Creative Labors: The Lives and Careers of Women Artists

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A qualitative study investigated the meaning and experience of career for 8 women between the ages of 40 and 65 years who identified themselves as artists and whose primary career pursuits were in the visual, performing, or literary arts. The question that guided this phenomenological investigation was: What is the meaning and experience of career as it is lived by women artists? Three in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant over 2 years. Detailed analysis of the interview transcripts identified 9 common themes in the lives and career development of these women artists. The implications of the findings for career theory, counseling practice, and research are discussed.

With the dramatic growth in the number of women participating in the paid labor force in North America, social and economic realities have necessitated a revisioning of women's occupational roles and workforce participation. Indeed, in the 17 years since Fitzgerald and Crites (1980) asked, "What do we know? What do we need to know?" about the career psychology of women, theorists have paid considerable attention to mapping the contours of women's career development (e.g., Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Gustafson & Magnusson, 1991; Larwood & Gutek, 1987; Marshall, 1989; Walsh & Osipow, 1994). Career theories are now being developed that are more sensitive to the distinct sociocultural realities that shape and circumscribe the work roles and experiences of women—theories that serve to expand our notions of career beyond paid employment to include the diverse roles and activities in which women engage across various life domains (Betz, 1991; Osipow, 1991; Swanson, 1992). Through

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in-depth analyses of the lives and careers of particular groups of women, a richer and more complex understanding is also being formed of the development, challenges, and joys inherent in the lives of women as they attempt to pursue their life's work. (Bateson, 1989; Chester & Grossman, 1990; Gustafson & Magnusson, 1991; Stohs, 1992). Just such an in-depth exploration and analysis of the lives and careers of one group—women artists—is the focus of this study.

Historically, women have been involved in many different roles in the arts, most typically as educators, volunteers, benefactors, and audience members. In recent years, however, increasing numbers of women are electing to pursue careers as creators of art. In Canada, the arts labor force currently comprises about 200,000 individuals including visual artists, musicians, product and interior designers, dancers, actors, writers, and editors. Of these, 45% are women, an increase of 390% in the past 25 years (Statistics Canada, 1993). American estimates reflect similar proportional increases in women's involvement as creators of art.

At the same time, the (limited) scholarly research available as well as personal lived accounts of women artists suggest that pursuit of a career in the arts may be particularly difficult for women because of a variety of factors. Barriers to success for women in the arts include (a) recurring unemployment, career interruption and instability (McCaughey, 1985; Noble, 1987); (b) low pay and frequently intangible rewards (Sang, 1989); (c) the traditional association of artistic roles with men and the corresponding devaluation of women's artistic career pursuits by self and others (Bepko & Krestan, 1993; McCaughey, 1985); (d) difficulty in balancing competing personal, relationship, and familial roles and obligations (Chicago, 1977; Kavaler-Adler, 1993; Sang, 1989; Stohs, 1992); and (e) pervasive sex discrimination in the arts world, which makes it difficult for women artists to get appropriate training, recognition, and adequate financial recompense for their work (Chicago, 1977; Kerr, 1985; Noble, 1987, 1989; Sang, 1989; Wyszomirski, 1985). Wyszomirski also noted that the prevalence of age discrimination in many facets of the arts "can detract from the acceptance of women as being creative, productive, or exciting once they past 40—at just the time when years of study, development, and reputation-building place them at, what is for men, the threshold of enduring success, acclaim, and stature" (p. 10).

Given the apparent vicissitudes of an art career, it is perhaps surprising that so many women are turning to art as a central focus of their creative labors. It seems important to ask, therefore, how women artists negotiate selecting and pursuing a career path that, although compatible with their abilities and interests, is fraught with economic, structural, and systemic barriers. Consistent with the recommendations of many career theorists and researchers (e.g., Chester & Grossman, 1990; Gallos, 1989; Gustafson & Magnusson, 1991; Larwood & Gutek, 1987; Marshall, 1989; Richardson, 1993), a phenomenological/narrative approach (Cochran, 1990; Colaizzi, 1978) was used in this study to examine the lived experience and meaning of career for eight women artists. The research question that guided this qualitative inquiry was the following: What is the meaning and experience of career as it is lived by women artists?

