

RE-MATRICULATION IN THE STUDIO ARTS: WHAT ARE THE PERCEPTIONS
OF MID-LIFE NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS IN GRADUATE FINE ARTS?

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ABSTRACT

A current phenomenon in higher education is the ever-expanding numbers of adults pursuing Post BA instruction. The present study considered the phenomenon of re-matriculation within the narrow framework of the studio arts, identifying threads of art-making interlaced with mid-life identity themes. The resulting collage of individual reflections on self and art sheds light on a shared essence of the human condition related to tapping into the aesthetic core in the adult years, a timeframe traditionally associated with application of skills rather than schooling. The contemporary issue raised here focused on several components, namely that these re-matriculating adults were still questing for a venue of self-expression and were interacting with a social frontier that among other things offered them a second opportunity to access institutions of higher learning with the purpose of exploring their creative gifts. From the rich tapestry of narratives came tales of self-reflection perhaps common to us all.

INTRODUCTION

The narrative accounts of the participating artists are an amalgam of individual storied realities in which mid-life adults were seeking to ‘attend to’ their lives through honoring the thread of art-making and art-thinking. As adults pass through mid-life, many hold up for review their life accomplishments and guiding perspectives (Edelson & Malone, 1999; Gibbs, 2005; Huitt, 2004). This was true of myself and as I took on the vestige of researcher for this study, it seemed I also took on serious introspection. My geographic life moves piloted my encounter with the phenomenon and my layered notions of the world determined the perspective from which I sought to comprehend it. The opportunity to investigate a perceived reality represented for me the luxury of graduate study but it has also represented a singular life opportunity for self-awareness.

Undertaken as a scholastic endeavor, the study slowly became an important tool of learning not only about the sphere of the phenomenon, but also about serious communication and how the individual interacts within the context of his/her referential surroundings. The fact that the investigation was a lengthy multi-faceted process gave authenticity to living within one’s framework of multiple and sometimes conflicting realities. The fact that the investigation was articulated through delving into a collective whole of descriptive accounts of experiential consciousness—the consciousness of others but also the consciousness of one’s own responses to and interpretations of the collected accounts, rendered the study a formidable investigation of the socially contextualized

self. The fact that the very nature of the prolonged investigation called for a substantiated conclusion gave significance to a concreteness of form and the decisive marking of the termination point. However, within these sturdy confines, the colorful flow of vague, fleeting, confused ideas was rich and abundant, thus making this doctoral research journey an exciting, exacting, exploration of possibilities—in short, an aesthetic experience.

The Research Question

The research question was: Re-matriculation in the Studio Arts: What are the perceptions of mid-life (+40) non-traditional students in graduate fine arts? The sub-questions were: (i) Was re-matriculation in the studio arts lived as a quest, and if so, what are they searching for? Are these mid-life adults still searching for a venue of self-expression? (ii) Why have they returned to campus? (iii) Why have they returned to the fine arts?

The Research Area

A current phenomenon of interest in higher education was and continues to be the ever-expanding numbers of adults pursuing post BA instruction (Weinstock, 1978; Cohen 1998). The research looked at the phenomenon as it occurred within the framework of a graduate program in the Fine Arts. The study sought to identify particular threads of motivation and self-reflection during transit through graduate level courses among a participant group of older (40+) non-traditional graduate art studio students as they reflected on the meaning of art in their lives, the choice to continue their arts education in

mid-life, and how their art-making and art-thinking may have been interlaced with personal identity issues.

Educational literature was limited with respect to scholarly research on art-making as a tool of re-definition. Many explorations and texts did site the phenomena but were inclined towards individual accounts of healing and life stories of artists (Congdon, 2000, 2005). Other recent articles had contemplated the efforts of some mid-life adults, especially women, as they changed careers and sought to exercise their individuality (Barton, 2005; Gibbs, 2005; Kennedy & Vaughn, 2004). The research area connecting mid-life to education to the arts was thought timely and had the possibility of adding to a distinct area of educational studies in higher education focusing on adult education, non-traditional students, and arts education area specific research on studio arts practice and the arts can be transforming (Barrett, 2000; Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 2003; Weintraub, 2003).

The Researcher's Role

In mid-life I shifted realities. I was not actually aware that I was re-inventing myself but in truth, perhaps spurred by a need for a “new, less traditional aging scenario” (Cavigioli, 2005), I did indeed re-define myself logistically, professionally, and perhaps internally by jarring a bit of that inner amalgam in the process. After more than two decades of absence I returned to the United States leaving behind an established existence and a university teaching post in Europe. To re-orient myself within the setting, I returned to academia, switched educational area to arts education, thus, becoming myself an older

non-traditional student. Although not formally enrolled in the MFA program, one incentive for returning to school was the prospect of taking studio courses in the Fine Arts, this spurred by an intent on addressing the long ignored artist harbored within. Among the people I interacted with in the studio courses were numerous mid-life MFA candidates and post BA graduate students who had re-matriculated for various reasons but who seemed to be re-defining themselves beyond the realm of professional development. In fact, upon listening to some of these mid-life art students as to why they had re-matriculated in a costly, time consuming, and emotionally taxing life course program, career related statements were seldom raised, instead, comments were riveted towards “effortless mastery”, “enhancement of artistic ability”, “self discovery”, and personal enrichment.

I, the researcher, met the participants in the higher education setting. All had returned as mid-life (over 40) re-matriculated graduate students in the studio arts. *The details varied but the agency of their efforts was similar.* And it was here that the question arose: “What are their stories?” which led to the more refined research question of “What are the perceptions of these re-matriculating mid-life adults?” with sub-questions:

- (a) Is re-matriculation in the studio arts a quest, and if so, what are they searching for?
- (b) Why have they returned to campus?
- (c) Why have they returned to the fine arts?

As the researcher and interviewer, I was a co-constructor of their stories as recounted here within. I was also one of them, though not a participant per se. I had met them in the studio arts class because I also was intent on addressing an inner artistic core that had lain dormant for years. I also had found the arts to be sublime with regards their ability to engage the viewer, and I also found the arts to be an exciting and powerful venue of expressive communication. In addition, after living within the setting and therefore being able to claim a lengthy permanence in the field (Bogdan & Taylor, 1984; Clifford, 1986; Seidman, 1992; Wolcott, 2001), I knew that my interpretations and informed insights would possibly carry intuitive truisms some of which were confirmed by the very words of the respondent group.

It is the task of the researcher to first raise the issue up to his lens of inquiry and in this case, I, the researcher, chose to investigate the lived experiences of these mid-life non-traditional graduate students in the studio arts. I had a 'lived' familiarity with the overall setting (the physical buildings and studio areas), the faculty, the gallery exhibitions, the different studio mediums (painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, photography, fibers), art history, contemporary art, art criticism, and perhaps most important, the personal investment in terms of learned abilities as well as the psychological delving into of one's core self. This prior knowledge facilitated an open, relaxed, and informed exchange with the participating group resulting in "a dialogue amongst men [/women] of the same trade" (Stokrocki 1997). Maturity and a varied background made me similar to many of the participants and therefore, this too, helped inform the research perspective.

The Research Procedure

The research was based on the lived experiences of non-traditional re-matriculating students, but it aimed to shed light on a common essence of the human condition having to do with tapping into the creative core in the adult years, a timeframe traditionally associated with application of skills rather than schooling. Therefore, the study investigated aspects of the contemporary phenomenon, namely that these re-matriculating adults were on a personal quest, that is, they were still searching for a venue of self expression, and as part of the search had returned to a site of learning, the college/university campus, and to a creative activity of past success. The research questioned their acts but also delved into how creativity and an individual aesthetic code could be nurtured, schooled, and given meaning as it was incorporated into one's living of life. Therefore, on another plane of inquiry, the research sought to comprehend the nature of these non-traditional students' perspectives on self-actualization through art-making and art-thinking and how the experience of re-matriculation and their evolving beliefs in art-making and aesthetics engendered how they live their lives.

The investigation was carried out by examining a collage of narratives and reflections on self and art emerging from a series of in-depth, one-to-one semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 1991) with recent MFA graduates, current MFA candidates, and current post BA graduate arts studio students. The Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree cited here in the study is the MFA in visual (painting, drawing, printmaking, photography, and film) and/or plastic (sculpture, ceramics, fiber arts, and textiles) studio

arts programs. The participants elaborated on their creative experiences and the process of art-making and art-thinking as it pertained to self-reflection. The study attempted to crystallize this particular reality as it was “constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (Merriam, 1998, p.6) and, as it was related “from the actor’s own frame of reference” (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). The essence of these participants’ experience was examined and viewed through the shared act of re-matriculation as (1) a quest, (2) a return to a site and to an activity of success in the past, and (3) an engagement of the creative self. The researcher anticipated the findings to relate to a determined effort to enlarge one’s aesthetic frame of reference and to honor through artistic production, “the products of our imaginative life” (Eisner, 2002, p.2-3).

The Research Perspective

My research perspective is constructive in that I adhere to the convention that society is home to multiple personalities, multiple variations of socio-psychological growth, multiple beliefs and multiple realities. All lead to divergent approaches to life and to how one constructs their specific reality. Each is valid in that it exists and each has overlapping commonalities which allow recognition within the species while retaining a slightly unique flavor and temperature to distinguish it. By embracing the individual narratives and placing them sensitively one alongside another, larger patterns of human comportment emerged.

Life in one’s early years, is somewhat pre-fabricated: a child is born into a life molding tradition (Bourdieu, 1976). In adulthood, it seemed there might exist a psycho-socio behavioral re-birth in which one can re-define the inner and outer selves, re-adjust

their goals, and address a pondered moral stance. This type of self evolution is constructivist in nature in that it is dependent on the building of a successful sequential harmonization of one's past, present, and future; it seemed it might also have a social impact as an inclusive process—in that it brings together the many divided parts of man or woman or society, thus giving receptive space to our different selves, to life's different peoples and species, to our brethren beings.

The Conceptual Framework

The research was rooted in a discourse on art as a discipline leading to self-expression and self-definition. This was the tie that binds the quest of re-matriculation to the fine arts. It attempted to investigate the nature of the choice and experience lived by mid-life re-matriculating students as they pursued serious studio arts graduate curriculum within institutions of higher learning. The study considered re-matriculation of older non-traditional students in the fine arts as (i) a quest to define or re-define the self, both inner and outer through (ii) a return to the college/university setting and (iii) a return to the deferred affinity with the fine arts and tapping into one's aesthetic core.

The theoretical underpinnings for the research as well as an abundance of referential viewpoints with respect to the human element as it creates sociological trends were substantiated by the phenomenon itself and expanded and invigorated by the experiences and reflections of the individuals. The basic theoretical framework for the research included the following areas:

- (i) Re-matriculation as a quest involving the self gaining consciousness as a life actor with self-reflection, self-actualization and self-efficacy as essential areas of concern; personal navigation along with narration of the process lent authenticity to the human desire to communicate one's own personal trajectory; narration was also seen as a bridge to the creative impulse.
- (ii) Re-matriculation was viewed as situational, occurring within a setting – an ideological and cultural setting as well as an actual site for the process. Here the setting for re-matriculation was the college/university campus and the shores of higher education.
- (iii) Re-matriculation by older non traditional students as it occurred in the fine arts was the specific domain of the study and thus reference to the arts as symbolic of civilization and as an intellectual cultural operative was included.

The theoretical underpinnings for the study are discussed in detail in the Literature Review.

Re-matriculation as a quest

The character of university campuses has changed significantly in the last half century with the single most dramatic change represented by the enormous increase in numbers of matriculating students (Cohen, 1998; Rosenbaum, 2004). Other more subtle changes have also occurred, such as re-matriculation into university degree programs by

older students, with continuing education practices paralleling longevity (Edelson & Malone, 1999; Verduin, Miller, & Greer, 1986). The motivations for re-matriculation in higher education by adults coming as they are from the workforce, are many, and include augmenting one's social and economic capital (Edelson & Malone, 1999; Cohen, 1998; Kenndy & Vaughn, 2004) and/or career advancement, sometimes urged by the personal desire for knowledge (Edelson & Malone, 1999) but often dictated by the need to update one's professional qualifications so as to continue to be employable (Cohen, 1998). Here the act of returning to school was seen as a personal quest for self-actualization (Maslow, 1943, Huitt, 2004) and self-agency (Bandura, 2001), resulting in personal growth and enrichment (Edelson & Malone, 1999; Knable, 2000). In this light, re-matriculation became a tool with which mid-life students enacted 'self-referentiality' (Cavigioli, 2005) ushering in an opportunity for a sort of second chance at forming an identity through schooling.

Within this well-documented phenomenon known as the "graying of the campus" (Weinstock, 1978; Edelson & Malone, 1999) there exist various sub-phenomena, including re-matriculation of older non-traditional students in graduate level studio arts. There is ample literature on continuing education (Edelson & Malone, 1999), and life long learning, on women returning to school and coping with dual roles, college and family (Beutell & O'Hare, 1987; Kennedy & Vaughn, 2004) and adult education (Belanger & Valdivielso, 1997; Vermilye, 1974; Watson & Taylor, 1998). There are even some writings on creativity in the adult years (Edelson & Malone, 1999; Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, & Gardner, 1994; Gardner, 1982), however, there was no investigation with respect to the narrow study of people, age 40 and over, re-matriculating in the Fine

Arts as non-traditional students in studio arts and/or MFA programs. And while many accounts of older adults finding empowerment through art-making are sprinkled through the literature bank, and are similar, they did not fully account for the mid-life adult going to the extent of a committed return to the college/university campus in his/her quest for this self defining tool of art.

Re-matriculation as a return

Adults find a certain sense of pleasure in returning to school in that it gives them freshness of thought, expanded intellectual boundaries and breadth of social involvement (Edelson & Malone, 1999). Middle-aged adults today are often an active force whose “potential contribution depends on their own self-confidence and desire to remain functioning as useful members of society” (Ossofsky, 1972). No longer must graying signify a gradual retreat from the professional world in that mid-life has become a time of release from the ‘burden of expectations’ (Gibbs, 2005) and can certainly be a moment of *creative reshaping of their professional lives* (Gardner, 2002). Statistics show that adults that have already had a successful college experience remain interested in returning for further educational opportunities (Lifelong Learning Trends, National University Continuing Education Association, 1994). In fact, there is a “robust relationship” (Belanger & Valdivielso, 1997) between the level of scholastic attainment in youth and re-matriculation as an adult. Individuals who had positive school experiences in youth or at least those who had found some delight in knowledge gathering were found to be “significantly more inclined to seek this venue of self improvement and self

empowerment as mature adults” (Belanger & Valdivielso, 1997). This appeared to be true for the participants and thus the study’s intent was to delineate this continued growth in adulthood. Important to the study was the idea of ethical comportment of the ‘favored adult’ where mid-life re-matriculation could also include “mapping out new terrains of socialization and bonding” (Cavigioli, 2005) thus giving the individual a broader sense of community and citizenry in which ‘being educated’ (Gardner, 2002) leads to being a responsible and informed member of society.

Having survived and most likely navigated certain phases of existence, mid-life adults often find it empowering to make choices, to urge priorities, to engineer their now more valued energies and briefer time frames. In our society of plenty, adults now live longer, in fact, states Boyer (1974) “never before have there been people that live so long” (p. 19), nor are “the old as old as they used to be” (Kuhn as cited in Boyer, p 34). Over the past decades, this demographic change has been reflected in the educational participation patterns of older adults (Kim & Merriam, 2004). Non-traditional older students have become increasingly present on higher education campuses in a benevolent trade between institutions of higher learning and non-traditional older, and/or working students: the students, many of whom are eligible for employer tuition benefits, offer “an effective new revenue stream for the universities” (Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2004, p. 16) and, in turn, the college/university setting allows the student to engage new career options. According to the Consortium for Higher Education (1987) the American adult will explore an average of four different careers during a lifetime; later, Gardner (2005) put the number at five. Knable (2000), inquiring as to why mid-life adults are returning to college in record breaking droves, insists that ‘boomers’ are “by far the most educated

generation” (p. 1) and have been influenced by education not only as is reflected in their lifestyles but, also, in their daring to re-define themselves. “These benefits to the individual span disciplines and cross pollinate age and cultural boundaries” (Belanger & Valdivielso, 1997) with some fields inviting further study and therefore encouraging re-matriculation of older students. One such field is certainly education itself where teachers return to school to study themselves and their beliefs in the tenets of education. The Fine Arts appears to be another magnet for re-matriculating where non-traditional adults invest time and self in further learning (Edelson & Malone, 1999) and re-addressing creativity. And it was here that I, the researcher wondered as to the nature of this social trend and raised the issue of “What exactly are the inner and outer experiences of these re-matriculating adults and what are they seeking?”

Re-matriculation and the creative self

Recent literature in the Fine Arts and Arts Education does indeed focus often on the creative self. The articles are often framed in a qualitative research format such as biographies or interpretative profiles giving plentiful space to the life histories of little known artists, very often women (K. Congdon: The art of Bernadine Stetzel, 2000; R. Lyon: Shielding the Torso, 2005; Polly Barton: Knowing Her Need, 2005; D. Harrison: Turmoil and Change, 2005) who have stitched their threads of art-making talents through decades upon decades, weaving tales of raw life and distinct personalities in constant revision as they are impacted by war, immigration, human rights, and, of course, birth, belief, illness, and death.

A major theme in this type of literature enveloped areas of human worth, mental health, and the merging of the past with the present with suggestions of how art-making lends stability and congruity to the individual life cycle (Congdon, 2000, 2005). Other areas of interest in the literature showed how artists recounted their lives through their choice of medium (Weintraub, 2002; Ferris, 2001), through their multi-cultural layering of languages and customs (Leong, G. 2001; Volpe & Bouillet, 2001), again indicating just how the process of art-making can lead to self-empowerment through clarification of identity (hooks, 1995; Bandura, 2001; Huitt, 2004). These writings employed the individual as well as the collective voice and were effective in their intent: they inspired, they explained, and they portrayed the sensitive aspects of daily living.

A major intent of the present study was building a description of human experience. Paramount to the study was recognition of the powerful nature of art (Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, & Gardner, 1994; hooks, 1995; Weintraub, 2002) and the cognitive attributes of creativity (Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, & Gardner, 1994; Gardner, 1992) while also making space to explore the empowering force of self-expression, and the thirst of the common man to partake of this. The findings from the multiple interview series which emerged from the storied ‘conversations with purpose’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) informed the nature of art-making and that which Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, & Gardner (1994), Greene (1978, 1988, 2001), and Unrath & Nordlund (2006) see as ‘reflectiveness’. Fundamental to the research was, as Gardner (1994) explains: “the belief that we can know ourselves, can hold our experience and the experience of others up for

examination, and can build a sense of uniqueness and distinctiveness that we usually call a sense of self or identity”.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to formally inquire into the nature of the lived experiences of older non-traditional graduate students in studio arts. Eisner (2004) stated that the art of seeing and creating is an inner collaboration between what we take visually from the world and what we make of it. And therefore, as these re-matriculated students augmented desired skills and widened their aesthetic parameters with which they not only viewed and discerned art forms, but also created art works of their own, the question arose—was it possible that they were also refining and developing themselves by tapping into an inner aesthetic core? Could it be that through the process of art-making and art-thinking they had embarked on a sort of re-definition of the self? Honoring the tradition of a phenomenological research, this study gathered the storied biographies of a group of mid-life non-traditional re-matriculated students as they pursued graduate work in the studio arts. The resulting tapestry of dialogues provided insightful perceptions and reflections concerning their experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A discourse on art as a discipline leading to self-expression and self-definition was the tie that binds the quest of re-matriculation to the fine arts. The study considered re-matriculation of older non-traditional students in the fine arts as (i) a quest to re-define the self, both inner and outer through (ii) a return to the college/university setting and (iii) a return to the deferred affinity with the fine arts and tapping into one's aesthetic core. The inquiry attempted to answer the research question: Re-matriculation in the studio arts: What are the perceptions of mid-life graduate students in the fine arts?

Literature pertinent to the research study comprised this chapter and provided a wealth of theoretical underpinnings for the research as well as an abundance of referential viewpoints with respect to the human element as it creates sociological trends. The cited literature established current definitions and relevant concepts, which accompany the ideas developed for this study.

I. Quest: The SELF

Quest: Quest as a search for understanding the self, assessing the life course and enabling personal navigation, discovering and then urging self-agency in order to become a functioning member of the collective self.

- 1. The SELF defined**
- 2. SELF-motivation, agency, efficacy, actualization**
- 3. The SELF as social-cultural currency**
- 4. The SELF and social identity**
- 5. Schooling of the SELF**
- 6. The SELF, selves, and dialogue**
- 7. The SELF as voyager/navigator**
- 8. The SELF as an offspring of narrative**

Perhaps one reason for the enduring popularity of fortune-tellers and tarot cards is the difficulty of predicting how life will turn out. (Sternberg & Spear-Swerling, 1998, p. 219)

Coming to maturity and even education itself is a type of forward moving quest, which involves the self gaining consciousness as a life actor through reflection and “full attention to life” (Greene, 1978 p 163). Questing is also a search for understanding the self, assessing the life course and enabling personal navigation (Sternberg & Spear-Swerling, 1998). Under this aspect, the evolution of the self becomes a sequence of life phases and thus an ongoing process of self-discovery.

The notion of ‘quest’ forecasts discourses of heroic journeys, on spirituality, on self-determination. Quest also indicates intimate domains of character in that setting off on a quest, the self, at whatever point of evolution it may be, is called upon to engage the

processes of charting the course, of mapping out the life terrain. According to Jerome Brunner (1997), the self is a complex entity, an instrument of life actions:

The self is both outer and inner, public and private, inner and acquired, the product of evolution and the offspring of narrative. Our self-concepts are enormously resilient, but also vulnerable. Perhaps it is this combination of properties that makes Self such an appropriate if unstable instrument in forming, maintaining, and assuring the adaptability of human culture (p. 159).

1. The SELF defined

John Dewey (1906, as cited in Natsoulas, 1998, p16) stated that the definition of “conscious” as aware and “consciousness” as the state of being aware, is “a wide, colorless use; there is no discrimination as to contents, as to what there is awareness of, - whether mental or physical, personal or impersonal, etc.” (p 40). Perhaps with Dewey’s comment in mind, Natsoulas in his essay on *Consciousness and Awareness* (1998) confirms the complexity of the idea by citing C.S. Lewis (1967) on “consciring”:

Man might be defined as a reflexive animal. A person cannot help thinking and speaking of himself as two people, one who can act upon and observe the other. Thus he pities, loves, admires, hates, despises, rebukes, comforts, examines, masters, or is mastered by, “himself.” He is privy to his own acts, is his own conscious or accomplice. And of course this shadowy inner accomplice has all the same properties as an external one; he too is a witness against you, a potential blackmailer, one who inflicts shame and fear.” (p. 187, as cited in Natsoulas 1998, p. 18).

The self both distinguishes us *from* others (Bruner & Kalmar, 1998; Natsoulas, 1998) while at the same time it bonds us *to* others allowing us to form community. As Bruner (1997) remarks “The self is an odd mix of the outer and the inner, an unmanageable mix of the public and the private. It is indeed constructed through interaction with the world grow[ing] out of our encounters with events and circumstances - a product of transaction and discourse” (p. 146). In light of the self being a principal actor in all that man/woman undertakes, it follows that the self is a multi-grounded, complex mechanism in search of identity or the combination of self-awareness (Huitt, 2004), self-efficacy (Eldeman, 1999), self-efficacy in terms of competence (Noddings, 1984; Bandura, 2001), and self-achievement (Maslow, 1943, Huitt, 2004).

2. The SELF as motivational agent

The self is “by its very nature an agent, something that is naturally capable of performing intentional actions” (Lowe, E. J., 2003, p. 321; Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 69). Consideration of the self implies taking into account the expenditure of energies in terms of living or survival skills: that which animates, directs, and sustains human behavior (Huitt, 2004). In terms of function, the self, when relatively free, is ‘self-actualizing’, set on a personal quest for growth, leading towards self-fulfillment and realization of one’s potential (Maslow, 1943; Huitt, 2004) including the possibility of self-transcendence (Elias & Merriam, 1980) or connecting beyond the ego (Huitt, 2004; Elias & Merriam, 1980).

Maslow (1943) based his work on the human animal's hierarchical needs envisioned as a pyramid with '*deficiency needs*' or what he termed needs focusing on survival orientation (the physiological and safety needs) at the base and those higher '*growth needs*' focusing on personal advancement (belonging, self-esteem, achievement) in the middle, inching up the pyramid to what Maslow coined self-actualization wherein the domains of morality, creativity, spontaneity, and genuine acceptance are tapped. Relevant to the process of self-actualization are other such fundamental properties such as competence (Noddings, 1984; Ryan & Deci, 2000), bonding and relatedness (Huitt, 2004), empowerment, and mental stability (Congdon, 2004).

The term self actualization was first coined by Maslow when he established a hierarchy of human needs and confirmed the human desire for self-fulfillment, realization of one's potential, and the eventual connecting with some higher self, or self transcendence (Huitt, 2004). Transcendence is seen as a moment of creative *flow* when mundane tasks become subconscious (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This certainly ties in with the notion of growth and development, which occurs in youth, but also in adulthood. Maslow himself considered self-actualization as an adult phenomenon manifesting itself as a desire for self-fulfillment and for realizing one's potentiality (Elias & Merriam, 1980). The concept of self as "a determiner of behavior which has a great influence on one's ability to grow" reconnects with the goals of humanistic education, influencing persons who are open to change and continued learning, people who strive for self-actualization" (Elias & Merriam, 1980).

Bandura (1982) broadens the discourse of self-actualization. He considers and expands the phenomenon of human agency as a form of ‘self-directedness and forethought’, a personal- or self-efficacy based on motivation and belief. Self-efficacy or the belief that one can achieve a desired goal is central to Bandura’s theory and is defined as “an essential part of the human functioning, reciprocally motivating and perpetuating the individual’s behavior” (Bandura, 2001). In Bandura’s theory, self-efficacy is larger than competence in that it “is not a measure of the skills a person possesses but concerns the beliefs that they have about what they can do under different sets of conditions with whatever skills they possess” (Bandura, 1997 p 37). Self-agency involves “people’s judgment of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (Bandura, 2001, p. 5), a ‘perception’ that “influences an individual’s ability to complete an attainable goal” (Pajares & Schunk, 2001), a perception which also affects the level of motivation and resilience the individual develops” (Irizarry, 2002, p. 58), or what Bandura (2001) and Pajares (2002) present as the larger “self-system” which “provides cognitive and affective information basic to the control of thoughts, feelings, and actions” (Irizarry, 2002, p. 58).

3. The SELF as social-cultural currency

It might be stated that identity is gained and eventually defined through awareness of the self, by knowing who you are, where you came from and where you are headed. Yet the self looks both ways. It serves as an interface between looking inward and viewing outward. The self is “construed as a functional interaction between behavior and environment” (Rachlin, 1997, p. 85) with clues to self-knowing positioned as positive or

negative responses from other people and events which mirror our behavior. “It is as if the world were a funhouse with distorting mirrors moving this way and that” (Rachlin 1997, p. 85). Rachlin (1997) remarks on this double sidedness of the mirrored self:

This view of the self is a drastic departure from traditional self-perception as a wholly internal process – thus the hermit who retires from the world in order to understand himself is actually abandoning the set of mirrors – human society – from which he could best gain self-understanding. When we focus on the inner dialogue, on inner pictures, we necessarily ignore the mirrors (p. 85-86).

With respect to the outer or public self, the traditional parameters are defined in terms of the social milieu in which one resides, positioning the self as a socio-cultural entity. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) coming from his critical social theory lens, maintains that the rapport between self and society involves his notion of “self-currency” or the “trade of some version of our self for the distinctions that the culture has to offer” and therefore creates what Bourdieu terms “habitus”, a cultural commodity wherein the self is accompanied by social values: “I am not only me, but also a professor, a speaker, etc.” (Bruner on Bourdieu, 1997, p. 148). For Bettie (2003) habitus is a variable within the frame of cultural capital and “cultural performances most often reflect one’s *habitus* – our unconsciously enacted, socially learned dispositions, which are not natural or inherent or prior to the social organization of class inequality, but are in fact produced by it” (p. 51).

The concept of habitus is core to Bourdieu’s theory of social research and represents the cultural structures that are not emergent products of free will but rather a *conditioned response to a dominating social structure*. While the term habitus takes on a

more general meaning as described by Wikipedia: “aspects of culture that bind individuals to larger groups; the totality of learned habits, bodily skills, styles, and tastes”, it does provide an idea of layering of social identities upon a simple unique core. One could think of this layering as hiding or protection of the core self from the outer world. It is similar to an interfacing wherein identity takes on cultural hues of gender, race, and socio-economic status. These hues then become traits of identification so that not only we, but also others might *know* who we are. And if we did not know to what race, gender and socio-economic class we were born into, the outer world quickly clarifies these issues for each of us. This societal teaching of identity indicators – skin, sex, and species - both ours and others, is channeled through all venues, the educational institutions included.

Within the social identity imposed by gender, race, and class, the self is required to further distinguish itself in relation to others. In psychology, the concept of habitus has been expressed by the term ‘persona’ (as used by Jung) or a self-construed self (as used by Brunner), and can be seen as a survival tool. The constructed self bends and blends as it navigates social worlds. And while negotiating the mercurial rules of adherence to the social tribe, the individual must trade (Bourdieu, 1984) and/or adequate his/her social and professional identity while attempting to salvage and re-define the inner substance of self-identity. Jung (1976), an early pioneer of the self, attributed the wide use of the ‘persona’ mask to preservation and protection of the inner core self rather than to a stark manipulation of the external setting. Jung’s ‘conscious’ is not only awareness of the state of existence, but also the perception of the self as differentiated from others (Brunner,

1987): one's thoughts are individual and therefore, private whereas words are directed outward to connect with others and are public. Therefore, the existence of two selves, two selves, the inner and outer, the private and the public, is a documented truism representing not only a social state, but a psychological state as well as the poetic and artistic concept. The psychological need to maintain and protect one's inner self, one's inner aesthetic core, is manifest by the myriad of defense mechanisms (Anna Freud, 1936; Klein, 1975; Winnicott, 1958) used to deal with the often harsh, exterior world.

In accordance with Bruner's credo that the self is "constructed through interaction with the world grow[ing] out of our encounters with events and circumstances" (1997, p. 147), Ferrari (1998), states that finding the way in life or 'personal navigation'" is "never completely independent of one's social and biological resources" (p. 411). Each individual by social position and physical birthright has "inherited potential ranges of abilities and temperament" (Binswager as cited by Ferrari, 1998, p. 411) and therefore the "level of cognitive development and individual differences in ability will also influence self-development by affecting how easily one profits from learning opportunities that may emerge at different points in one's life" (Ferrari, 1998, p. 411) reminding us that the individual human is a 'seamless whole' with the basic self and behavioral self knit together.

4. The SELF and social identity

Undercurrents of class and identity beseech one's navigation through life. Strong correlations between socio-economic status and social mobility exist. The educational setting itself provides statistics on upward and downward mobility with respect to social

class. Consideration of gender and race augments the complexities (Bourdieu, 1984, Lareau, 2003, Brantlinger, 2003, Bettie, 2003).

The presumed inherent superiority of whiteness, as well as the ideology of upward mobility, is challenged by the existence of white trash, and thus the difference of class as class is made visible; poor whites are evidence of the existence of class inequality apart from race. How can one explain white people who behave this way except by acknowledging the existence of class difference per se? Whiteness is usually an unstated but assumed racial referent (when race is not mentioned, whiteness is assumed), so when it is present it reveals much. The phrase poor white trash suggest that color and poverty and degenerate lifestyle so automatically go together that when white folk are acting this way, their whiteness needs to be named. (Julie Bettie, 2003, p. 128).

Class consciousness or cultural identity is a learned position in life (Steedman, 1986 as cited in Bettie, 2003, p. 43), which follows on the heels of class identity as it is taught and “lived out in the private life – [it is] in short, class culture” (Bettie, 2003). Julie Bettie like Lareau (2003) and Brantlinger (2003) takes up the issues of identity and class with respect to race and gender. In her 2003 book, *Women Without Class*, Bettie calls attention to the “failure of social theory to theorize women as class subjects” stating that in political discourse, “women’s class location and identity is often obscured in contemporary discourse on the family” (p. 34-35). She claims that women have not only been ignored as true actors of class culture but they have also been trivialized: if you are speaking of the working class, it is the male that serves as referent, a hard working, often non white, head of household male – however, if you are talking in critical terms about the middle or upper class person, the idle consumer, it is a middle aged white woman, undignified in her mindless accumulation, who comes to mind. Again, according to Bettie (2003, p. 41-42), these icons of class certainly fit the traditional critical Marxist

rhetoric and reflect the lack of seriousness in their approach to the low-income-working woman regardless of race. In the last decades, critical feminists have battled to have the struggling white or non-white female of head of household status recognized along with their voting potential.

Bettie offers the reader an extensive view of class and identity issues. On the ‘smooth surface of reality’ (Greene, 1988) gender is a distinguishing feature for class and race. Women are indeed associated with their race, but much less than racially diversified males, who are viewed as capitalistic units of productivity, and therefore are seen as workers with a political voice and choice, Women, instead, are linked to a surface notion of class – ‘classy’, ‘without class’, ‘high’ or ‘low’ class; they are also looked upon as family providers and as such, are designated consumer workers, workers, yes, but workers that merely gather goods and consume, but are, in the larger picture seen as unproductive (units not seen as producers of goods). In critical Marxist rhetoric, states Bettie, these women are considered voiceless: women or “girls, it seems, cannot resist (the capitalistic employer model)” (Bettie, 2003, p. 43).

Bettie with her keen interest in women coming from “families of modest means and low educational attainment who therefore have little cultural capital to enable class mobility” (2003), argues that the exclusion of ‘women’s experience of class’ results in women being “invisible as class subjects” (2003 p. 37). It perhaps reflects the “invisible” characteristics of terms such as *working class* in that work is labor and associated with productivity which is seen at odds with the role of women caught up in consuming by

purchasing: “women make the stage as class subjects when they represent (non-productive) consumption and leisure, not work” (Bettie, 2003). On top of that, the “masculinization in class analysis has almost wholly ignored the transitional objects of women’s experience of class identity and mobility, the material stepping stones of our escape: clothes, shoes, makeup” (Steedman, 1986 as cited in Bettie, 2003, p. 43). This view is perhaps another testimony to the “disqualifying” or “mystification” of the racial worker status of the female. Critical feminist thought focuses on the residual space left the female in social discourse and certainly, just as sophisticated political theories have left the female unattended to, *so have the fine arts*. Only recently have women made territorial claims: shades of this thinking have surfaced in the art-making of women, celebrated and documented by women and, as the Guerrilla Girls see it, the white male still dominates the institutional art world, although “(t)hings are getting better for women and artists of color” (www.GuerrillaGirls.com). Authoress, feminist, and activist Gloria Steinem remarks:

Their very anonymity makes clear that they are fighting for women as a caste, but their message celebrates each woman's uniqueness. By insisting on a world as if women mattered, and also the joy of getting there, the Guerrilla Girls pass the ultimate test: they make us both laugh and fight; both happy and strong.

Gloria Steinem (as cited in www.guerrillagirls.com)

One initial inquiry into the exclusively white male socio-political landscapes of the American art scene was carried forth by Michele Wallace as far back as the late ‘70s and brought home again in her 1991 discourse ‘Why Are There No Great Black Artists? The Problem of Visuality in African-American Culture’ in which she comments on the

need to fathom “how regimens of visibility enforce racism (and) how they literally hold it in place” (cited in hooks, 1995, Introduction XII). Scholar, artist, and art critic bell hooks remarks on how all of us, black and white alike, “maintain the system of white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 1995, Introduction XII) through a complicit internalizing of its visuals and its values. Summarizing, Collins (1987) states:

Women have been excluded from equal participation in the mainstream traditions of both Western art and democracy. On its face, this condition seems but an accurate reflection of prejudices and customs prevailing in the larger society. A deeper significance attaches to the historical exclusivity of art and democracy when we realize that, from their beginnings, their mainstream traditions have been dominated by and shaped primarily to meet the needs and interests of males. Whether or not one approves of the results, these traditions were established and developed by men who rarely questioned the exclusion of women from these spheres of activity (p. 32).

5. Liberatory Schooling and the SELF

In *Landscapes of Learning* (1978) Maxine Greene speaks on ‘wide-awakeness’ and how this high state of being present in life “has a concreteness to being in the world” (p 163); Greene insists that “the performing and working self is fully interested in life, and hence, *wide awake*” with an attention that is “exclusively directed to carrying its project into effect, to executing its plan. This attention is an active attention, not a passive one” (p 163). Greene herself, is described as a “New York intellectual with a strong sense of European cultural models”, concerned with “critical contention and interventionism” – a woman who has “presented a new sensibility in the broad field of education” (Pinar, 1998 p 3-4). Aptly speaking on emancipatory education in *Landscapes of Learning* (1978):

A new pedagogy is obviously required, one that will free persons to understand the ways in which each of them reaches out from his or her location to constitute a common continent, a common world. It might well be called a democratic pedagogy, since the object is to empower persons to enact democracy (and) to be responsive to consciously incarnated principles of freedom, justice, and regard for others (pp. 70-71).

Maxine Greene is 'attended to' here for her brilliant pedagogical engagement and her "breathtaking intellectual range" (Pinar, 1998) applied to activist oriented aesthetics. She has stood apart for her leadership and educational beliefs, which seem to embrace not only the goals and guidelines of the profession but also her belief that the arts are an "expressive rendering of what it means to be alive (and) as a mode of transmuting some of the stuff of human experience into symbolic and expressive form" (Greene, 1968, p 12). Her versatility of vision linking growth and intensification of the individual to self-reflection is directed towards "releasing the imagination" in order to "bestir (individuals) to create their own projects or find their own voices" (Greene. 1983, p 2).

Greene's writings bridge the distance from the arts to sociological and political discourses of life. In fact, the educator in Maxine Greene understands that "[h]uman subjects have to be attended to; human consciousness must be taken into account, if domination is to be in any way reduced" (Greene as cited by Pautz, 1998, p 37). She voices her dilemma about "how, in a society like ours, a society of contesting interests and submerged voices, an individualistic society....how can we educate for freedom?" (1988 p. 116). She also questions the role of the educational institutions with regards the "development of processes for the enactment of dialogical freedom" (Greene as cited by Davies, 1988, p. 43).

Education with the goal of liberating the individual from capitalistic serfdom or what Bourdieu sees as class reconstructionism is not new. Like Paolo Freire (1972) and Antonio Gramsci (Quaderni dal carcere, Einaudi, 1975) before her, Greene confronts us with the reality that the concept of freedom is not a “passive meaningless given....[on the contrary]...freedom should not to be taken for granted...[but rather] it is to be continually sought after as an active, meaningful dialogue” (Greene, 1988) with freedom conceived of as “an achievement *within* the concreteness of lived social conditions” (Greene, 1988 as cited by Davies, 1998, p. 41).

6. SELF, selves, and dialogue

Perhaps Greene’s notable contribution with respect to liberatory teaching methods, is her unswerving belief in the power of the arts as they are applicable to the American temperament and also to American educational settings. Greene argues for an aesthetic orientation to schooling with an “educational use of the arts to combat the numbing objectification, which characterizes contemporary society....(t)he arts serve as a powerful and critical exploration of compelling historical and social issues, (and thus) provide alternative means to critically engage the world” (Greene as cited in Davies, 1998). Greene, recognizing the artist’s prerogative to choose and to re-choose through the process of visual and intellectual reflection, seems to be urging for a like educational frame in which individuals feel free to be flexible in their continuous alternating between posing questions and choosing solutions. Cited in Salvio (1998), Greene states that “encounters with the arts alone will not prepare people to take transformative initiatives”

but that art can act as a catalyst in that it “can release a reader (a viewer, a listener) into his own subjectivity, his own inner world” and guide the individual towards “some aspect of his/her consciousness as never before” (Greene, 1968) Necessary to this scenario is the inclusion and appreciation of the “artist-in-society” who makes “that strange liberty of creation possible” (Greene as cited in Salvio, 1998, pp. 99-123) in the larger life community.

Fundamental to this tradition of social theory is the human need to congregate and “to create our identities within a plurality” (Greene, 1988, p. 51). This creative or flexible dialogue within the context of plurality yields the mindful collective voice, which is a triumph over what Greene calls *negative freedom* (Greene, 1988) “the right not to be interfered with or coerced or compelled to do what they did not choose to do” (p. 16). Greene indeed urges people to gather together because “acting in our freedom”, that is taking mindful action for daily freedom, cannot be done alone, it requires plurality. It is a striving for freedom as a daily task and a *unity of minds*. Greene states that individuals need to be “reminded of what it means *to be alive among others*, and to achieve freedom in dialogue with others for the sake of personal fulfillment and the emergence of a democracy dedicated to life and decency” (Davies, 1998, p. 42). This process is such that *as* people “recover their collective voices and collective experiences...[forthcoming is] the agency that results from participation with others to produce needed social changes” (Davies, 1998, p. 41). Greene points to public attitude, stating that:

The social milieu of the 1980’s (with its) self-righteous, self-centered social climate dispatched individuals into lifestyle enclaves and stripped away their

sense of obligation to one another. Amid this ambience of intolerance toward social differences and immobility and indifference in reaction to social problems, a general withdrawal from what ought to be public concerns (occurred).

(Greene as cited by Davies, 1998, p. 41)

As Davies (1998), writing on Maxine Greene's work, states: "dialogical freedom, then, arises out of particular situations in which individuals band together to participate in a process that affirms their identities and fulfills their promises through naming and overcoming obstacles" (p 43). Here, with the idea of 'collective identification of social obstacles' can be seen reference to the major liberatory figures such as Freire, Gramsci, and even Dewey, but Greene, an American woman writing today, does well to identify the current problem of 'liberation' as an existing American goal or even, educational obligation, since as Ivan Illich (1971) states schools have never "separate[ed] learning from social control" and Ryan (1981) continues:

(Schools) are not springboards to social mobility, where individual merit is unerringly identified and nourished. They are, in fact, major social institutions that serve to sustain and cement inequality and to prepare a relatively docile work force for various levels in the hierarchy of labor. Its task is not to open the minds of youth to the flories of eternal truth and beauty, but rather to artificially enhance the egos of the children of the well-to-do and brutally assault the egos of the children of workers and poor people (pp 136-137).

It is true that Greene questions "How, in a society like ours, a society of contesting interests and submerged voices, an individualist society, a society still lacking an 'in-between', can we educate for freedom?" (1988, p. 116), however both she and Davies see the school as a site of "intellectual and cultural transformation" but only if schools can offer a terrain where "students can learn to empower themselves and others to overcome the legacy of prevailing cultural practices so that the students may become

empowered to think about what they are doing, to become mindful, to share meanings, to conceptualize, to make varied sense of their lived worlds” (Greene, 1988, p. 12; as cited by Davies, 1998, p. 44).

Greene wants a freedom for us all, grounded in the fabric of community, in the ethical and moral responsibility that individuals feel for one another when they come together to recognize, name, and overcome impediments to their *becoming fully human*. Greene’s desire to reawaken in us a commitment to *fight against an acquiescent acceptance of the given social environment* is always in her writing, in her determined clarity of detail, and in the care she has taken to understand. (Greene as cited in Davis, 1998, p. 45)

Bringing another perspective to that sense of the plural, that public and civic mindedness, Nell Noddings, noted educator and scholar, keenly interested in intuition (1984a) as a factor of learning, and, caring (1984b) as a factor of living, notes a difference between the community commitment of Americans as compared to that of Europeans stating that: “Americans have lost the imperative to care for others in the community at large” (Noddings, 1996, p. 252 as cited in Davies, 1998, p. 42), continuing with “unlike some European nations, citizens in the US have few, if any, positive duties. The emphasis on negative duties has eroded not only a sense of responsibility for one another but even our understanding of human sociality” (as cited in Davies 1998, p. 42). Noddings’ *recognition of the lack of positive duties* and thus the need for civic bonding where each individual participates as a member of the whole, corroborates Greene’s urging for the daily choice or commitment to adhesion and social freedom. Greene, it follows, urges the public civic self to become passionately engaged with all spheres of the social community, especially the schools (Davies, 1998, p. 43).

Greene champions the factor of choice, in life and in education: the conscious choice when a “student chooses not to learn what a teacher has chosen to teach” (Pautz, 1998, p. 33) but also the choice to honor the “concept of freedom, which requires an engagement with the world as it is found” (p. 34). The most important function of school is to provide an environment in which students can *explore choices*, raise questions and reach for “alternatives in the situated-ness of their lives” (Greene, 1988). For her, this engagement is exemplified by the arts and an aesthetic orientation to the world. Green advocates the educational use of the arts in order “to notice more (and) to attend (to life) with greater sensitivity and discrimination” (Greene, 1978b p 178 for citation from words of Welcome Lincoln Center).

Greene in her discourse on vigilance over freedom, the collective dialogue, empowerment of choice and reflexive action invigorates the link between freedom and pedagogy, and seems to echo Freire’s basic concepts from *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* such as the twofold nature of dialogue, praxis, being at the heart of liberation. Certainly Greene’s exploration of collective dialogue coincides with Freire’s idea of education as a cultural action. “Morality, then, involves choices by which to live and, principles one understands and chooses, to inform the praxis of one’s life. This involves taking responsibility for one’s life within the wider, interconnected set of communities in which one lives. (Pautz, 1998, p. 32).

Dialogue explores choices through narrative: exterior conversation with others or interior, with oneself. Both modes relate and contemplate life experiences but perhaps the

interior conversation best seeks out depth, interpretation and also, *relief* from life's perplexities and torments by enlarging the perspective. It is an alternating of questioning with the expectation that from others will come an answer, with questing, which implies a solitary inward search for resolution (Weintraub, 2003). The process of reflecting and recounting becomes dialogue or narrative and can function as a healing of confusion and a healing of wounds. And certainly artistic dialogue whether it be crafted from words, forms, colors or sound becomes an intimate narrative with the potential for calming the spirits and healing our injured parts (Bruner, 1997). Thus discourse and narrative have the *potential to soothe* as a balm soothes and bring together the fragmented inner and outer parts into a repaired and more cautiously aware whole.

It is incredible how the written sentence can calm and tame a man. The sentence is always something different from the man writing it. It stands before him as something alien, a sudden solid wall which cannot be leaped over. One might walk around it, but before one even arrives on the other side, there is a new wall at a sharp angle to the first, a new sentence, no less alien, no less solid or high, and likewise beckoning one to walk around it. Gradually, a labyrinth arises, in which the builder just barely knows his way. He is calmed by its tangled paths.
(Canetti, E. 1979, p. 40)

The arts, says Greene, especially literature, provide alternative means to critically engage the world, providing "a powerful and critical exploration of compelling historical and social issues. Art can work to stimulate questions about the social world, with its lacks, its deficiencies, its possibilities" (Greene 1988, as cited in Salvio, 1998, p. 118) and the eventual "enrichment of the *I* may become an overcoming of silence and a quest for tomorrow for what is not yet (quote of Greene 1988 p 21-22) which certainly echoes Dewey's idea of the "continuous formation through choice of action" (Dewey, 1916, p. 408, as cited in Salvio, 1998, p. 118).

7. The SELF as navigator

Within the confines of self-actualization or self-efficacy (Maslow, 1943; Bandura, 1982) the metaphor of *navigation* is often used to denote piloting, charting, navigating the course of life. According to Sternberg and Spear-Swerling (1998), two principal sources for the navigational metaphor are found in (i) “the wealth of personal life stories” (p. 222) and (ii) literature (and here the authors cite the “notion of life as a voyage to be navigated” (p. 223) in works such as *Ulysses* by Homer, Dante’s travels in *Inferno*, and Walt Whitman’s most well-remembered words *O Captain! My Captain!*: “our fearful tri is , the ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won....”

Hundreds if not thousands of references to life’s journey – along roads, seas, paths, or whatever, adduce to the importance of the navigational metaphor in literature (p. 223).

Authors Sternberg and Spear-Swerling (1998) cite the formal definition of “to navigate” taken from the *American Heritage Dictionary* (1985) as “to plan, record, and control the course and position of (a ship or aircraft)” and link this to their construct of *personal navigation* as the state of “knowing where one wants to go and believing that one is capable of getting there” along with “dealing effectively with events” (i.e., “riding out the storms”). Additionally, they note the complexity of the issue as one navigates the different bodies of waters or domains (i.e., “work domain” as opposed to “personal domain”). However, the primary question addressed in their text is: “just what is it that distinguishes those who ultimately become successful in adult life – as defined both by society and by the individuals themselves – from those who do not?” Sternberg and

Spear-Swerling claim that expertise in navigation is clearly a factor and can determine who are successful in a wide variety of domains” (p. 223). The authors proceed to reveal the complexity of discovering a “destination”. They also state their intended theory, that “more important than the journey itself is how one navigates through it” (p 223).

The construct of navigation assumes a multifaceted character with specific importance owed to: (i) direction (and here the authors refer to Howard Gardner’s treatise (1983) of intrapersonal or intellectual intelligence distinguished from interpersonal or emotional intelligence; (ii) flexibility; (iii) the ability to overcome obstacles; and (iv) holding fast to long term perspectives: wherein “all the abilities - intrapersonal, emotional, creative, and practical – involve a kind of mental power or potential” (Sternberg & Spear-Swerling, 1998, p. 229). But Personal Navigation goes beyond ownership of abilities and deals with applying one’s “mental powers or potential” in life. Personality traits, again according to Sternberg & Spear-Swerling (1998), related to successful navigation are seen as the “4 R’s”: resilience or the ability “to recover from setbacks”, relentlessness or a “dogged determination or persistence in pursuit of goals” (p. 230), restlessness or a thirst for new and “meaningful” challenges which incorporate goals “set at the right level of difficulty”, and risk taking because “the very attempt to succeed involves the potential for failure or rejection” (p. 231).

All of these personality traits – resilience, relentlessness, restlessness, and risk taking – must be applied in the right direction, or they are worse than useless. (p 232).

For Sternberg and Spear-Swerling, ‘personal navigation’ refers to a person’s control of his or her voyage through life, including plans, beliefs, and the ability to overcome obstacles. It is stated that effective self-navigation requires, resilience, restlessness, necessary risk taking, and relentlessness in pursuit of one’s goals. The authors make a point of positioning the personal navigation construct as including but yet apart from the following traditional psychological constructs. Personal navigation, again, according to Sternberg and Spear-Swerling (1998), is kin to the following but yet is *not* fully explained by: (i) intelligence - “being highly intelligent is never a drawback”, but the successful navigator must harbor more than raw intelligence, s/he must own a social intelligence or “the knowledge repertoire underlying the interpretation of events and the making of plans in everyday life situations” (Cantor and Kihlstrom, 1987) together with emotional intelligence and empathic acuity (Goleman, 1995). The authors reiterate that to have abilities such as intelligence and planning is different from “using one’s intelligence(s) effectively.” The area of (ii) wisdom is also is a part of navigational skills, it being “a way to mediate between conflicting types of information” (Czikszentmihaly & Rathunde, 1990) or to “synthesize knowledge from opposing views” (Kichener and Brenner, 1990). Wisdom also is seen as competence in viewing and interpreting “local knowledge” (Greene, 1995). And thirdly, (iii) motivation (Maslow’s motivational research, 1943; Huitt, 2004) and self-efficacy as conceived by Bandura (2001) play a role in navigating life but the destination is not always clear. Both having direction, on the one hand, and the actual process of navigation, on the other, are important to personal navigation. Again, however, according to the authors, the constructs of motivation and self-efficacy capture some, such as having goals and the belief that one can achieve them,

but not all of what they mean by ‘direction’ - “they capture much less of the important, day-today process of trying to reach one’s destination that consumes so much of one’s time and energy” (Sternberg & Spear-Swerling, 1998, p. 239).

Continuing to employ once again the navigational metaphor, the authors perhaps are speaking of high waters when they conclude that: “Navigation is directly under one’s control, but what are not usually under one’s control are the forces acting on one as one attempts to navigate.”

We believe that dealing with the construct of Personal Navigation requires us to be more holistic and to ask what it is that people genuinely seek in their lives. They may seek fame and fortune, outstanding professional achievement, satisfaction in their personal lives, or whatever. But, we suggest that all these goals are subordinated to an overarching goal: setting a direction and then doing what needs to be done to get there. These are the things that, for many people, give meaning to their lives, and that might possibly even give some new meaning to the psychological study of people. (p 241).

The textual image of people, floundering mostly amid inclement undercurrents, many of which we are not even consciously aware seems so true. Strength of perseverance and accuracy of direction do indeed seem necessary for the successful ‘journey’ but, just when is it and how is it that we take ownership of the process of evolving inwardly and outwardly?

Up to this point, all is well and has the tone of heroic determination and effortless mastery, the youthful self goes forth towards his or her manifest destiny of self-actualization, and successful fulfillment of life, almost *as if guided by a divine hand*. But

perhaps the hero's voyage across the vast landscape of human endeavor is all too swift, all too smooth, all too mechanized to be applicable on a large scale. *Variations must abound*. Indeed, many sad variations are dramatized by personal limitations, by cultural impediments, or by cruel twists of fate. Survival comes in many guises, some eloquent, some rudimentary. And it is without doubt that survival of the individual self, and often of the cultural group intersects with acts on the part of the other, or others, of dominion - dominion over the environment, dominion over other species, and dominion over other peoples based on sex, race, and resources. The urge to dominate seems to be one of man's many intriguing characteristics.

Therefore, we might ask ourselves what occurs when the self is only partially successful – when scrambling up Maslow's triangle (Huitt, 2004) doesn't get much beyond the basic skills? In that case the self must rely on inner fortitude or perhaps even educational institutions to help activate the residual fantasies of self-efficacy and self-actualization. Under this aspect, evolution of the self becomes a sequence of life phases and thus an ongoing process of self-discovery.

8. The SELF as an offspring of narration

Dialogue is narrative: exterior conversation with others or interior, with oneself. Both modes relate and contemplate life experiences and while praxis or activating thought (Freire, 1972; Greene, 1988) is seen as a collective force ignited by exterior or public dialogue, it is perhaps the interior conversation that best seeks out depth, interpretation and also, *relief*, from life's perplexities and torments by enlarging the

perspective. It is an alternating of *questioning* with the expectation that from others will come an answer, with *questing*, which implies a solitary inward search for resolution (Weintraub, 2003). The reflecting and recounting become in themselves a dialogue or narrative and can function as a healing of confusion and a healing of wounds. Certainly artistic dialogue whether it be crafted from words, forms, colors or sound becomes an intimate narrative with the potential for calming the spirits and healing our injured parts (Greene, 1983; Bruner, 1997). Thus discourse and narrative have the *potential to soothe* as a balm soothes and bring together the fragmented inner and outer parts into a repaired and more cautiously aware whole.

It is incredible how the written sentence can calm and tame a man. The sentence is always something different from the man writing it. It stands before him as something alien, a sudden solid wall which cannot be leaped over. One might walk around it, but before one even arrives on the other side, there is a new wall at a sharp angle to the first, a new sentence, no less alien, no less solid or high, and likewise beckoning one to walk around it. Gradually, a labyrinth arises, in which the builder just barely knows his way. He is calmed by its tangled paths.
(Canetti, 1979, p. 40)

Reparation through awareness and reflection is echoed in the literature of social liberatory writing (Freire, 1972; Gramsci; Greene, 1988). But, while postmodern theories of pluralism and inclusiveness have obtained credibility and thus encourage many voices, in the society, praxis (Freire, Majumdar) still appears singular and dispersed. Reparation of the individual begins with knowing the self, obtaining consciousness, and augmenting perspectives. It has to do with the emancipating the “men and women experiencing themselves as overwhelmed by external circumstances, victimized, and powerless” (Greene, 1988, p. 3), those “minimal selves” (Lasch, as cited in Greene, 1988 p. 3) lost

and lacking a knowledge of themselves that is “embedded in memories and histories they have made their own” (Greene, 1988 p. 3). The words of Dewey corroborate the thrust for freedom through self-definition: We are free “not because of what we statistically are, but in so far as we are *becoming different* from what we have been”. This circles back to the idea of finding the self, exercising self-efficacy and using personal navigation towards a changed self, better suited to a consciousness of self freedom and the eventual notion of freedom for the larger groups.

Dialogue or ‘dialectics’ for Maxine Greene (1988) consists of individuals learning the *language of social freedom* as it is lived out daily in small ways, and entails constructing meaning from the multiple realities of human experience. Notions of freedom circulating within the context of people in search of themselves (Green, 1988) makeup the backdrop for Maxine Greene’s treatise. Greene elevates the discussion of *freedom of the self from oppression* with the eloquent words of mid-twentieth century literary giants. From T. S. Eliot (Murder in the Cathedral) to the abyss of detachment and disinterest, that same disinterest recognized as lethal but ultimately real by Sartre, Moravia (Gli Indifferenti & La Noia), and Virginia Woolf, to political philosophers Hannah Arendt (“think about what we are doing”), Michel Foucault’s insistence on “consciousness and mediation between what impinges on one from without and one’s response” and his belief that “(t)hought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects upon it as a problem” (1984, as cited in Greene, 1988). The last half century has seen brilliant men and women urging for a consciousness of self through reflection and

through penetration of the language and symbols since “thought, after all, grows through language and without thought or freedom in relation to what one does, there is little desire to appear among others and speak one’s own voice (Greene, 988). These are perhaps the initial forms of Intervention of Praxis (Freire, 1972). Greene’s educational efforts in the exploration of dialogue seem to coincide with Freire’s idea of education as a cultural action.

In concluding this first section, the reviewed literature was used in support of the act of re-matriculation as a quest which involved the self as it gained consciousness as a life actor. The interlaced concepts of self-reflection, self-actualization, and self-efficacy are focal areas of concern as they are the underlying forces piloting human action. The literature also delved into personal navigation as an individual mode of maneuvering through life, and the many faces of narration as manifestations of the human desire to communicate; narration is also viewed as a bridge to the creative act.

II. Re-matriculation as a return

Re-matriculation: Re-matriculation was viewed as a return to the a setting of learning and knowledge, the university/college campus and also as a return to a creative activity.

1. Re-matriculation situated
2. The graying of the campus

Perhaps the moment is uniquely propitious for the left hand , for a left hand that might tempt the right to draw freshly again, as in art school when the task is to find a means of imparting new life to a hand that has become too stiff with technique, too far from the scanning eye (p. 8).

J. Bruner (1979)

The idea of re-matriculation as a quest for re-definition of the self, recognizes that these returning adult students are in search of major self-agency (Bandura, 2001; Edelson & Malone, 1998) and in this vein have returned to the campus as a structural setting where they know they can obtain laudable credentials and useful knowledge (Breese & O'Toole, 1995; Kennedy & Vaughn, 2004). Our interest here briefly centers on the actual *theatre*, the university/college campus and the evolutionary factors which have enabled and encouraged higher education to open her doors to a plurality of students including the older non-traditional student.

1. Re-matriculation situated.

One might ask how the social context shapes the human experience with respect to institutions of higher education. It is a valid question for pondering, and while it is true that individuals are certainly molded by institutions and the circumstances of logistics and time, institutions also adjust, however slowly, to large sweeping public and

governmental pressures. Thus the university/college structure of higher education can be viewed as catalyst or agent of social trends but also as subject of social change.

The socially tempered and perhaps inevitable expansion of higher education and its admission policy was preceded by a gradual modification of administrative mandates as well as a relaxation of community and societal norms. The history of higher education in America reveals the slow ascent, validation, and distribution of the educational trump card (Cohen, 1998; Spring, 2006) with institutions of higher education asserting themselves not only as centers of learning, but also, in recent years, as uncontested centers of assessment and certification and therefore linked with corporations of employment (Boyer, 1974; Cohen, 1998; Rosenbaum, 2001; Spring, 2006). It is a fascinating slice of social history and while focusing on the larger ramifications of admission policy in higher education, the sinuous patterns of socio-political life are revealed.

*No organism wanders like humanity wanders, toward the
conditions that are satisfying and away from those that are not.*

Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, & Gardner (1994)

Edelson (2000) sees the roots of American adult education as having to do with (i) self-improvement or that “distinguishing feature of America, noted by De Tocqueville, as the pervasive faith people hold in their ability to rise through their own efforts” (p. 8); this is also linked to the notion of the “genteel tradition for middle class gentlemen and women seeking to add polish and refinement to their lives” (p. 9); (ii) contemporary

trends, or as Edelson reminds us: “instability in the workplace and in individual careers have fueled an upward spiral of occupationally related continuing adult education” (p. 12), a trend aggravated even more by continuing changes in the technological sector; and (iii) corporate sector investment and the powerful working partnerships now linking academia to business and finance.

According to Edelson (2000), “the inter-relationship of American higher education and the education of adults has been a feature of our system all along, even during the Colonial period” (p. 18) with the Morrill or Land Grant College Act of 1862 as it carried professionalism in agricultural fields to youth and adults alike. This was followed by the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill. Both were considered the first great excursions into adult education as they “embraced the principle of colleges as ‘popular’ institutions, with a public mandate” (p. 19). The GI Bill came into being when returning WWII military veterans were offered an opportunity to better their lot through a government assisted educational program; the response on the part of the American public was indeed overwhelming with numbers far exceeding initial expectations (Cohen, 1998). Veterans had the opportunity to either continue their disrupted education or to begin fresh a scholastic career that they would not have been able to afford if it were not for government funding. The returning soldiers were a more mature group in that both chronological years and war experiences had set them apart from the youthful flow of privileged high school students entering the nations universities and college settings: “older than their years and matured by experience, they were an unusual bunch of individuals, un-awed by authority and perhaps more driven by

purpose than they would have been earlier” Cohen, 1998). Many of these veterans were also coming from socio-economic levels traditionally excluded from higher education circles. The GI Bill, like the Morrill Land Grant Bill was one of the “biggest effort[s] in the history of man to hand higher education to anyone who wanted it” (Cohen, 1998).

Within this exciting context, this “fanfare for the common man” (Aaron Copeland, 1942 composition), or the elevation of the great middle class, the first tidal wave of social mixing of the campus population came about. The injection of diverse social sentiments and world-wise veteran views brought life to higher education’s student ‘intelligenza’. The student populations emerging in the years between 1950 and 1975 were vibrant in all fields of endeavor and they were fed by the great expansion of available knowledge on campuses (Cohen, 1998). Society’s temperament for humanistic ideals and individualism seemed to mirror the European Renaissance in its creative outpour. Animating this creativity was the continual acting out of social intolerance and tolerance along with America’s undisputed sense of political power (Cohen, 1998). Higher education’s campuses became the Western block’s great social-political playgrounds where young and not-so-young people were activating their newly found beliefs and sought to reckon with their powerful elders.

In the 70s and 80s higher education campuses became theatres of mass education and therefore as Cohen remarks, “the place of colleges and universities as institutions essential to the society [was secured] and [would] remain intact because of what they mean to individuals seeking a step up in social or economic status” (p. 438). Offering

some statistical data, he remarks that “the gain in earnings displayed by people at various levels of education has continued as a prominent measure of higher education’s effects: in 1976, families at the 90th percentile enjoyed income levels 9 times greater than those of families at the 10th percentile; in 1993, the disparity was twelve-fold and by 2015, it will be sixteen-fold” (Cohen, 1998, p. 438-439).

Another feature of higher education’s expansion was the major inclusiveness with regard to gender, ethnicity, and economic diversity. Further along, trends such as part-time students and working students moved hand-in-hand with additional curriculum, and served future employers as well as future employees as a bridge into the professional world. According to Edelson (2000) and others (Boyer, 1991; Cohen, 1998; Edelson & Maloen, 1999; Rosenbaum, 2001), not only was there and continues to be a steady stream of adults returning to school in order to upgrade their social and educational capital, but there is also, a robust relationship between adults with college level backgrounds and adults returning to school through continuing education or even re-matriculation. Along with the adult range of re-matriculantes came the continued presence of the mid-life ‘baby boomers’ on campus (Edelson, 1999; Gibbs, 2005; Knable, 2004) who seem to be living out what Eisner (2002) claims “[e]ducation, in turn, is the process of learning to create ourselves” (p. 3).

2. The ‘graying of the campus’

It has been noted that the character of university campuses changed significantly in the last half century with the single most dramatic change represented by the enormous

increase in numbers of matriculating students (Cohen, 1998; Rosenbaum, 2004). Other more subtle changes have also occurred, such as re-matriculation into university degree programs by older non-traditional students, with continuing education practices paralleling longevity (Edelson & Malone, 1999; Verduin, Miller, & Greer, 1986). The motivations for re-matriculation in higher education by adults coming as they are from the workforce, are many, and include augmenting one's social and economic capital (Edelson & Malone, 1999; Cohen, 1998) and/or career advancement, sometimes urged by the personal desire for knowledge (Edelson & Malone, 1999) but often dictated by the need to update one's professional qualifications so as to continue to be employable (Cohen, 1998). The act of returning to school can also be seen as a personal quest, resulting in personal growth and enrichment (Edelson & Malone, 1999; Knable, 2000) and in this light, re-matriculation can become a tool with which mid-life students enact 'self-referentiality' (Cavigioli, 2005) ushering in an opportunity for a sort of second chance at forming an identity through schooling.

Within this well-documented phenomenon known as the "graying of the campus" (Weinstock, 1978; Edelson & Malone, 1999) there exist various sub-phenomena now in full flower, including re-matriculation of older non-traditional students in graduate level studio arts. There is ample literature on continuing education (Edelson & Malone, 1999), and life long learning, on women returning to school and coping with dual roles, college and family (Beutell & O'Hare, 1987) and adult education (Vermilye, 1974; Belanger & Valdivielso, 1997; Watson & Taylor, 1998). There are even some writings on creativity in the adult years (Edelson & Malone, 1999; Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, & Gardner,

1994; Gardner, 1982), however, there is little or no investigation with respect to the narrow study of people, age 40 and over, re-matriculating in the Fine Arts as graduate students in post BA or MFA programs. And while many accounts of older adults finding empowerment through art-making are sprinkled through the literature bank, and are similar, they do not fully account for the mid-life adult going to the extent of a committed return to the college/university campus in his/her quest for this self defining tool of art.

In concluding this section, it can be stated that decision-making epiphanies, life altering actions, and certainly an act such as re-matriculation are situational and occur within a setting—an ideological and cultural setting as well as an actual site for the process. It has been shown here³ how the setting itself beckoned forth its great expansion as it opened its doors to all; it has therefore worked in tandem with the expanding numbers of re-matriculating adults wishing to further investigate their intellectual and professional selves.

III. Art and Creativity: Exploring contemporary culture

Art: Art and the furthering of creativity as a cultural operative leading to self-expression and healing of the self and society is the tie that binds the quest of re-matriculation to the fine arts through a return to the deferred affinity with the fine arts and a determined tapping into one's aesthetic core.

- (a) ART as an intellectual cultural operative
- (b) ART, a human proclivity for personal expression
- (c) ART & healing
- (d) ART & creativity in adults

In the midst of the seriousness of creativity my advice is to keep an eye out for the tinker shuffle, the flying of kites, and kindred sources of surprised amusement. J. Bruner (1979, p. 18)

Art is an intellectual pursuit and is one of the essential “tools of culture”, indeed, “[t]he arts have an important role to play in refining our sensory system and cultivating our imaginative abilities” (Eisner, 2002, p. 2). And certainly, the tapping into of individual resources is not new, nor is the fact that activating one's creative capital is indeed satisfying. By exploring the creative self and the “contours of our emotional selves” (Eisner, 2002, p. 11), humans develop aesthetic notions and tastes, discover the drive for competence and, in the process, develop self-efficacy (Eldelson, 1999; Bandura, 1986) which lends purpose and confidence to our lives (Eldelson, 1999). “Following the desire to create, acting on this desire and using creativity” (Eldelson, 1999) is a means of taking ownership of our lives and can also lead to a means of ‘changing the world’ (Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi & Gardner, 1994) and this additional intoxicating possibility, this mixing of artistic sensitivity with the social or civic self (Gardner, 2001), is indeed empowering. Art-making imposes self-reflection by the nature of its endeavor in that the

“arts are means of exploring our own interior landscape” (Eisner, 2002, p. 11); but it also fosters interaction with our social world (Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1978; Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi & Gardner, 1994; Gardner, 2001) and can be seen as guiding (Greene, 1978) the greater public to a larger consciousness.

(a) Art as an intellectual cultural operative

Throughout the unfolding of civilizations, the artist and the artifact have served as testimony to higher thinking among populations (Clark, 1969; Sandler, 1996). Art as a “visual experience is vitalizing” and has the power to “extend human experience in a way words alone cannot do” (Clark, 1969,).

However for Clark, the visual is not a destination but a point of departure (Clark, 1977) granting art the force as a process of self- and social-reflection, which corresponds to the postmodern ideas that the aesthetic experience reaches beyond the experience itself and links “the artistic imagination to the social imagination” (Sandler, 1996). Art, to a certain degree, was long separated from human concerns (Gee, 2004; Sandler, 1996, Weinraub, 2003) and seemingly scorned inclusion, setting itself apart from the ordinary. Michelangelo’s magnificent David, as described by Clark (1969, p. 123-124) embodies the creation of art as a struggle against the demons of inner comfort and stability and the triumph of the hero’s superiority, a description of the Renaissance concept of the artist and the powerful nature of the art form which remained fairly intact, facing only minor challenges (Sandler, 1996), through to the post-modern era:

Seen by itself the David's body might be some unusually taut and vivid work of antiquity; it is only when we come to the head that we are aware of a spiritual force that the ancient world never knew. I suppose that this quality, which I may call heroic, is not a part of most people's idea of civilization. It involves contempt for convenience and a sacrifice of all those pleasures that contribute to what we call civilized life. It is the enemy of happiness (p. 123).

The shift from modern to postmodern theory in art dates back to the 1964 presentation of Andy Warhol's 'Brillo Box'. According to celebrated art critic Arthur Danto, it brought an end to art as known during the lengthy period of Modern Art. Again according to Danto, the history of Modernism had been all along a "history of erasures" (Danto, 1994 as cited in Barrett, 2003, p 92), a continual challenge to the current establishment's shared political and artistic vision, and eventually, a dismantling of the very foundations (Barrett, 2000; Barrett, 2003). Modernism had been seen as an "antidote to the poison of tradition, and the yoke of obligation" (Friedman, S., 2001) and in its last forms such as minimalism (art as a thing in itself detached from maker and voided of psychological imprint) it seems to have bowed to a total 'erasure', only to begin anew the human dialogue between the inner and outer life in postmodern style with artists such as Warhol "committed to the multiple" while "imitating the mindless repetitive procedures of the assembly line, demonstrating a link between mechanical reproduction, the numbing of the emotions, and the eradication of individuality" (Appleman, 2000). The presentation of the *brillo pad* or the *soup can* as an art piece recognized by curators of art in New York was, to many, the final breath of modern art. Warhol crossed the divide into the postmodern thought and process by blurring "the ordinary object and the art object"

(Sandler, 1996). This opened up the age of interpretation and the individual's experiential search for meaning.

Bridging the gap between the modernist and the postmodernist theoretical terrains are the artists themselves. Dieter Hacker, established contemporary painter and sculptor, who has rallied from 'constructivist artist' in his early years to a 'conceptualist artist' with political overtones surfacing on a neo-expressionist format (Raynor, 1986, as cited in Ferguson, 1990), is convinced of ponderous self-reflection and states:

Art must claw at the neck of the bourgeois as the lion does the horse. It is not there to satisfy the flabby needs of the idle pleasure seekers. It sharpens our awareness. Art opens up for us an enormous range of things. Art is active self-determination (D. Hacker as cited by Gardner, 1989).

Postmodern theory has dominated 'art-world' discourse for the last four decades and brought to the art scene clusters of theoretically minded artists primed for change (Sandler, 2006). The eventual postmodern inclusion of art with other disciplines in the search for knowledge has widened the inner and outer reach of the arts and fits with "the situation of total pluralism" (Sandler, 2006) of our society. However, suggests Sandler, it possibly numbs or even loses the essence of the Fine Arts in its net.

Everyone is free and every style can get a more or less fair share of art world attention in a way that many styles in the 1950s and '60s couldn't. That's the upside of pluralism. The downside is that if everything goes, it's hard to know what counts, what really counts? (Sandler, interviewed by Yau, 2006).

Postmodernism (affectionately referred to as POMO) is a ‘concept without definition’ states Sandler, an “extension of modernism into contemporary times” where modernism itself is defined as an artistic or cultural state of disillusionment (Sandler interviewed by Yau, 2006). Postmodernists are seen to work under “the assumption that language, signs, images, and signifying systems organize the psyche, society, and life in general” (Sandler, 2006). As postmodern philosopher Derrida stated: “all explanations of the world are stories or discourses” (as cited in Appleman, 2000). Derrida himself championed postmodern thought as “deconstructing or disassembling the setting, the idea, the notion, revealing it to be nothing more than a bare stage”, a view of postmodernism that is “linked to post structuralism and the rejection of the elitist culture” (Derrida as cited in Appleman, 2000).

Renowned contemporary painter Chuck Close, whose far larger-than-life portraits seem almost to draw a close to the discussion of individuality as initiated timidly during the Italian Renaissance, comments on the postmodern approach “What we tried to do was create problems, not solutions, and ultimately, that would lead us to what we wanted to do as artists” (Yau, 2006). Vietnamese artist Phong Bui whose fascination with cubism becomes a walk through his “spunky, zestful, historically informed” installation (Sara Bowen Gallery statement), remarks that “by creating problems, you find a way to get beyond yourself, because you’re doing things that exceed what you know, and you have to figure out how to do it. (Bui in an interview with Sandler on the occasion of Irving Sandler’s new publication, *From Avant-Garde to Pluralism: An On-The-Spot History*, (2006). Another artist, Lorna Simpson, again a highly successful contemporary artist

working with photographic images, recognizes the artist from “the vantage point of the ethnographer who collects, sorts, counts, and catalogues, and whose investigation of identity formation is conducted without nostalgia, empathy, idealizations, moralizing, self-pity, cynicism, or sympathy” (Weintraub, 2003, p. 265). It is also seen that art and contemporary social criticism commentary from the publication *Satya* (May, 2005; September, 2006) assert the fuller role of artists in present day society by printing the belief that “Artists use their skills to give people epiphanies and wake them up from this media consumer nightmare that most of us are caught in.” Again, Sandler sums it up by stating that postmodernist theory and most contemporary artists today hold that *art should not be thought separate from human concerns* and that “there is a firm tie between the artistic imagination and social imagination” (Sandler, 2006).

(b) Art, a human proclivity for personal expression

Identity is gained through awareness of the self: knowing who you are, your past and where you come from. With Freud the self was extended to the unconscious coupled with a social identity. Limpid self-knowing and situation of the self within the context of a sociological and intellectual reality is infrequent. On the other hand, more than ever, within the ever changing, complex, often unsettling society, we humans necessitate placement. While negotiating rules of belonging, the individual must adequate his/her social and professional identity while attempting to salvage and re-define the inner substance of self-identity. Art making can further that crafting of identity (Walker, 2001; Weintraub, 2001).

This link between self, identity, and art is further elaborated by Dissanayake (1992) as she discusses the primal urge of ‘homo aestheticus’ to make something special by using that “specific artistic behavior when the child shapes or embellishes some material of his[/her] everyday life with the intention of making it special so that it will be responded to by others for its aesthetic quality” (Dissanayake, 1992, p. 148). Dissanayake’s theory is that the magic of making something special is “a universal inherited propensity in human nature to make some objects and activities special” (1988, p. 107), and that aesthetic imagination and the need to ‘make special’ is a “human proclivity” (p. 227) for the “transposition of [life’s] ordinary elements” into an expression of specialness (1988, p. 102).

Married to this idea of a basic trait common to all man/woman, is the cognitive science operative that gaining awareness can come about by exercising artistic narrative (Dewey, 1934; Walker, 2001). Long appreciated in the art world, creative expression is a means of running with your inner self and setting up an inner dialogue. It is used not only to dull the edges of pain, it is also activated in celebratory fashion and to pursue that which excites our imagination. These are actions taken by the self in *pursuit of meaning*. Creativity is action born of contemplation and collaboration with materials (Gross, unpublished artist interview 1979), a quest for meaning while exercising one’s artful competency. Competency and familiarity with materials builds relationship frameworks and fosters intuition in finding solutions. And certainly, exercising intuition, aesthetic intuition, stemming from experiential competence gives us “a sense of control” (Noddings, 1984) which in turn can impact identity and self-definition. Thus the art-

making experience might be considered a sort of praxis of healing initiated by the self, interpreted by the self for the self, and sometimes yielding a work that transcends the original self and stands on its own.

The initial stages of gaining awareness of the self or the process of “awakening” (Greene, 1983) is akin to descriptions of *seeing* in the Fine Arts. Seeing is not a passive process, it is a process of formulation. Understanding the world begins in the eyes” (Langer, as cited by Gardner, 1994). The recognition of the ‘eye’ or the visual-spatial portals as one of the many essential forms of human intelligence (Gardner, 1983) is fundamental to postmodern principles. The idea that visual intelligence can be enhanced resulting in a trained eye, is one of the goals of teaching the arts. Through the cultivated eye the mind assimilates “similarities, differences, analogies, modifications and inventions in visual form.” (Feldman, 1988). Artistic training of the ‘eye’ in studio instruction leads to keen mental development of relationships on a visual/spatial plane and as such is a “prime objective of art education and also indicative of an artist's artistic/intellectual achievement” (Leong, L., 2004). This development of the capacity to see, to view, to log into relationships is a mental activity which transfers into artistic renderings but also transfers to emotional clarity and thoughtful situational behavior.

Art as a discipline leading to self-expression and self-definition is fundamental to postmodern aesthetics. Recent literature in the Fine Arts and Arts Education does indeed focus on exploration of the creative self. The articles are often framed in descriptive research formats such as biographies or interpretative profiles giving plentiful space to

the life histories of little known artists, very often women: *Shielding the Torso*, 2005 by Rebecca Lyon; *Knowing Her Need*, 2005 by Polly Barton; *Turmoil and Change*, 2006 by Diana Harrison. These are narratives of artists who have painted or stitched their threads of art-making talents through decades upon decades, weaving tales of raw life and distinct personalities in constant revision as they are impacted by war, immigration, human rights and, of course, birth, belief, illness, and death. A major line in this type of literature envelops areas of human worth and mental health, the merging of the past with the present, and gives credence to how art-making lends stability and congruity to the individual life cycle (Congdon, 2002, 2005).

Other areas of interest in the literature show how artists recount their lives through choice of medium (Weintraub, 2003), or through their multi-cultural layering of languages and customs (Weintraub, 2003; Leong, 2005), again indicating just how the process of art-making can lead to self-empowerment and clarification of identity. These writings employ the individual as well as the collective voice and are effective in their intent: they inspire, they explain, and they portray the sensitive aspects of daily living.

(c) Art & healing

Art-making possesses a therapeutic resonance. Using “art and art processes in marvelous, inventive, and downright powerful ways” (Congdon, 2004) such as healing and curbing of fear, and even transcending tragedy, bringing the dead back to life , in a “transformed state” (Congdon,2004), The arts have long been linked with maintenance of mental health (Congdon, 2000), and building emotional stability through artistic

endeavors and communication: “the drugs didn’t stabilize him but making art does” (Congdom, 2005). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) writes on the elements of enjoyment in relation to creative “flow” – a process in which “concern of the self disappears, yet paradoxically the sense of self emerges stronger after the flow experience.”

Constance Gee, art education scholar, writes on the worrisome pluralism of expectations that now blanket the once anti-social field of fine arts. Gee (2004) cautions the notion of art as innately good, and the use of the arts as a therapeutic cure for low self-esteem, and a balm for social grievances. Gee writes that “[s]ince the late 1960s, the arts education community has watched a proliferating arts bureaucracy make increasingly aggressive claims on and on behalf of arts education” (pp. 126-127). Her position is strongly questioning regarding this issue and credible as she voices criticism on one current of postmodern art education thought: “mimicking the trends and adopting the values of the art-world do make for a perplexing if not (oxy)moronic coupling of the word *art* with the word *education* (p. 131). Renowned art authority Weintraub (2003) acknowledges the widened scope of ‘art’ as she traces postmodern pluralism back to “the progressive decline of a powerful, historic, international institution—the end of the Guild apprentice system [...] by a papal decree issued in the year 1539” (p. 9). Weintraub continues her discourse on today’s art culture stating that it is a “vast and relentlessly expanding domain of artistic freedom” where the question of “what is art?” is “greeted with so many credible answers” and where “being a ‘traditional’ artist now requires *choosing* from a profusion of cultural options, *all available for adoption* in part, in combination, or in their entirety”. Artistic inquiry now requires both the artist and the destined viewer to take ownership of a personalized interpretive dialogue. Continues

Weintraub “[a]rt today is all things: a highly inclusive and eclectic statement of our times echoing the rich diversity of human vision and fantasy” (p. 3-manual). This type of view of the arts perhaps also echoes a comment by Eisner (2002): “[p]erception is, in the end, a cognitive event. What we see is not simply a function of what we take from the world, but what we make of it” (p. xii).

However one positions him/herself in the debate, we can concur that the postmodern art-world is alive as evidenced by the many dialogues cited in *Discourses* (Ferguson, et. al, 1990) by recognized artists as they attempt to fit their extremely serious postmodern thinking on paper and give voice to the sense of fragmentation existing in contemporary society. Emerging from their postmodern vision, one captures a sense of the vast humanity of the graphic art community, the philosophic nature of their urgency, and the intensity of the quest. It seems that each one of us is doomed to respond for ourselves as to what art is and what it means.

(d) Art & creativity in adults

Adults find a certain sense of pleasure in returning to school in that it gives them freshness of thought, expanded intellectual boundaries and breadth of social involvement (Edelson & Malone, 1999). Middle-aged adults today are often an active force whose “potential contribution depends on their own self-confidence and desire to remain functioning as useful members of society” (Ossofsky, 1995). No longer must graying signify a gradual retreat from the professional world in that mid-life has become a time of release from the ‘burden of expectations’ (Gibbs, 2005) and can certainly be a moment of

creative reshaping of their professional lives (Gardner, 2002). Statistics show that adults that have already had a successful college experience remain interested in returning for further educational opportunities (Lifelong Learning Trends, National University Continuing Education Association, 1994). In fact, there is a “robust relationship” (Belanger & Valdivielso, 1997) between the level of scholastic attainment in youth and re-matriculation as an adult. Individuals who had positive school experiences in youth or at least those who had found some delight in knowledge gathering were found to be “significantly more inclined to seek this venue of self improvement and self empowerment as mature adults” (Belanger & Valdivielso, 1997). Mid-life re-matriculation can also include “mapping out new terrains of socialization and bonding” (Caviglioli, 2005) thus giving the individual a broader sense of community and citizenry in which ‘being educated’ (Gardner, 2002) leads to being a responsible and informed member of society.

Having survived and most likely navigated certain phases of existence, mid-life adults often find it empowering to make choices, to urge priorities, to engineer their now more valued energies and briefer time frames. In our society of plenty, adults now live longer, in fact “never before have there been people that live so long”, nor are “the old as old as they used to be” (Boyer, 1974). Over the past decades, this demographic change has been reflected in the educational participation patterns of older adults (Kim & Merriam, 2004). Non-traditional older students have become increasingly present on higher education campuses in a benevolent trade between institutions of higher learning and non-traditional older, and/or working students: the students, many of whom are

eligible for employer tuition benefits, offer “an effective new revenue stream for the universities” (Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2004, p. 16) and, in turn, the college/university setting allows the student to engage new career options. According to the Consortium for Higher Education (1987) the American adult will explore an average of four different careers during a lifetime. Knable (2000), inquiring as to why mid-life adults are returning to college in record breaking droves, insists that ‘boomers’ are “by far the most educated generation” (p. 1) and have been significantly influenced by education not only as is reflected in their lifestyles but, also, in their daring to re-define themselves. “These benefits to the individual span disciplines and cross pollinate age and cultural boundaries” (Belanger & Valdivielso, 1997) with some fields inviting further study and therefore encouraging re-matriculation of older students. One such field is certainly education itself where teachers return to school to study themselves and their institutions, firstly because they believe in the tenets of education, and secondly, because they are seeking to give voice to some of their well pondered ideas regarding education.

Our basic assumption is that there is an aspect of creativity in all people and that many adult individuals are free to draw this talent out and to use it as a tool of self-fulfillment, an engrossing interest and challenge and perhaps in some cases as a means to significant artistic achievement. (Sunderland, 1973, p.1)

The Fine Arts is another magnet for re-matriculating where non-traditional adults invest time and self in further learning (Edelson & Malone, 1999) and re-addressing creativity. And it is here that I, the researcher raise the issue of “What exactly are the inner and outer experiences of these re-matriculating adults and what are they seeking?”

The return of non-traditional students to campus in search of serious approach to art-making coincides with the feminist movement's attempts to claim status (hook, 1995) and also creative identification for the mid-life adult female, since as Cunningham and Brookbank (1988 as cited in Gergen, 1990) see it "aging may be more difficult for women because they are defined more narrowly" (p. 471).

Gergen (1990) in her handsome article looking at the adult scenario for women "within the Patricarchy" (p. 471) reminds us that a woman's role has been dominated by the embedded psychological view with respect to women of renouncement of the ambitious masculine activity and an acceptance of her feminine nature, which is governed by the principle of passivity. This reflects the study by Diehl, Owen, & Youngblade (2004) as they explore agency (male ambition) and communion (female cooperativeness). Gergen comments on how the woman's role as mother and nurturer has dominated her adult identity whereas, men could achieve "generativity through intellectual, occupational, and other public endeavors" (Erikson as cited by Gergen, p. 473). Gergen continues to explore this issue by separating life development scenarios for men and women, stating that a man's development is generally "linear, progressive, and sequential with a hero-quest myth narrative form of representation" (p. 486) and is not based on biological determinism as is a woman's whose main contribution to society is to reproduce, not only the next generation, but also the same value stores of thought. Gergen provides narratives of "missing stories, missing lives" (p. 475) and holds the autonomous single self as "new units of analysis, new narratives of life stories that do not [necessarily] foretell decline and desperation" with the advance into the mid-life years.

Another author, Kerka (1999), also takes note of gender difference in roles of creativity, explaining “men preserve a creative [mental] space while women cede this space to family demands” (p. 2). “Women artists describe difficult family related choices they had to make that diverted them from their art” (p. 3). Kerka cites Amabile (1996), stating that there exist assumptions that “creativity is largely innate or immutable and that creative people are distinct from non-creative people” (Amabile, 1996, as cited by Kerka, 1999, p. 2), however, as Amabile and Kerka see it, recent research describes “creativity as the confluence of cognitive processes, knowledge, thinking style, personality, motivation, and environment over the life span” (p. 2), which ties in with what cognitive scientists Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, and Gardner, (1994) along with Howard Gruber (on Darwin) have to say about creativity in life.

Authors Diehl, Owen, & Youngblade (2004) studied the modalities of behavior patterns with regard to agency and communion in the self-representations of 158 adults viewed across numerous parameters including age and sex. According to their study, the concepts of agency and communion are frequently used to describe two basic styles of how individuals relate to their social world (Bakan, 1966, McAdams, 1993 as cited in Diehl et al., 2004). Agency is intended as an individual “striving to master the environment, to assert the self, to experience competence, achievement, and power” (p. 2), whereas, communion, on the other hand, had to do with a desire to commune and cooperate with others. The study showed that self-agency was a common attribute of males while communion was predominant among females. Noted was the changing

behavioral tendency with maturity: self-agency gave way to communion in males, whereas self-agency blossomed in females. King & Hicks (2007) have added to the overall research by documenting adult lives in “Lost and found possible selves”. They maintain “a special eye toward understanding the role of possible selves in adult development, the trade-offs that might characterize maturity, and the issues facing adults who have the opportunity to grow through important challenging life experiences” (p. 27).

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methodology seeks to establish philosophical and descriptive underpinnings for human experience while taking into account the perspectives that individuals proffer for their actions in specific social settings (Hatch, 2002). The choice to question qualitatively rather than quantitatively had to do with the inability of measuring per se the subjective data to be collected: verbal data (open ended interviews), artifacts (artistic works which communicate in emotive visual modes), descriptive observation data, and written artist statements. The choice to question qualitatively rather than quantitatively also had to do with selecting an appropriate methodology in order to capture the essence of the phenomenon under scrutiny. An educational phenomenon having to do with the perceptions of a particular population, in this case re-matriculated mid-life adults in the graduate fine arts studio necessitated a naturalistic inquiry base (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The aim of the research was to fathom the essence of their collective experience as it was lived out within the context of an educational setting.

Rich descriptive texts are the hallmark of qualitative methodology, and were gathered here by adopting an interview protocol in which the participating interviewees described their singular transit, that is, the essence of their experience as they resided in a particular human phenomenon, a phenomenon which they themselves had constructed and pursued. The narratives were fruit of a naturalistic approach, which emerged from the participants' lives, or as Eisner (2002) suggests from "what might be called natural

experiments”. And, as Eisner also states, if the inquiry resides in the sector of education, then “qualitative studies of practice are an appropriate methodological orientation”. The qualitative method proved appropriate for exploring personal experiences and meanings associated with reflecting on the self, because it allowed each individual a personal space within which to reflect on and verbalize their experiences and, even to explore their participatory involvement by “explain[ing] participant meaning” (Morrow & Smith, 2000, p 200). These dialectic methods involved the art of humans listening to and ‘attending to’ other humans (Greene, 1978). By definition a non-human instrument employs an *a priori* set of evaluating grids and thus reflects the instrument itself and the mindset of the instrument maker, rather than an ongoing construction of meaning by the respondents themselves (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In qualitative research the human becomes the instrument of choice and it is the human that represents the initial and continuing core element (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This format was convincing and fit the educational aspect of the inquiry and thus, by virtue of the research intent and the unknown input of the players, the qualitative or naturalistic inquiry mode was employed.

Tradition

“What distinguishes phenomenology from other methods is not so much any particular step but the spirit of philosophical reverence” (Spiegelberg, 1965, as cited in Merriam & Simpson, 1984). Phenomenology was used in this study because it embraced the subjective perspectives of the phenomenon by allowing exploration of the each individual’s lived experiences as well as his/her unique considerations as to

the meanings attributed to the act of re-matriculation and re-connection with the studio arts. Phenomenological research assumes that ‘access to reality’ is granted through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings (Hatch, 2002) and thus, integral to the study’s design was the fact that the very process of phenomenological inquiry encouraged participant self-reflection through the attribution of meaning.

A descriptive research design was employed here in an adult education study partially because of the wealth of information in the form of seeing, feeling and intuiting that took place as these individuals adjusted to “unique, dynamic and complex social settings” and elaborated their thoughts as to “the essence of the social meaning” (Hatch, 2002, p. 6). Necessary to this type of naturalistic study was the holistic view of the setting without fragmentation into “isolated incomplete and disconnected variables” (Hatch, 2002, p. 7). The phenomenological approach was seen as a quest for “the essential, invariant structure or the central underlying meaning of the experiences and emphasize[d] the intentionality of consciousness” (Polkinghorne as cited in Creswell, 1998). According to Bandura (2001) “intentionality and agency [operating through consciousness] raise the fundamental question of how people bring about activities over which they command personal control” (p. 5). This personal operating agency was central to the inquiry.

Because the present study focused on a descriptive account of human beings and how they experienced their worlds within their domains of endeavor, and more precisely,

since this study sought to understand human actions and thoughts from the individual's own frame of reference or perspective (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975), the phenomenological tradition was applied here. According to Merriam and Simpson (1984) "essential to the method of phenomenology is the pure description of inner experiences". And to safeguard the purity of the description, Spiegelberg (as cited in Merriam & Simpson, 1984) suggests phenomenological reduction or the ability of the researcher to suspend (Merriam & Simpson, 1984) his/her own reality in order to better breathe in and intuitively live the experience as described by the participant. Phenomenological reduction, also referred to as 'bracketing' or the means by which the researcher puts to one side his/her natural assumptions about the phenomenon, thus achieving openness of mind (Creswell, 1998), was given thorough consideration and employed as a research tool here in this study. The study operated on the principles of clarity: clarity of intention, clarity of position, and the unmasking of persuasive thoughts, which could alter limpid interpretation of the data. As Seidman (1991) suggested "it is naïve for us to argue that researchers can be theory free. Everyone has theories. [Theories] are the explanations people develop to help them make connections among events [and] they are not the private preserve of scientists (p 29)". Therefore, in an effort to limit the threat of bias interpretation of the material, the researcher took stock of any perhaps 'unshaped' theoretical explanations and/or expectations, this prior to beginning the interview series. This safeguard along with using bracketing during review and analysis of the interview material was carried out.

Theoretical assumptions

In the vestige of researcher, I adhered to two distinct methodological assumptions: (i) that there actually was an essence or essences to the shared experience (Patton, 1990, p 70) and thus, that amongst the study's participants an essence of searching for the self or an identity shift would, most likely, be a shared experience; and that (ii) the participants would be conscious of these inner subtleties and would verbalize them, this while keeping the study open-ended (Stokrocki, 1997) and "sufficiently flexible to permit exploration of whatever the phenomenon under study offers for inquiry" (Patton, 1990, p. 196).

Research perspective

My research perspective is constructivist in that I adhere to the convention that society is home to multiple personalities, multiple variations of socio-psychological growth, multiple beliefs and multiple realities. All lead to divergent approaches to life and to how one constructs their specific reality.

Furthermore, artists, be they musicians, poets, or visual artists, are a particular group of people who, by choice of endeavor, are involved in constructing symbolic realities using their heightened individual perceptions. Thus, the meeting between artists and researchers in a mutual "effort to reconstruct the constructions" (Hatch, 2002) through personal reflections, could be considered a classic collaboration in the constructivist paradigm. "Reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their

social worlds” (Merriam, 1998, p.6) and therefore, the study honored the individual experiential perspectives of these re-matriculating art studio respondents as they constructed personal accounts as to art-making as a reflective and re-defining practice.

Data Sources

The main data source for this study was the collective voice. Although gathered individually, the multiple voices offered one larger view. Used here were the very words of the participants, fruit of “conversation with a purpose” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 268) with relevant data emerging from in-depth interviews that yielded rich narrative-like descriptions. Following the tradition of a phenomenological qualitative research, this study gathered the mid-life non-traditional re-matriculated students’ own accounts of their motivations, thoughts, and behavior while pursuing graduate program courses through the Fine Arts program. The resulting dialogues provided individual perceptions along with any meaning and interpretation that they attributed to their experiences. Again, the research was based on these participants’ lived experiences and the findings were energized and determined by the individual data entries, however, in the larger view, the study aimed to shed light on an aspect of the human condition having to do with tapping into the creative core in the adult (40+) years, a timeframe traditionally associated with application of skills rather than schooling. The storied arts-related narratives informed educational interest in life-long learning, in the non-traditional student population, and in arts studio curriculum.

Participant selection

a. Sample size

The present inquiry, sought to comprehend the essence of the studio arts experience as lived by non-traditional re-matriculating students. The study was phenomenological and as such, did not intend to penetrate the entire biographical life of the individuals who were experiencing the phenomena, but rather sought to gather personal commentaries involving the arts related phenomena in order “to explore the structures of consciousness in human experience” (Polkinghorne, 1989 as cited in Cresswell, 1998). This exploration, this weaving together of many lived experiences requires sufficient threads, that is, sufficient accounts narrating the individual’s interaction with the phenomena, in order to create a more compelling tapestry. Therefore the study used a participant group of ten individual re-matriculating students. The number was sufficient to “reflect a range of participants that make up the population so that others outside the sample might have a chance to connect to the experiences of those in it” (Seidman, 1992, p. 45). Saturation was occurred at various stages of the interview process with the participants expressing similar responses to events in their background and their experientially rich association with the studio arts.

b. Saturation

Saturation of response was achieved. The study’s inclusive criteria limited participation within tight confines—age-frame (+40), educational preparation (graduate level), and area involvement (fine arts studio). And although the questions were open-

ended and encouraged flow and variation appropriate for an adult population, the responses fell into clusters in part due to the close-knit frame of participant characteristics which facilitated early saturation of the study's questions (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The study's participant pool numbered 10 and was sufficient to give substance to the study's findings.

c. Criteria for inclusion

The salient characteristics of the participant pool were confining. The initial draft of the research design squeezed the participant pool into an even tighter confine, that of mid-life (40+) MFA candidates. I, the researcher, considered this proposed narrow grouping an excellent and almost preferable confine, feasible, however, only by journeying distinctly different paths: (i) a case study tradition citing the MFA program together with the individual MFA candidates and recent degree recipients from a single institutional program as a tightly bounded reality in its own right; or (ii) the same phenomenological tradition limiting the salient characteristics to mid-life MFA candidates only and therefore urging the necessary geographic expansion to include other institutions. This study, which kept as its participant base the rather selective MFA candidates and recent MFA degree recipients, enlarged the criteria to include post BA and post BFA re-matriculating mid-life adults pursuing graduate course work in the same studio arts classes as their MFA colleagues. The study retained the very interesting essential component that the research study sought to render visible. Thus, it was the researcher's belief that the widening of the criteria in the present study could not be considered a limitation.

All participants fit the narrow slice of university population that was distinctly addressed in the study as people who had returned to campus life after a significant absence, and met the criteria for inclusion by being re-matriculating adults in the studio arts program at the graduate level in any of the studio arts areas: painting, sculpture, ceramics, fibers, photography, printmaking, or drawing. MFA candidates and recent (2004 to present) MFA graduates were encouraged to participate. Here within, the salient characteristic 'older' or 'mid-life', or even, the non-specified 'non-traditional' as sometimes referenced by universities, refers to age 40 or above during the time of adherence to the fine arts program.

d. Contact

Participants were initially contacted and introduced to the research idea. The possible participants were identified and full explanation as to the nature of the project, the time span of the interview series, along with assurance as to anonymity of response was discussed. Prior to commitment, all participants signed the study's specific consent form (see appendix) designed so as to protect their role as respondent. All the people contacted fit the global criteria as active art students in studio arts as well as the aforementioned specific indicators.

d. Benefit

Taking part in this study offered the participants an opportunity of contributing to a phenomenological inquiry concerning creativity in adults. It placed the participant as a principal actor within the higher education context and took note of his/her actions and

life choices as well as the meanings attributed. To a certain extent, the study celebrated the strength of resolve and creativity of the participants as they pursued their aesthetic core. Participation in this study allowed these interesting individuals to see themselves as pioneers in the larger social trend of inventing new horizons.

Site selection

The study's setting was distinct, located in a particular university in a particular state, but representative of a typical accredited graduate level Fine Arts program here in the United States. The interview process for one participant took place in her home, while all other interview sessions took place on campus, either in settings of public access or the open studios at the Fine Arts building, and/or the corresponding MFA studios. The studios were located in one of the three building complexes housing the (i) painting, sculpture, ceramic graduate studios, or the (ii) fiber arts graduate studio areas, or the (iii) open studios in the centrally located Fine Arts Building:

- a. The Lenin building is fairly large with the graduate sculpture/ceramics studio on first floor and a large painting studio upstairs. The upstairs painting loft has been sectioned off into separate studio cubicles for each MFA painter and visiting professors. Three of the study's participating MFA candidates and two recent MFA degree recipients have studio space here and frequent their studios daily or at least as often as possible. Many graduate critiques are held in the

Lenin building as are the review sessions and informal commentaries between painting graduate students and the art professors.

- b. Across campus, the Morandi building houses studio space for the fiber arts program and includes a small gallery space where students display their work. Again, the graduate students are assiduous workers and are very present in the large multi-tasked Morandi building space.
- c. Other sites such as the upper level studios and the large Fine Arts Gallery are located on central campus in the Fine Arts building. The open invitation lecture series is usually held in the Fine Arts Gallery with occasional lectures at either the Morandi or Lenin building.

Access to the studio buildings was formally negotiated through contact with the Chair of the Fine Arts Department.

Data Collection

“Interviews are powerful tools for obtaining knowledge about human experience and behavior” (Kvale, 1996 p. 72) and with this mind, data collection for this study comprised a series of three 60-90 minute interviews with each participant. Interviewing artists brought to center stage the importance of their art performance and the essential art interest of each person’s artistic expression, however, the present research opportunity

was oriented to a glance at the behavioral pattern of mid-life adults with respect to mid-life re-matriculation and not to the individual artistic expressions. Therefore, even though interview data collection was often carried out in the individual's art studio setting, the integrating of the setting, the work, and the artist's commentary, although intriguing, was relegated to future research. The goal of the study's data gathering process was interpretation of the verbal descriptions emerging from the encounters, in order to obtain "a tale that does justice to the subjects' stories of their lived world [which] conveys new and valid knowledge and insights to the readers of the tale" (Kvale, 1996 p. 80).

(a) Interview

The goal of the interview was to comprehend the experiences of a group of people, distinguished by narrow criteria, and the meanings they made of those experiences (Seidman, 1991). It served to "capture the perspectives that actors use as a basis for their actions in specific social settings" (Hatch, 2002, p. 5). It also established the groundwork in order to make sense of those actions and intentions and to construct meaning of human conduct (Hatch, 2002). The basic interview assumed the form of a series of three open-ended, one-on-one interviews following Seidman's (1991) and Dolbeare & Schuman's (1982) guides for the in-depth, three-interview series: (1) the first interview sought to capture a rich descriptive biographical sketch of the participant relating the path from when he/she first embraced the fine arts, through the traditional scholastic tract, to adulthood along with possible epiphanies which eventually led to re-matriculation in the Fine Arts; (2) the second interview sought to understand his/her

present creative experience within the arts studio setting and what the day-to-day sense was of art-making and art-thinking; and (3) the third interview which was structured so as to solicit reflection and commentary about the phenomenon of re-matriculation as a means of re-connection with an artistic self through a return to art-making (with key issues having to do with creativity, identity, and tapping into an inner aesthetic core).

Member checks were carried out and re-visiting the spoken word sometimes served to clarify points of confusion and/or focus on specific considerations “based on evolving theoretical analysis” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998 p. 85). Often, the participants were impressed by their own thinking and realized that reflection on their memories gave them the opportunity to see and state meaning. Regarding the duration of the interviews: three 60-90 minute interviews per participant was the format with most interviews lasting nearly the full 90 minutes. The interview sessions were taped if permitted by the artist, and if not taped, recorded through rapid note-taking. The research data included thoughts and reflections by individual graduate students as told to the researcher during the interviews. The questions posed were open-ended to ensure flexibility and concerned art, the individual as an artist, and any connections the individual might wish to make between art making and identity issues, perhaps lived as mid-life identity issues. Questioning “helps contextualize a phenomenon, that is, to locate it within a conditional structure” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 127) and it is through this process of questioning and reasoning and drawing comparisons, that the “structure or conditions set the stage and create the circumstances in which problems, issues, or events pertaining to a phenomenon are situated” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 127-128).

The open-ended interview questions were suggested by the inquiry itself and also by art educator Mary Stokrocki (1997) in her writings on qualitative research methodology and were articulated as follows:

- What, if any, were your arts-related *experiences* in childhood?
- What, if any, were the arts-related *influences* in childhood? In your family? In the extended family circle? In the community?
- What type of arts-related experiences and influences did you have in school – elementary, middle, high school or beyond?
- What role did the arts play in your adult life? Experiences? Influences?
- What prompted you to re-matriculate in the studio arts?
- What have been your experiences in the arts studio? The instructors? Your fellow classmates and/or MFA candidates?
- What is your medium and what influenced your choice?
- Do you consider or present yourself as an artist?
- How has maturity impacted creativity for you?
- How has creativity impacted maturity for you?
- What does the re-connection with art mean for you in the larger picture of life?

Although the flow of the narrative resulted in a semi-autobiographical account, the study's focus was art-making and its relationship to the adult individual. Therefore, what follows was not a view of the individual life scenario, but glimpses of individual life

as it accompanied and shaped the artistic experiences of the interviewees. The results obtained were an *experiential response to a phenomenon*. The timeframe of the interview sessions was sufficient to allow plentiful room for detailed descriptive life accounts.

(b) Artifacts

The collection of artifacts was not required for support of the data, however, the possibility of interlacing the artists' perceptions of the arts with their art work would be an intriguing study. This implied type of interpretation of their work would have gone beyond the scope of the study and also, far beyond the researcher's competence.

Data Analysis

"Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning—[consisting of]—organizing and interrogating data in ways which allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes and discover relationships" (Hatch, 2002, p. 148).

When you are trying to determine what someone's behavior 'means', the mental exercise involves connecting a discrete fact with other discrete facts, then grouping these into lawful, comprehensible, and more abstract patterns. With the preceding tactics, we are moving progressively up from the empirical trenches to a more conceptual overview of the landscape. We are no longer dealing just with

observables but also with un-observables, and are connecting the two with successive layers of inferential glue. (Miles & Huberman, 1984)

Data collection and the first phases of data analysis advanced hand-in-hand as the review of the first interview informed the second and the combined first and second interviews informed the third (Seidman, 1991). This occurred within a “flexible structure” (Hatch, 2002, p. 38) so as to allow the inductive process to move from ground level specifics to analytical generalizations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The interviews were scheduled at weekly intervals, which permitted contemplation on the part of both the interviewee and the interviewer. From the interview write-ups, categories, themes, and hunches emerged from the data. This was followed by an attempt at a “bottom-up” analytical process or as Miles & Huberman (1984) put it: ”to “mov[e] progressively up from the empirical trenches to a more conceptual overview of the landscape.”

The jump from data to theory proved daunting, making analytic tools and guidelines necessary in order to “to delineate the properties and dimensions that define the meaning of phenomena and give specificity to our theory” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 89). To facilitate making meaning from the large quantity of data that emerged from the interview series, an effort was made to “group concepts into categories [so as] to reduce the number of potentially explanatory units” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.11-12). Employed here was the method of constant comparative thinking in order to discover the

“properties and dimensions of categories [so as to] open our minds to the range of possibilities” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998 p. 88).

According to Kerlinger (1973), a theory is a “set of interrelated constructs, definitions, and propositions that presents a systematic viewpoint of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena” (as cited in Merriam & Simpson, 1984, p. 17). Continuing, Merriam & Simpson (1984) state that a “theory, then, summarizes information and offers a general explanation of the phenomenon being studied (p. 17).

(a) Researcher’s bias

In using a phenomenological paradigm, it is said that the researcher’s bias must be accounted for (Merriam & Simpson, 1984) so as to curb intrusion and render pristine the interpretive process. And therefore, in order to render distinct and thus, suspend personal judgment (Merriam & Simpson, 1984) the researcher wrote, prior to beginning the interview series with the participant pool, personal considerations about important threads linking mid-life identity issues and the process of art-making. The researcher maintained a ‘sketch book’ of thoughts or reflexive journal (Merriam & Simpson, 1984; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) to record various thoughts and quandaries, along with negative and/or positive perceptions of the individual interview sessions. The process of emersion in the data and reflection was lengthy, and as Hatch (2002) declares “It is not an exaggeration to

say that no qualitative analysis is ever complete. Data analysis is like teaching: there is always more you can do” (p. 149-150).

(b) IRB approval

The researcher applied for and received Institutional Review Board approval. This process insured a certain protection to the participating individuals and also to the research project as a whole by stating limitations, domain, and use of material reaped from questioning the study’s participant group. The IRB also sets guidelines for storage of the study’s data bank. The application procedure itself proved helpful in expanding one’s idea of just what serious social research is and eliciting an awareness of the sensitivity of the practice.

(c) Consent forms

The consent form (see appendix) was issued to each individual participant for a signature. An explanation as to the privacy of their information was given in all cases. Some of the participants had prior knowledge of the IRB procedures and consent forms.

(d) Confidentiality

Participants were advised as to the confidentiality of the study. The researcher adopted code names (Italian cities) in referencing interview material and there was an overall masking of personal and institutional information. All tapes, written notes, and images are kept apart under lock as dictates IRB guidelines and the Informed Consent form.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research has to do with meeting certain criteria for validity within the study. Seidman (1991) comments on “internal consistency” as essential to validity and he designed trustworthiness into his carefully articulated, thematically structured 3 part interview series. Each interview (1st, 2nd, 3rd) was done separately at week intervals and thus the in-depth discussions occurred over a ‘passage of time’ (Seidman, 1991) giving what Seidman terms internal consistency. The process “incorporates features that enhance the accomplishment of validity. It places the participants’ comments in context. It encourages interviewing participants over the course of 1 to 3 weeks to account for idiosyncratic days and to check for the internal consistency of what they say” (p. 17).

The research study employed Seidman’s (1991) interview design wherein the researcher viewed the participant within his/her context through the in-depth three part interview series from which emerged: (1st interview) a rich descriptive biographical sketch of the participant relating the path from when he/she first embraced the fine arts, through the traditional scholastic tract, to adulthood; (2nd interview) his/her present creative experience within the MFA/Post BA arts studio setting and the day to day experience of art-making and art-thinking; (3rd interview) meaning of the re-connection with the artistic self.

As regards Trustworthiness, the present research employed “certain measures” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.281) so as to avoid distortions and to safeguard credibility,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability (see Table 2, Appendix). The “mounting of safeguards against distortions” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.281-283) during the entire process of study was encouraged by carrying out certain procedural tasks documented along the inquiry journey in the research journal. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985) *credibility* can be safeguarded by the united practices of (i) prolonged engagement in the research arena (sufficient to know the setting and sufficient to build and maintain a sense of trust with the respondents); (ii) persistent observation, so as to be sensitive to change, to relevancy of information, to any atypical occurrence; (iii) triangulation, a practice of cross checking or examining similar data from multiple perspectives assists the analytical process, states Wolcott (1988), in “ferreting out varying perspectives on complex issues and events” (p. 192). Credibility remained in the foreground and was promoted by the technique of (iv) peer debriefing which involved “exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.308) so as to provide a sounding board for perplexities with the idea of keeping the researcher honest and aligned with his data; (v) referential adequacy, a practice which deals with archiving support data not to be directly used in the study but which, when further analysis and triangulation are required, can advance credibility; and (vi) member checks in which the data is revisited by the investigator and presented to the respondent affording opportunities during and again at the end of the data gathering process, for correction, confirmation, additional elaboration if any, and an overall view of the state of credibility.

With regard to Lincoln & Guba's (1985) procedures for "mounting the safeguards against distortion", the present research study sought appropriateness within the following areas:

- a. The researcher had lived within the setting and established an unequivocal prolonged engagement, a "hallmark of high quality qualitative research" (Hatch, 2002, p. 8), allowed the researcher time to become truly oriented in the setting. The time frame of the research merged with a previous pilot study and spanned a sufficient time period so as to avoid what Hatch (2002) warns against as "not spending enough time being intensely engaged in the settings" (p. 8). The researcher was familiar with the overall university setting, the arts studios, the class levels, the critique formats, art lecture series, most of the Professors, the MFA and Graduate programs offered through the Fine Arts Department. As a graduate student, the researcher had taken studio courses and intimately recognized the investment of one's aesthetic self along with the distinct personal vulnerability of public criticism within the class/professorship critique sessions;
- b. The researcher was armed with persistent observation and attentiveness so as to be sensitive to change, to relevancy of information, and/or to any atypical occurrence taking place in the setting or as described within the interview series.

- c. Triangulation as a process and practice of verification that increases validity by viewing similar data from multiple entries (collected from different sources and different methodologies) was employed.
- d. Peer debriefing from colleagues and my advisor were helpful in keeping the study within the confines of the research question.
- e. Referential adequacy bolstered the study.
- f. Member checks were carried out and lent strength to the quest for verification.

In dealing with that second area of trustworthiness, transferability, it is actually those thick descriptions compiled during data collection that made the idea of transferability possible. “It is not the naturalist’s task to provide an index of transferability” but he/she must provide a rich data base. In the present study dependability and confirmability were safeguarded by a documented trail of interview information, category listings, emerging themes, analytical revelations, and decisions - registering the who, what, where, with relevant descriptions so that an interested third party could retrace the information and interpretation process to the original source through the documented path: “a single audit properly managed can be used to determine dependability and confirmability simultaneously” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher’s journal (some in the form of an on-going self-dialogue tape) served as the expandable site for the documented raw data intake, data reduction, and cross comparison writings which took place while searching for the study’s emergent themes.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested keeping an exhaustive record of everything in journals; they also counseled documenting the researcher's pool of thoughts and considerations by journaling reflections since the researcher is the principal instrument in the data collection task. They suggested referring to this as a reflexive journal, which is a personal diary of sorts and "has broad ranging application to all four areas of trustworthiness" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 327). The study relied on their advice with respect to keeping written documentation of events and reflections of such; the written documentation, as stated, made up the study's research journal.

The study was undertaken and carried out with participating student artists from the fine arts studio area. The researcher shared the fundamental culture and language of the art making process. The researcher's familiarity with the studio arts programs, pre-requisites for entrance into the MFA program, the studio sites themselves, and kinship with aesthetics and its dialect within visual culture facilitated comprehension of the narratives as the participants discussed creativity, life, and other. It is also true that the researcher's familiarity with mid-life issues provided a sensitive receptor for any commentary on art and aging or art-making maturity, which emerged from the interviews. Trust between the researcher and the interviewees with respect to the research project came about through (i) adhesion to the interview series protocol; (ii) reiteration of the consent pact; and (iii) careful attention to confidentiality.

Paramount to the inquiry and the soliciting of individual storied accounts during the interview process (Seidman, 1991) was the issue of trust. Throughout the entire

interview process and member check contact, the researcher maintained a keenly felt sense of respect and interpersonal trust, this further supported by gratitude.

Identification of salient elements was a learning process which occurred through honing listening skills, crafting the open-ended prompts, noting hunches and ‘ah-ha’ moments, and re-visitation of the collected interview material. The researcher kept chronological records, monitored new input, and flagged any atypical events or statements. In addition, member checks were used for clarification when needed.

Several peer debriefings and member checks functioned to curb intrusion and erosion of the project’s validity due to researcher’s bias and/or inflexibility of thought. In this study the research participants were not selected on the basis of their artistic output or inclinations: rather they were asked to speak and reflect on their personal journeys as mature adults addressing the creative act within the rigor of an accredited graduate studio arts program. To counter bias, the researcher had drafted an *a priori* statement as to personal notions, expectations and vague opinions regarding mid-life identity concerns. This became part of the research journal along with the researcher bias accountability statement, suggested by Stokrocki (1997), which was enacted so as to avoid improper judgments being waged upon the words of the participants.

In summary, human instrument frailty issues were addressed. The researcher imposed a regime of open-ended interview questioning, and organizational checks in order to monitor inappropriate data collection and/or conduct. And in the end, the thick

descriptive text, derived from transcriptions of a series of in-depth interviews offered multiple themes for reflection and interpretation of the study's target phenomenon supported by documented data categorization and analysis.

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Summary

Restatement of research question

The purpose of the study was to formally inquire into the nature of the lived experiences of older non-traditional graduate students in studio arts. Art education theoretician Elliot Eisner (2004) states that the act of seeing and creating is an inner collaboration between what we take visually from the world and what we make of it. Honoring the tradition of a phenomenological research, this study gathered the storied

biographies of a group of mid-life (40+) re-matriculated students as they pursued graduate work in the studio arts. The study sought to identify and interpret particular threads of motivation, daring, and self-actualization during transit through graduate studio arts courses as these non-traditional students reflected on the meaning of art in their lives, the choice to continue their arts education in mid-life, and how their journey was interlaced with personal identity issues. Of interest was the nature of these non-traditional students' perspectives on self-actualization through art-making and art-thinking and how the experience of re-matriculation and their evolving beliefs in art-making and aesthetics engender how they live their lives.

The research question driving the inquiry was: Re-matriculation in the Studio Arts: What are the perceptions of mid-life non-traditional students in the graduate fine arts? The sub-questions were: (1) Was re-matriculation in the studio arts lived as a quest, and if so, what were they searching for? (2) Why did they return to the higher education setting? (3) Why did they return to the fine arts studio and what meanings were attributed to re-connecting with the artistic self?

Introduction

Utilizing the qualitative research methodology described in Chapter Three, common themes related to re-matriculation in post-graduate studio arts programs by mid-life adults were sought out and ascertained. The abundance of material derived from the interview series carried out with each participating artist was in itself testimony to the tenets of trustworthiness inherent in qualitative research undertakings. Analyzing the data

became feasible by employing the traditional qualitative research analytical techniques of coding, constant comparison, and cross-site reference (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). From the data bank emerged thick descriptive thematic threads, eventually leading to the reported findings. The material was extensive and therefore a conscious effort was made to afford a broad and multi-vista panorama of the categorized domains in play here.

With regard to trustworthiness and suspension of personal bias, one must note that notwithstanding attempts by researchers to temper their collusion with the narratives as the interview sessions unfold, the very process of listening and interpreting is a human activity, and thus spawns threats to the purity of the narrative. Therefore, no view of the material is final and the present study bows to the recognition that we live in a world of multiple realities and certainly a pluralism of narrative realities as they are lived, remembered, selected, and shared in the context of the interview setting (Bruner, 1998; Jarvilouma, Moisala, & Vilkkö, 2003).

Presented in this chapter are the emerging thematic categories defined by the words of the participants, fruit of “conversations with purpose” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as the participants singularly shared and later, lent meaning to their deepest intentions and lived experiences. As previously stated, these re-matriculating mid-life adults articulated their art-making journey by describing their storied experiences (Bruner 1997, 1998).

In recording their storied experiences it became clear that there were several stages upon which the narratives unfolded: youth seemed one clear timeframe and then

adulthood through re-matriculation in graduate fine arts as mid-life adults was another. Therefore, in order to best accommodate the large span of life and the eventual act of re-matriculation in studio arts, the first two interviews representing Part I and Part II, in which the interviewees give a detailed summary of their lives, have been registered in broad divisions of *youth* and *adulthood*. In Part III, the participants made sense of their adult relationship with the studio arts as they described their lived experiences in the studio arts courses and the meaning they attributed to the intersection of creativity and maturity. The participants also moved into considerations of ‘What is the meaning of art?’ where each seemed to identify art in a particular, personalized manner.

The report of the findings correlated tightly with Seidman’s (1991) Three Part Interview Series format. In all interviews, the narratives recaptured the lived experiences of the respondents. Specified segments of human portraits were continually cross-referenced with the literature in order to align the research material with current theory previously reviewed in Chapter Two. The matrix for reportage was the following:

- (i) Description of artistic self in youth in which the respondents contextualized their early experiences and relationship with art-making—corresponding to Interview I.
- (ii) Description of artistic self in adulthood in which the respondents related their re-engagement with art-making in the arts studio class—corresponding to Interview II;

(iii) Description of the essence of their arts related actions as the respondents attributed meaning to their path in life, to their course of re-entry into the arts studio and re-connection with the creative act—corresponding to Interview III.

Although the flow of the narrative resulted in a semi-autobiographical account, the study's focus was art-making and its relationship to the adult individual. Therefore, the findings do not present a view of the individual life scenario, but rather, glimpses of individual life as it accompanied and shaped the overall artistic experience of the interviewees. The results obtained were an *experiential response to a phenomenon*.

Through inquiry and especially qualitative methodological inquiry, one learns “[h]ow people see, understand, and interpret their worlds” (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p. 195). Differing from topical interviews in which interviewers focus on obtaining responses to their own questions and their own agenda, the qualitative questioner seeks to capture what the people in the studied area *reveal and find of concern*. In honoring the methodological process appropriate for this descriptive qualitative inquiry within the domain of education (Bogdan & Taylor, 1987; Eisner, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Seidman, 1998) the data collection session maintained “the scope of the interview open and flexible with few interrupting questions” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 175). The researcher listened and absorbed what the participants were saying about their experiences and found that their narratives and ‘slice-of-life’ examples were embedded with a multitude of theme-driven life experiences. These tapestries of personalized events were often mixed with societal and generational trends thus “reflect[ing] cultural

discontent or iconic events” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 195). Later, as the study attempted to make “inferences about underlying themes hidden in examples” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 195), the researcher, as suggested by Rubin & Rubin (1995) allegorically assumed the guise of a fisherman, by “cast[ing] the net and slowly reel[ing] in the options.”

The idea for the study was supported by a pilot study done in the year 2006. The earlier study demonstrated the uniqueness of the project in that there was little or no information in the literature concerning adult matriculation in the studio arts; the study also revealed the timeliness of the research in that re-matriculation of mid-life adults is in full flower in higher education (Ballantine & Spade, 2004; Cohen, 1998; Edelson & Malone, 1999; Edelson, 2000); and lastly, the pilot study was encouraging since it showed that many non-traditional students were eager to relate their storied paths which had brought them to formally re-matriculate in studio arts. Indeed, as Rosen (1998) suggests, the human animal often has an ‘auto-biographical impulse’ or need to understand one’s own life through narrative (Bruner, 1997, 2003; Johnstone, 2001, as cited in Kerka, 2005). It was therefore, that the pilot study served as a precursor and a stimulus for the present research.

The data collection process for the present study began in mid-December of 2007 and continued through March 2008. Each individual respondent agreed to and fulfilled the procedural contract of Seidman’s (1991) three-part interview series (see Chapter III). Following the tradition of a phenomenological qualitative research, this study focused on

older (mid-life) non-traditional re-matriculated students' own accounts of their lived experiences as they engaged the fine arts. The resulting dialogues have provided highly individual storied perceptions. Provided also, were the comments and interpretations as respondents attributed meaning to their behavioral life choices. Therefore, the research was based on the participants' lived experiences but its aim was to shed light on an aspect of the human condition having to do with tapping into the creative core in the adult years, a timeframe traditionally associated with application of skills rather than schooling.

Six studio mid-life art students had participated in the above-mentioned 2006 pilot study on artistry in aging undertaken by the same researcher. All but one of the 'pilot' group agreed to undergo a second full performance of the three-part interview series. The one pilot study member not participating in the present study was no longer available since professional life had taken him far from the Midwest. Enlisted into the participating group were five other graduate student adults all of whom fit the criteria for inclusion: age 40 or above when re-matriculating in the graduate arts studio (Chapter III, pp. 71).

The basic interview assumed the form of a series of open ended, one-on-one interviews following the Seidman (1991) guide for the in-depth three-part-interview series from which emerged three interviews, each of approximately 90 minutes. The first interview or Part 1 sought to capture a rich descriptive biographical sketch of the participant relating the path from when he/she first embraced the fine arts in youth, through the traditional scholastic tract, to adulthood; Part II traced the participants'

relationship with the arts in adulthood and descriptions of their lived experiences as non-traditional re-matriculating graduate students in the Fine Arts; Part III dealt with each participant's attribution of meaning regarding the return to creativity in mid-life and the implicated intersection between creativity and maturity.

Part I: Description of the artistic self in youth

(a) Description of the artistic self in youth: Influences

(b) Description of the artistic self in youth: Praise and recognition

Summary

During the first interview, participants provided a backdrop for their interest in the arts accompanied by anecdotes of artistic influences and creative stimulus through school, family or social environment, along with how art and art-making had a place in their lives. Thus, the following data collection and analysis had to do with the first phase of life—childhood through to young adulthood—prior to either attending university or entering the job market. The recollections of the participants consistently brought forth the idea of the artistically sensitive child often acknowledged by family, friends, and community. The organization of Part I of the interview excerpts conformed to the themes uncovered through data analysis and were addressed as *Description of the artistic self in youth* with sub themes of (a) Influences; (b) Praise and recognition.

(a) Description of the artistic self in youth: Influences that “refin[e] our sensory system and cultivat[e] our imaginative abilities” (Eisner, 2002)

Life’s major influences come in many forms and can impact us at any age.

However, it is said that youth is particularly impressionable (Erikson, 1968). Within the family unit or the kinship of friends, opinions and biases are seeded and have their active part in informing taste and sensitivity for many of life’s sectors, including the arts. As Eisner (2002) sees it, “the arts have an important role to play in refining our sensory system and cultivating our imaginative abilities” (p. 2). Appreciation of the arts also fosters interaction with our social world and can be seen as guiding the greater public to a larger consciousness (Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1978; Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, & Gardner, 1994). The participants’ art orientations, as related in the childhood narratives, were either reflections of private family views or public and institutional influences.

1. Influences: the aesthetic ‘habitus’

Familial and social contexts leave strong imprintings on the individual in formation. Familiarity with scents, colors, music and aesthetic notions is absorbed and becomes part of that person’s familial/social DNA (Bettie, 2003; Winnicott, 1960). This aesthetic DNA influences and generates an aesthetic or artistic inclination and is influential in the development of individual tastes and the creative imagination. It has the aspect of an aesthetic ‘habitus’—a socially informed aesthetic disposition, with which one appreciates or deprecates their surroundings.

Eisner (2002) remarked that sensorial perception is a primary life tool, that humans begin “[e]xperiencing the environment” as newborns and the process “continues throughout life; it’s the very stuff of life” (p. 1). This was the case with participant Ancona, who was raised in an Eastern urban environment and remembered art as being almost a family tradition.

Everyone in the family was or is an artist. My mother painted and loved dragons, anything oriental. My father was an engineer and he painted the family’s coat of arms. My brother—he’s about 3 and a half years older—yeah, he could really draw.

Participant Livorno remembered the strong influence of her father:

Dad had an appreciation of art, you wouldn’t really notice it but he had it. He was an interesting man but he got stuck in the mold of bread winner for the family, authoritarian head of the family....[but] he had a few creative ways of doing this.

Another participant, Forli, shared the following:

I think I had a child’s view of art—things had to be pretty—beauty and good taste were important. I had absorbed good taste from my family environment—it wasn’t sophisticated but pretty and pleasing.

Participant Imola remembered the artistic imprinting of the family home with its “unusual colors and Frank Lloyd Wright style windows overlooking the back patio. Modern art had always had a place on interior walls”. Imola continued as she related an overlapping

of the arts, music, graphic arts, and literature—hints of the photographer/film-maker she was to become.

I suppose the ‘hero’ was always present in my imagination. I remember listening to Oscar Wilde’s *The Happy Prince*. We had a brilliant recording of it and we would listen again and again....and weep as we read along and looked at the illustrations. There was something magical in the combination of the spoken word, the bird singing, the music, and the beauty of the drawings. I think I always thought about the great poets and artists as our heroes.

2. Influences: Art-making as a child

Verona, who returned to school later in life and, eventually, to the field of drawing and sculpture, recalled her father teaching her his craft of constructing houses as she grew up:

My father wanted me to be an architect and always encouraged me [when I’d draw].

Instead, participant Firenze, who actually became an architect, recounted how he enhanced his solitary existence by constructing his own private town:

I did *architectural drawings* of buildings when I was 13-14 and I even did some panels on 4 by 8 ft plywood—it was a model of a town—I made the buildings from cardboard and fashioned them on the wood panels—it was my solitary life and in those slack hours I would work on the model—I did the model for 4 or 5 years—I still have a few of the cardboard buildings. I was systematic as I learned about life—after I build the homes, I built a bank, a library, a fire station, one of each that were needed by a town. I made them from sheets of cardboard left over from the

cleaners... [laughing at the recollection] It was sort of a continuing at-home art project – I was fairly isolated through my Jr. and High School years, I never fit... had a hard time.

Participant Forlí recalled the art of sewing among the female members of her family. In her recollection of watching the creative act, in which she associated art to that which is ‘magical’ and ‘transformative’, her words seemed to echo Dissanayake’s concept of the magic of attention, the magic of making something special: “a universal inherited propensity in human nature to make some objects and activities special” (1988, p. 107). Forlí seemed to have lived a moment akin to this and made it a part of that which influenced her creative nature.

I remember being in awe of my aunt who would make paper dolls for us out of cardboard. She would transform a flat piece of cardboard into a little girl doll with a sweet rosy face. I think she made us cloth dolls as well ... again it was magic. I enjoyed the transformation.

Another participant, Como also recalled the art of fabricating, making, sewing—all of which was to become a strong component of her artistry:

I loved to sew, to knit, and to embroider. My grandmother and mother showed us how to embroider—these were the solitary crafts.

Much like Como, participant, Livorno, remembered having learned the thread crafts in the family setting:

When we were small we *all* did needlepoint, crocheting, knitting and embroidery work. We were five kids—I have three brothers and one sister.

3. Influences: Artistic lifestyles

Relatives and friends populating the larger family circle, along with other youth in formation, brought with them characteristics, which charmed, enthused, or even disturbed. Their flair was noted and adds to the pool of aesthetic inclinations present in the participants' reservoir of memories. One participant recalled the artistic lifestyle of relatives.

The wealthier side of the family lived in upstate New York—he was a cigar-smoking architect and she was a loom weaver. They were 'art collectors'... wall sculptures and large abstract paintings. Their house was built in a grove of pine trees and was ...beautiful. As a child I remembered being aware of their arty European style, it was great, they were great (laughing) he was very short and she was tall with dark hair....the fabrics and their ceramics were beautiful. I remember they had a Bauhaus chair. I really envied my cousins (laughing).

Although participant Forlí recalled liking art-making, she had not really attributed any strength or power to the act, or to the arts as a profession.

I didn't really give the arts much thought until I met Vania in high school....she became my closest friend and her father was an artist, *an acclaimed artist*...very different from the insurance salesman fathers that the rest of us had....her father

lived in a huge studio and I remember once he cooked us this superb Greek meal for lunch and even gave us a sip of wine.

4. Influences: Schools and teachers as ‘vicars of culture’

After exposure to the arts, there is that next passage, the creative implementation of the perception, that evolutionary necessity which calls into action man’s ‘aesthetic imagination’ and the need to ‘make special’, which is, according to Dissanayake, a “human proclivity” (p. 227) for the “transposition of [life’s] ordinary elements” into an expression of specialness” (1988, p. 102). Schools have long been important in providing both exposure to and exploration of the many art forms.

Eisner (2002) correlates what the child perceives with individual interpretation, and states that “perception is, in the end, a cognitive event. What we see is not simply a function of what we take from the world, but what we make of it” (p. xii). Schools and teachers, who are, according to Bruner, like ‘vicars’ of culture (Ossofsky, 2001), must provide a multiplicity of portals to abilities with which the student can perceive and interpret the world. One such ability is certainly that of seeing, of visually breathing in the informative information of life. The role of the school with respect to fostering interest in the arts has long interested educators and policy makers alike.

Participant Como recollected how her city’s school system uniquely favored the arts:

It was an *artistic city*, very supportive of the arts. There was a lot of money, oil money, and the city wanted that generation of baby boomers to be exposed to the

arts. It was a great experience and we were instilled with a love for the arts, civically and culturally. It was part of a school program and I would go home and it was I, as a child, who asked to be taken to the museums, to the concerts, etc. My family would accommodate me [and the school program]. I saw some of the best conductors and the most beautiful museums...we'd go on field trips and then chamber orchestras would come to the school and give previews for concerts that we would then attend—it was wonderful!

Whereas, participant Genova recalled:

I went to a strict and highly demanding elementary and middle parochial school—more demanding than the public schools at that time. There weren't formal classes in art but they did have music classes because they had a large choir.

Again, in favor of school's intervention with respect to a student's artistic inclination, participant Empoli related the role school instruction played in how *he* as a young teen began to consider art important:

My biggest brush with art was in High School in *Mrs. Johnson's* class. She taught art and I liked art ok but I skipped school a lot. She caught a group of us fibbing one day about where we were and so she chained (figuratively) us to the workbench as atonement for our wandering ways. *It was at that wood sculpture workbench that I discovered how much I liked it [art].*

5. Influences: Exposure and exploration of arts possibilities

Humans develop aesthetic notions and taste by exploring the creative self; exposure to art, as well as, looking at art and making art are means of exploring the “contours of our emotional selves” (Eisner, 2002, p. 11). One participant recalled her first encounter with Van Gogh in catechism class: “...putting together the ‘nativity scene’ at church...the little figurines, the hay and the cows, and the starry night backdrop—the [church] teacher had us use Van Gogh’s starry night in the scene and talked to us about art and...possibilities”.

Both recollections by Ancona and Firenze further confirmed this:

It [the *Opera house*] was beautiful and the ceiling was painted as well as the scenes in the halls. I knew art was important. My *parents* would point these things out to me.

When I was in 4th grade my Father took me to see a *Van Gogh exhibit* in St Louis, it was a big deal, waited in line for an hour for the tickets. Usually it was my mother who was responsible for the *museum visits* – also for the taste in the home—with very little she kept up a stylish home with propriety.

Yet another participant, Imola, recalled how oftentimes what seems a window of opportunity could actually become a closure.

A friend of the family was a landscape painter so that I was given landscape painting lessons with oil paints on canvas. I had never done oil painting before.

There were several kids and we hiked off into the mountains like Cezanne—it should've been fun, but I guess I didn't enjoy it much because....I've always thought landscape painting tedious.

Still other participants remembered being influenced, not only by schools, museums and theatres, but also by books, photography, newspapers, and magazine images. As Ancona, an illustrator recalled:

When I was young I remember staying up all night with *Jane Eyre*. I was in 6th grade. To read is to imagine and to illustrate in your head (An).

When I was in 2nd grade I would copy *cartoon figures* and then color the drawings and... they were pretty good for a kid (Em).

My aunt and uncle's *Polaroid* camera was pulled out at all the family events. It was like watching magic—a magical chemical process (Im).

In 2nd grade I was always drawing houses and room plans – sort of interior design drawings that came from my mother's *home and garden magazines*—shelter magazines. Later when I got a bit older I became a secret artist (Fi).

Summary of sub theme: Influences active in the crafting of the private and public artistic self in youth

With respect to the inner or private self, including our artistic inclinations, the basis for our taste is generally established in the family and/or cultural settings of youth; as children, a familiarity with scents, colors, music and aesthetic notions is absorbed and becomes part of that social DNA (Bettie, 2003). This later spills over into our outer or public self where the traditional parameters are defined in terms of the social milieu in which one resides. Therefore, often our sense of taste, our ‘core’ aesthetic sense and creative imagination is linked to our ‘habitus’ ...that unconsciously enacted, socially learned disposition toward one’s surroundings (Bruner on Bourdieu, 1997). And here, the theories of Dissanayake (1988) and Bruner (1983, 1997, 2003) seem to meet, as the inner self meets the outer self, the private self joins the public self in youth: with Bruner’s inner core responding to the primal urge of Dissanayake’s “homo aestheticus” to make something special, seen as that “specific artistic behavior when the child shapes or embellishes some material of his everyday life with the intention of making it special so that it will be responded to by others for its aesthetic quality” (Dissanayake, 1992, p 148). This artistic urge carrying aesthetic information from the home and community, translates into creativity and leaves an imprint on the individual. This seemed the case with participant Verona as she recalled having assigned special meaning to her desire to please her mother through crafting a personalized art gift. The caring and tenderness of the act was seen in her adapting her idea to the family tradition of building as a way of making.

My mother used to sew and had boxes of buttons and scraps of material, etc. I remember for Valentine's Day I made her a corsage. I *built* a heart out of cardboard and embroidered words all over it, and then I padded it with tinfoil and stuff. I glued everything into a sort of sculptural gift card...I was about 10 or 11. I was the only one of the girls to take a liking to art ... to being creative.

(b) Description of the artistic self in youth: Praise and recognition as a means of confirming and celebrating artistic identity indicators in youth

Paramount to having included the defining tool of art in one's life seemed to have been a certain degree of exposure to the arts along with encouragement during early experiments with drawing, painting, and/or varied art-making tasks. The settings were those of youth: pre-school, elementary school, middle school, high school and/or family environment.

1. Acquisition of identity awareness in youth

Identity is gained and eventually defined through awareness of the self. In youth, just being considered in the family and having that sense of belonging is important and lends stature to the budding self (Erikson, 1968; Maslow, 1943, 1971, Winnicott, 1960). In childhood, indicators of identity accompany our growth and are confirmed or dismissed as one's character traits evolve. When a child's identity is linked to a competence or an ability, this can become an indicator of the self that distinguishes us from others (Bruner & Kalmar, 1998; Natsoulas, 1998), and a primary identity factor within the internal landscape of the person, remaining memorable throughout life (Erikson, 1968; Polacco-Williams, 2007; Winnicott, 1960).

The following excerpts, which emerged from the individual dialogues, suggested the thematic domains for a categorical interpretation of the narrative slices. The emergent themes were many, praise and recognition in the family, praise and recognition in school and community, competition with siblings and then in school contexts, and isolation in youth. These many themes were reduced to praise and recognition, which easily encompassed the first four sub-themes dealing with private and public recognition along with competition for praise and recognition; they all had to do with the construction of an artistic self in childhood. The individual passages are accompanied by points of reference and contextual information lending uniqueness and situation to each artist's lived experience. Engaging here are the surprisingly detailed recollections of some of the early artistic moments.

2. Self-perception as an artistically gifted youth

Some of the participants recounted how their individualism was embraced and intertwined with the idea of a child with a particular ability, a child or adolescent with artistic talent. Participant Ancona noted:

Well, there was a bit of a hub-bub when it was discovered that I had skipped an artistic developmental phase. I never did the expected stick figures but went from *scribbling* straight to *form*. Somehow *I knew I had succeeded in something*.

Firenze talked with ease about his penchant for arts and recognition of his youthful talent.

Yeah, I think people liked and appreciated my drawings and colorings—*all through elementary and junior high there were 2 or 3 kids out of 30 who excelled in art and I was one of those.*

Participant Genova had always been interested in art, but silently so.

I received praise in elementary school. You know.... lively doodles, little designs but I went to a strict parochial school where art was not considered a real subject of study. In fact, art wasn't treated seriously in my family or at my school but *in my head I wanted to be the best artist and be recognized as such.* I am not sure why I felt as I did [but] *I didn't want to be the best speller.*

Participant Livorno brought up recollections of who she was as a child:

I remember coloring as a kid. I was just an intense little kid. *I loved colors* and I would color within the marked lines. Yeah, I filled in those blank outlined areas, and I remember I would really fill them in [her voice here has an amused tone] with rich, saturated, heavy colors. *I can still remember the seriousness of my marking.*

Continuing, Livorno, seemed to have gleaned where her strengths and talents were and as a child she remembered recognizing her abilities:

I wanted to be a ballerina but I saw the others had a natural grace and had fluid movements. I knew I did not have *that* talent (Li).

Imola recalled her love for horses and how she felt capable after a family friend helped her express this instinctive choice through art:

I sawed a horse head out of wood and for me it was beautiful...I had a collection of horse statues but this was *something made by me*...I felt proud and I remember feeling capable and actually, through life, I have never doubted my abilities—other things, yes, but never my abilities.

Forlí remarked that she was a good student. School was easy for her and so was art.

I always did well in art and I was encouraged. *I knew I could draw well.*

Similar words came from participant Aquila who remembered:

I was one of the kids who could paint and draw pretty things.

3. Collaboration with the elements: Enjoyment and happy fearless exploration

Many participants recalled the sheer pleasure of art-making: the materials, the physical involvement, the community. