefs about parenting is an incredible feminist statement.

The last theme I will draw from this data is related to **technical**

challenges. I determined many aspects of community-based art making that I had not known before; that community art is expensive, and that if I had had more funds, the project would have been entirely different; the stress and impact the project had on my family; and the importance of networking at the grassroots level.

Experience of the Audience of the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding Project

Two themes were identified from the data presented in the previous chapter; the creation of a 'safe' environment to disclose their challenges/feelings, and the lack of clear data on whether the project created informed consent or dialogue.

Although it was clear that the 'audiences' I engaged with were impacted by the images and stories of mothers who practiced extended breastfeeding, I did not get a clear idea if any of the individuals had actually **changed opinions.** The project seemed to be based on a sense of faith or hope, instead of teaching and role modelling.

However, mothers who had breastfed seemed to be inspired and comforted by the images and stories present in the project. Mothers stayed well after the presentation to approach me to tell their stories and to **disclose their challenges/feelings** around mothering and

breastfeeding.

Discussion

In examining all the interpretations from the themes present in the data, several areas prompt further discussion and analysis; the organic nature of the project, clarity of intentions, the nature of the audience, and role-modelling.

Organic Nature of the Project

The experience of community-based art making is necessarily cumbersome, messy and slow. For each of the three groups identified in the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding project, the experience was a living process without clear answers and outcomes. The literature indicates that one of the elements in successful arts-based community development is understanding that there are no shortcuts to participatory artmaking (Cleveland, 1999), and that each community's cultural, social and political ecology is unique. Process, rather than product, is a focus; "even though it takes ten times more energy to find consensus and get things done, the results make the journey worthwhile". Relationships and partnerships are central to community-based art making projects . This is reflected in the literature associated with community-based art making projects, which indicates that effective community-based work is about

partnership (Cleveland, 1999), and that productive collaborations tend to be initiated from within the community itself.

Clear intentions produce better outcomes.

Because this project began very deliberately and slowly as a community-based project, I was sharing control of this project with the participants. Initially, I did not have a high degree of clarity about the roles of the participants and the overall anticipated outcomes or artworks of the project. Cleveland (1999) indicates that social, economic, political and artistic goals are not necessarily incompatible; "while their combining increases the complexity of the work, the potential for extraordinary outcomes on all fronts may be raised exponentially. All this makes the work far more demanding" (p. 10).

Insiders versus Outsiders; Who IS the audience?

Although the audience was defined initially as those 'outside' of the project, this line became blurred as the life of the project unfolded. Those who considered themselves to be 'insiders', or advocates of breastfeeding, ended up being as much viewers of and therefore affected by the art works. These newly defined audience members seemed to appreciate the underlying beliefs of the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding project as a way to further the political momentum already

present in the system.

Operationalizing/Role-modelling Beliefs on Breastfeeding

Although the participants had differing views on whether they considered their motivation to participate in the study to be political or not, all of the women perceived themselves to be acting congruently with their beliefs on extended breastfeeding. Mothering was a strong theme for both participants and the artist; that being a part of this project furthered more than just breastfeeding, but the entire cause of mothering.

Conclusions

This chapter utilises the three research questions to interpret the data reported in chapter 4. The meta-themes of the organic nature of the project, clarity of intentions, the nature of the audience, and role-modelling are raised again in the discussion section. In the final chapter of this thesis, I summarize the findings and discuss the impact on art education theory and practice.

Chapter 6 Summary and Implications

The findings from this research project provide information about the specific experience of this community-based art making project. My intent and hope is that this information has been richly presented to allow transfer of these insights to other similar situations in community-based art making and in the incorporation of community-based art making in art education curricula. In this chapter, I will attempt to summarize the research findings, through an examination of the success of the project, the potential impact on art education, and through a proposal of areas of potential further research.

Was this project successful?

In terms of the Normalizing Extended Breastfeeding Project itself, I believe that it was only moderately successful, due to challenges outlined earlier in this document. I am unsure if it really made an impact on those on the 'outside' of the political breastfeeding movement, but I believe I have presented data that indicate that the project did impact the lives of 'insiders'.

Why is this research significant for Art Education?

This research sought to impact art education in two ways; to describe the experience of community-based art making and to

contribute to the dialogue about the incorporation of community-based art making in art education curricula.

This research contributes to the dialogue concerned with researching practice, as well as the dialogue on defining community-based art making. There is a long history of the arts creating awareness of social issues and leading to social change, but in Western society the arts have been mostly equated with entertainment and celebration. Recently, issues such as the environment, poverty, and human rights are becoming increasingly recognised as important issues in art, and art educators and artists are using art to address social issues and to create new forms of art. Exploring the issue of 'why' we make art strengthens the links between the arts and teaching for social justice, making them logical partners in the classroom (Lopez et al., 2002).

Although many educators are personally committed to the notion of teaching for social justice, the operationalizing of this in the classroom can be challenging. Having the language and narrative to be able to discuss the experiences of creating community-based art making can facilitate the breaking down of some of these barriers and therefore the inclusion of more of this kind of art making into the classroom setting.

Application to Art Education Teaching Practice

Many art educators believe that the social is critical to the understanding and knowing of art; "the social is part of how we come to know art and should be a part of how we teach art"(Garber, 2002, p. 162). However, operationalizing these beliefs in the classroom can be challenging. There is often a split between the theories and beliefs of art education and between the actual practice of art education, where curriculum is a mere recitation of what has been, rather than an exploration of what can be (Gude, 2003). Many art educators argue that educators are "imaging their curriculum within the style, content, and methods of their earlier education, rather than reflecting the reality of contemporary art and their own understandings of contemporary culture" (Neperud, 1995).

The teaching situations for art teachers today are very different from those of even a decade ago. Changed circumstances both within and outside schools have brought new pressures to bear on teachers and students alike. Single parent families, problems with drugs and alcohol, racial tensions, and poverty are but some of the social variables defining the circumstances in which many children grow up today (Neperud, 1995). Children and youth experience not only physiological and maturational changes in "growing up," but also the social influences of their diverse environments. Teachers see the result of these influences in

behavior that doesn't always coincide with their formal education preparations and goals (Duncum, 1990).

Utilizing approaches and examples from community-based art making practice can facilitate the students, who typically narrowly define the field of art and believe themselves to be locked outside the boundaries of the discipline, to question underlying assumptions about what an artist does (Smith-Shank, 1995). This opens up new possibilities of understanding how artists and the arts can play active roles in shaping environments in which we live and work.

Suggestions for further research

Although there is some research focused on the practice of community-based art making by art educators (for example, Miller (2002), there needs to be more study on the experience of these artist-educators and how this art making impacts their teaching practice. Research that utilises a similar methodology to this study, but examines the experiences of educator-artists would be a useful addition to the literature. I propose this methodology be triangulated with visual, interview, and narrative data. This would allow for the visual language of these educator-artists to be utilised, to allow for a broader variety of ways of knowing.

In this chapter, I have attempted to summarize the research

findings, through an examination of the success of the project, the potential impact on art education, and through a proposal of areas of potential further research.

Overall Summary

The purpose of this research was to investigate the experience of a specific collaborative art making project for the participants, audience and myself, as the artist. The research, consisting of two overlapping phases, was conducted using a series of descriptive case studies. Phase one of the study consisted of the art project itself. Phase two examined the experience of the women involved in the project, the 'audience' of the work, and myself as the artist. Insights into the experience of community-based art making projects suggest important implications. Themes included the notion of mothering as a political act and the realization that art making outside of the cultural norm is expensive, undervalued and requires extensive networking skills.

Because this form of art making has not been traditionally valued, there is a paucity of related research describing the impact of this genre of art making on those involved. This thesis is built upon the belief that examining these experiences will both celebrate community-based art making and facilitate dialogue that may encourage and validate this type of work, ultimately to be able to enhance artistic practice in art

education and to facilitate art education curricula that incorporate

community-based art making practice.

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Appendix B

Interview Questions for
Initial Interview Sessions

Please note that these questions are used in an open-ended interview process, where the purpose is to elicit the collaborator's narratives, or stories about their breastfeeding experience.

1. What are some of your stories about breastfeeding?

2. What are some of the highs and lows of your breastfeeding experiences?

3. Why do you breastfeed?

4. Who are your major supports for extended breastfeeding?

5. How long do you plan to breastfeed?

6. What do you foresee for the future of your breastfeeding experience?

7. Do you have anything to add to what we have already spoken about?

8. What brought you to be involved in this project?