METHOD

Critical to any qualitative research endeavor is the need for the researchers to make known their presence and to examine and clearly articulate their biases and presuppositions (Harding, 1987). We are both affiliated with a major Canadian university in research and teaching capacities and are also involved in clinical practice. As scholars, we identify ourselves as feminists and are specifically committed to enhancing psychology's understanding of women's experiences and women's understanding of their own lived reality.

Participants and Procedure

The participant group comprised 8 women artists between the ages of 40 and 65 years. An "artist" was defined as any manifestly creative woman who (a) identified herself as an artist (e.g., as a writer, poet, painter, actor); (b) considered the pursuit and practice of her own art to be a major value and primary life activity; (c) considered herself currently active in her chosen artistic field; and (d) considered her role as an artist to be her primary career. Age 40 was chosen as a minimum age requirement to involve participants in mid- or later-life who could provide some perspective on their experiences of career over their life span.

The participants were two painters (47, 65 years); one painter and musician (58 years); one potter (56 years); one fabric and mixed-media artist (46 years); one multimedia artist, writer, and composer (40 years); one writer (40 years); and one actor and storyteller (46 years). All of the women were Caucasian and from working to upper middle-class families. Five of the women identified themselves as heterosexual, two as lesbian, and one as bisexual. Five of the women were in committed relationships (two of these were mothers with dependent children) and three were single (one of these women had a dependent child; the other two had grown children). All of the women had some postsecondary education. Six of them had arts-related college or graduate-level degrees, one had a master's-level business degree, and one had pursued post–high school training in her field through private instruction. The number of years each woman had worked in her respective artistic field varied considerably. Six of the women had embarked on art careers after high school or university (although four of these six subsequently experienced major interruptions in their art careers). The remaining two women did not pursue art careers until adulthood. All of the women had chosen art as a career by the time they had reached their mid-30s.

Participants were recruited through letters and posters sent to various local arts associations and galleries and to the creative and performing arts departments of local colleges and universities. Volunteers were assessed for inclusion in the study through a telephone interview. Ten women initially responded to the call for volunteers. Eight women met the aforementioned criteria and became participants in the study.

The data sources for phenomenological research are verbal or written accounts of personal experiences, with the interview being the most common means of gathering data (Osborne, 1994; Van Manen, 1990).

In this study, data collection involved three in-depth tape-recorded interviews with each participant, all carried out over 2 years and conducted by the same interviewer (Brooks).

The first interviews were largely unstructured and ranged in length from 90 to 160 minutes. During this initial interview, each participant was given an opportunity to reflect on and describe her experience of her career as a woman artist. Participants were asked by the interviewer to "tell me, in as much detail as possible, about your life as a woman artist, as if you were telling me a story; for example, when did your life as an artist begin, how did it progress, and what is it like for you now?" The interviewer attempted to follow the narratives of the women as they reflected on their lives and careers. Empathic reflection was used to deepen the participants' self-explorations. Gentle probes were also used to explicate the meanings of the issues raised by the participants. The interviewer took care not to lead the participants' descriptions in order to avoid introducing researcher bias.

The second interviews were conducted approximately 8 months after the first to allow adequate time for interviewer and participant reflection. Each of these interviews lasted an average of 2 hours. Before the second interview, each participant was sent a copy of the transcript of her first interview to review. The second interview allowed each participant to elaborate on the material she had discussed in the first interview and to add any new information or insights that had occurred to her since the last meeting. The second interviews were then transcribed and analyzed in detail.

The third interviews were conducted approximately 15 months after the second interviews and lasted about 1 hour each. The purpose of these was to validate the thematic descriptions and common story that had been drawn from the previous data-gathering interviews. To conclude the validating process, each participant reviewed the findings to check how closely the themes and story fit with, and accurately reflected, her own lived experiences. The results were further refined based on the feedback from these interviews.

Data Analysis

We used three approaches to data analysis in this study. First, basic descriptive information was collected to provide summary profiles of the participants. Some of this information was provided by the participants at the time of the first telephone contact. Additional information emerged during the interviews. Second, we followed Colaizzi's (1978) method of phenomenological inquiry to structure the analysis of the interview data. This process involved our repeated, intensive examination of the data to identify common experiential themes that accurately represented the lived experiences and meaning of career for this group of women artists. Once we had grasped a sense of the whole for both sets of interviews, we reexamined the interview transcripts to extract significant statements. We then attempted to articulate or formulate the meaning of each significant statement. This step was repeated for all of the transcripts. In some cases, the meaning of the women's words was explicit, whereas

in other cases it was implicit. The process of articulating any implicit meanings was delicate and painstaking and required that we develop an intuitive as well as a literal understanding of the content of each transcript. Listening to the audiotapes also helped to deepen the analysis. Next, we organized the aggregate formulated meanings identified from the various transcripts into theme clusters. Here we attempted to identify themes that were common to all of the participants' descriptions. Ultimately, we identified nine common themes. At this point, we referred once again to the original transcripts to validate the themes. As previously noted, descriptions of the common themes were also validated by each of the participants. Third, we supplemented Colaizzi's method with a narrative approach (particularly as described by Cochran, 1990, and Cochran & Claspell, 1987) to identifying the storied nature (or fundamental structure) of the data.

Internal reliability was addressed through the review and confirmation of all theme descriptions by a third coresearcher familiar with phenomenological methodology. External reliability was addressed by involving another independent researcher who reviewed two sets of interview data, extracted numerous constructs (i.e., themes), and then confirmed that these constructs were congruent with the descriptions of the nine themes and the common story that were generated by the original researchers.

RESULTS

The Themes

The nine themes described in the following sections were identified in the data analysis as being common for all of the participants. Although we attempted to differentiate the experiences described in the various themes as accurately as possible, the themes are not completely discrete. Some theme descriptions may overlap slightly with others, and sometimes descriptive information provided by a participant could possibly illustrate more than one theme.

Theme 1: Sense of being an outsider. The theme of being an outsider had two interrelated aspects: a sense of marginalization and a sense of alienation. Marginalization involved the women's experiences of being set apart from others (e.g., socially or economically) and was both externally imposed and self-imposed. Alienation involved feeling lonely, misunderstood by others, or disconnected from others. Such feelings usually resulted from the women's experiences of marginalization, whether or not that marginalization may have been visible to others. Most commonly, participants had the sense of being outsiders in situations in which they believed that their values or life experiences were different from those of significant others in their lives or from those they saw as representative of "normalcy" or the status quo. All the participants reported having the sense of being outsiders in many different relationship areas in their lives. These areas included family, friends and colleagues, other women, general society, and the established art community. The sense of being an outsider was exacerbated by the lack of what the women

felt to be appropriate mentors and role models throughout their lives.

The women experienced "life on the margins" as both problematic and rewarding. Although they often felt hurt, disappointed, or angry at their social position as outsiders, that position also afforded them freedoms that they saw as being denied to non-marginalized individuals. In some cases, the women also identified their outsider status as a source of creativity and delight. For example, Susan (painter, age 47) saw benefits in her marginalized position. She reported the following:

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

The coping strategies used by the participants to deal with their experiences of being outsiders included efforts to distance themselves from others, to fit in with familial and social norms, and to find "kindred spirits."

Theme 2: Sense of validation through external recognition. All of the participants discussed the importance of being validated by others, that is, being recognized, accepted, and supported by others. This experience involved the women's sense of being externally validated both for themselves as unique individuals and for their artwork. Both intangible and tangible forms of validation were influential in shaping the women's self-perceptions and life choices. Intangible forms of validation usually involved attention and praise from significant others. Tangible forms of validation usually involved financial remuneration for their work. Overall, when the women had the sense of being seen and valued as artistic individuals, they felt encouraged and motivated to pursue their interests. When they did not experience such validation, they felt discouraged and lacking in self-confidence. One of the participants, Marilyn (fabric and mixed-media artist, age 46), emphasized that in her experience, validation from others could be instrumental in shaping the work and the life of an aspiring artist:

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

Theme 3: Sense of being obstructed. This theme related to the participants' sense of being obstructed by others, overtly or covertly, from pursuing their art and developing their careers as artists. Their experiences of being obstructed ranged from relatively mild (e.g., disapproving comments by others) to more severe (e.g., blatant sex discrimination). The emotional responses of the women to such experiences ranged from self-doubt and discouragement to extreme anger. The women felt obstructed by the attitudes and behaviors of others in a variety of circumstances: with family members, in soci-

ety in general, and in the established art community. The thread that connected the women's disparate experiences of feeling obstructed was the limiting effects of gender role socialization. For example, Alice (potter, age 56) described the double message she had received from her parents, especially her mother, about her artistic accomplishments. She believed that her parents' message to her was both that "I could do anything and was smart enough [to do anything]" and "that I should keep my place . . . my mother would often say, you shouldn't have too many shows because you're having more shows than [your artist husband and] . . . getting more attention." Having a wife's career take precedence was considered highly inappropriate in her family.

Theme 4: Sense of being torn between the needs of self and others. The essence of this theme involved the women's sense of being torn between their own personal needs and desires and the needs of others as they struggled to meet the demands of their multiple personal and work roles. The women's conflicts in this area were most noticeable in relation to their families, to the commercial art market, and to other work venues. Whatever the women's individual living situations, all of them put a high value on personal relationships. They consequently felt most torn when struggling to balance their need to have time alone to do creative work with the needs and expectations of significant others. This was especially true for the mothers in the group. One of the mothers, Elizabeth (painter, age 65), reported that she would consistently allow herself to be interrupted by family members when she was working because she felt her "motherly and grandmotherly side" was so important to her family. At the same time, she was acutely aware of "the conflict between being a mother and being an artist" and how, because of that conflict, she felt inhibited from being "creative in different areas" and restricted in time and energy from taking on the commitments of large-scale commissions and exhibitions. Elizabeth, like all of the women in the study, expressed a wish to have full, rich lives that reflect a healthy balance between work and relationships.

Theme 5: Sense of connection and belonging through art. This theme involved the participants' desire to connect with others through art and their sense of satisfaction in the experience of that connection. There are three main aspects to this theme: (a) the women experienced a sense of meaning through sharing their creative work with an appreciative audience; (b) they experienced feelings of "comfort" and "belonging" through associating and working with other creative individuals, especially other women artists; and (c) they experienced a sense of satisfaction and reward in connecting with others through teaching. Diana (painter and musician, age 58) especially emphasized the interactive aspect of showing her work. In her view, an artist's work is a highly personal statement of her self and her dreams and to share that work with an audience is to reach out to others in a very intimate way. She stated, "I feel strongly that artwork goes into the soul of . . . the viewer." Diana also reported that it was not until she started working closely with other women artists that she fully recognized her potential as a painter and felt really encouraged to develop new aspects of her creativity.

Theme 6: Sense of struggle to assume the identity of artist. This theme concerns the women's sense of struggle to adopt the identity of "artist." For all of the participants, the development and claiming of their creative identity was a long-term, multifaceted, and often difficult process. This process had four major interrelated aspects. The first involved the women's inhibitions about including themselves in an occupational group that they greatly admired. The second involved the women's fears that they did not possess either the requisite talent or credentials to legitimize their claims to be artists. The third involved their doubts as to whether or not they met internal and external criteria for the label of "artist." Finally, the fourth involved the women's inner conflicts about the appropriateness of their career choice in terms of gender role behavior. The process of the women's creative identity development was challenging in part because of the lack of role models in the arts. Often the women were able to feel comfortable with their identity as artists only after they had redefined the label "artist" for themselves. For example, Alice (potter, age 56) said that her sense of identity shifted in midlife when she understood that being an artist

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

Theme 7: Sense of self-determination. The sense of self-determination experienced by participants was composed of subphenomena including independence, freedom, resistance to rules and limits, self-confidence and self-trust, and optimism about the future. All of the women highly valued independence and freedom of choice in their lives. They enjoyed feelings of being in charge of their destinies and resisted relationships or environments in which they felt that their freedom was restricted. As Sarah (writer, age 40) indicated: "I have never been happy with the strictures of a 9-to-5 job." Rather, she said that she relishes "the freedom to write as I want to . . . It feels so free that no one can tell me how to be. There's no code for writers."

The women's sense of self-determination was closely tied to a sense of trust in themselves. They all described the importance of having achieved a level of confidence in which their personal evaluations of their own career success outweighed the standards and judgments of others. Furthermore, they all shared to some degree the conviction that they could shape their lives as artists and as women. A basic issue confronted by all of the women as they forged their career paths was how to reconcile the necessity of earning money with the pursuit of personal and artistic freedom. Each woman made a unique decision about this matter, but all of them ultimately chose to give priority to freedom. Given the women's strong sense of self-determination and their perceived ability to make satisfying life choices, they generally approached their futures with a strong sense of optimism.

Theme 8: Sense of being a pioneer. The sense of being a pioneer related to the women's experiences of breaking from traditional familial, social, and gender roles to create unique life paths. This theme was closely associated with Theme 7, but differed from that theme in that the sense of being a pioneer more particularly involved risk-taking behavior and the seeking-out of new experiences in both the personal and the professional realms. The feelings that most commonly attended the sense of being a pioneer were fear, excitement, and pride. An area in which many of the women demonstrated a particularly pioneering spirit was in their resourceful approach to career management and generation of income. The women repeatedly showed that they were capable of surviving and thriving as independent artists through very creative means. For example, early in her career Carol (multimedia artist, writer, and composer, age 40) entered beauty contests specifically to raise money for her art studies. Later, she started her own small business, unique in its field, "because that was the easiest way to get employed" and to support her various creative projects.

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

Theme 9: Sense of harmony between self, art, and career. This theme reflects some of the deepest feelings and convictions held by the participants about their careers. All of the women connected the choice of an art career to their sense of identity and considered the production of artwork to be a manifestation of their core life values. Despite the myriad of internal and external obstacles the women had encountered over the course of their careers, a major factor that kept them on an artistic career path, or drew them back to it when they had drifted away, was the sense that to be an artist was the most direct expression of themselves as creative individuals in the world. There are three main aspects to the sense of harmony between self, art, and career experienced by the participants: (a) an art career enabled the women to experience a deep and satisfying sense of congruence between their sense of themselves and their work; (b) the production of art gave them a sense of meaning and purpose; and (c) the women experienced their lives as artists to be a source of joy and pleasure.

Melanie (actor and storyteller, 56) expressed these sentiments particularly strongly. She stated that "I seem to get the most meaning out of my life and feel the most satisfaction if I am engaged and have committed myself and thrown myself into something." She expressed a deep "passion" for her work and said that she would feel "slightly ill" if she was not performing. For her, being a performing artist

> means, on a very simple level, that I am satisfied, that I feel full, I feel content, I feel at home with myself and expansive. It makes me open to

> the world. And when [my desire to work is] not getting fulfilled or when I feel off-track with it in some moments, then it's a shriveling inside me and its physically uncomfortable and it puts a pall on life. It shadows everything.

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

The Common Story

The career histories of the eight women interviewed for this study naturally contain some individual differences. At the same time, a common story of the experience of becoming and being an artist did emerge from the women's narratives. That story begins with the women's creative exploration and identity struggles in childhood and adolescence. It continues with their career experimentation in young adulthood, during which time the women experienced the challenges of giving voice to their artistic creativity while balancing their work with other important life roles. Finally, the women's careers crystallized in midlife in the consolidation of their identities as artists and in their feelings of satisfaction with the lives and careers they had created for themselves.

DISCUSSION

In the following discussion, the key results of this study are interpreted in light of what is already known about women artists' career development. Recommendations for counseling practice and for future research with this distinctive occupational group are also provided.

Many of the current findings are consistent with those of other researchers in the field. For example, as in previous studies on gifted and talented women (e.g., Fredrickson, 1986; Kerr, 1985; Perrone, 1986), the participants in this case were impeded early in their career development by a lack of familial and social support for art as a "legitimate" career and by the absence of female role models and mentors in the arts. Also, each of the participants felt constrained by social and economic barriers inherent in the "structure of opportunity" (Astin, 1984) of the arts world and by the difficulty in making space for their artistic work amidst competing role demands, especially the demands involved in raising and supporting children. Stohs (1992) had similarly identified that parenting responsibilities can contribute significantly to patterns of career discontinuity for women artists.

Sex discrimination emerged as a particularly salient factor in the participants' career development. The women perceived the arts milieu to be very much a "man's world" and described both overt and covert sexual harassment and discrimination that had prevented them from receiving recognition and support for their work. Although such struggles might be interpreted as a reflection of a more traditional social climate during the years that this particular cohort of women were starting out in their careers, gender role conflict and sexism continue to be identified in the literature (e.g., Kerr, 1985;

Noble, 1987, 1989; Sang, 1989) as serious impediments to the career development of gifted and talented women.

The area in which the current results may shed the most new light is on the process of women artists' creative (i.e., artistic) identity development. The nature of that process and the degree to which the women's creative and personal identities were interconnected is particularly notable. For the women in this study, creative identity development was a long, difficult, and nonlinear process, often involving intense feelings of illegitimacy, self-doubt, guilt, and resentment. Indeed, their young adult years were characterized by the struggle to define themselves as artists and to find a satisfying occupational vehicle for the realization of their creative and artistic passions. A serious consideration for the women at this stage in their lives (especially those who had become mothers) was the economic "impracticality" of an art career.

The women's middle years involved a different type of struggle. By their late 30s, each of the participants had entered a period of professional and personal transition that significantly changed her relationship to her work. This transition phase was often tumultuous, sometimes painful, and typically involved the women setting new goals for themselves and taking new risks in their work and other life roles. Ultimately, however, each woman emerged from this challenging phase with a clearer sense of herself as an artist and as an individual and with a confirmed sense that pursuit of an art career was central to her identity and to her fulfillment. In Holland's (1985) terms, each participant had at this point achieved a true sense of vocation. This finding also recalls both Super's (1951, 1990) conception of career as an implementation of the self and Gottfredson's (1981) emphasis on the importance of internal variables such as "job-self compatibility" and personal values in individuals' choice and experience of career.

As part of this midlife transition, the women all adopted very personal and subjective criteria for career progress and success that often bore little relationship to how these concepts have been understood in some of the more traditional career literature. For example, several participants reported that their sense of identity and legitimacy as artists was strengthened when they consciously shifted their focus from the *products* of their creative efforts to the *process* of making art. Some of the other positive changes experienced by the participants in their middle years were an increased sense of freedom, mastery, inner strength, and life satisfaction. These are similar to midlife changes described by other researchers (e.g., Albert, 1992; Schuster, 1990; Sheehy, 1995) who have studied creative women.

Another noteworthy finding is the extent to which each of the participants perceived her work and her life as an artist to be highly meaningful and purposeful as well as pleasurable. The intense nature of the women's involvement with art recalls Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) descriptions of optimal or "flow" experiences, which he theorized are an important contributor to individuals' ability to make meaning of their lives. Contrary to the common perceptions of artists as "troubled geniuses" and "psychologically tortured" souls (Jamison, 1993, 1995; Kavaler-Adler, 1993; "Madness, creativity

linked," 1995; Rothenberg, 1990), the results present a strong impression of the participants' collective well-being and happiness. These women did not suffer because of the demands of their artistic and creative passions. Rather, they struggled with very real structural and psychological barriers to pursuing a career path that was consistent with their interests, desires, and abilities. Their creativity was a vital thread in their lives, not a burden. In fact, the women seemed to experience their greatest difficulties when they were engaged in life roles or occupational pursuits that may have been considered by others more legitimate, socially appropriate, or economically viable, but which did not provide an adequate vehicle for the creative expression of their own artistic talents and abilities.

Furthermore, the women's experience of a fuzzy line between their various life roles and between their ideas of work and play (and between work and "nonwork" activities) was a major factor in their career and life satisfaction. The women explicitly discussed the connections between the various roles in their lives (e.g., artist, teacher, and mother) and the fluidity with which they often moved between those roles. For example, they typically expressed satisfaction in bringing an artistic sensibility to bear in many different aspects of their lives. Indeed, some of the women talked about seeing the creation of art and their role as artists as integral to all their life experiences, including the creative process of mothering. For this reason they generally disliked the term *career* because they perceived it to refer to a narrow and rigid conceptualization of work that they believed did not apply to their lives as artists.

Such results reinforce the utility and timeliness of explorations into the nature and meaning of work for women (e.g., Chester & Grossman, 1990) and recent challenges to accepted definitions in the career literature of concepts such as "work," "nonwork," and "career" (e.g., Richardson, 1993). It may be that to formulate a theory that would adequately reflect the realities of the lives of women artists, as well as other creative and talented women, the notion of what constitutes and differentiates each of these three concepts needs reexamination. The participants in this study emphasized identity, commitment, and passionate involvement with their work in their descriptions of their lives as artists. The women did not restrict their sense of their careers or their sense of work to any external or institutional structures. In that sense, each of their careers could be characterized as "boundaryless" (Bird, 1994) and also as a deeply rewarding and individualized "path with a heart" (Mirvis & Hall, 1994). In combining both passion and purpose, the careers of the women artists in this study eventually resulted in tremendous joy and life satisfaction for each of them, despite the vicissitudes of the early and middle years of their career development.

COUNSELING IMPLICATIONS

The lack of quality guidance counseling has been cited as a major concern in the vocational development of gifted women (Walker, Reis, & Leonard, 1992). There is clearly a need for well-informed counselors to help ease the way for artistically inclined women and girls,

so that they might negotiate or avoid some of the more difficult obstacles on the path to becoming an artist and realize life satisfaction from their careers.

Perhaps most important, counselors who work with women artists need to recognize the long-term natures of creative and personal identity development and to validate and support their clients' struggles in these areas over time. Although some career theorists (Phelps, 1991) have encouraged counselors to help gifted and talented young women toward early resolution of their identities, in order to provide a framework for the development of post-college vocational plans, the results of this study suggest that identity resolution for many artistically creative women may not occur until midlife, when the most intense demands of child rearing have subsided and women are more able to turn their attention to the realization of other creative labors.

The results of this and earlier studies also suggest that counselors could best serve the needs of artistically inclined women and girls if they address with such clients some of the distinctive issues that women artists may face as they attempt to forge a career in the arts. For example, the finding that the participants believed they lacked appropriate career role models suggests that counselors could assist women artists by addressing—either individually or in a group format—the negative effects of the absence of such role models in their lives. Counselors could also assist women artists by helping them to identify role models in their present environments, by referring them to literature by or about other women artists, or by encouraging them to make contact with other artists in comparable life situations.

It is important for counselors to recognize the very real struggles that women artists may experience in attempting to reconcile the demands of supporting themselves and their families with the realities of being members of an economically disadvantaged occupational group. The participants in this study often found themselves conflicted in their desires to be true to themselves and their work, while at times feeling like they had to "sell out" by producing work "on demand" for customers or galleries, just to survive economically. Counselors can play a vital role in helping women artists become "heroes of their own stories" (Noble, 1989) by exploring alternative ways to ensure their own and their families' economic survival—for example, through income-generating activities such as tutoring or teaching—without having to compromise their commitment to their art. Women artists may also benefit from some pragmatic exploration of ways in which they can balance work and family issues (Stohs, 1992), including literally and figuratively dedicating a space for their creative work, and from support for the validity of making their art as well as their children a priority in their lives.

In addition, women artists who rely primarily on outside sources for employment (e.g., actors and dancers) may require special help in managing their careers. Counselors who work with artists should make themselves aware of resources that may be available in their communities to help such individuals. For example, two programs that address the special needs of artists in career transition and

that have been described in the counseling literature are a program for actors (Ormont, 1989) and one for dancers (Pickman, 1987). Both of these programs offer individual counseling focused on helping performers change their careers and "renew their sense of purpose in life" (Ormont, 1989, p. 109) when they are no longer able to work in their chosen artistic field.

When working with creatively talented clients, counselors need to be cognizant of the very real gender barriers to the pursuit of an artistic career for women and need to help artistically gifted girls and women to name sex discrimination when it occurs, to locate the problem outside of themselves within a social context of sexual inequality, and to find ways to cope with and overcome such obstacles in their pursuit of a career in the arts (Wise & Stanley, 1987). Given the social and financial exigencies of an art career, counselors should also explore with women artists, or aspiring artists, issues connected to creative identity, achievement and status needs, personal definitions of success, financial expectations, commitment to the long-term process of artistic career and identity development, and the emotional and practical realities of an art career.

Finally, counselors should be aware of the terminology that they use with their artist clients so that they do not unintentionally contribute to the alienation so commonly experienced by members of this occupational group. It may be that a woman will be more drawn to discuss her "life as an artist" and a sense of "being an artist," rather than her "career as an artist" or a sense of "having a career" as an artist.

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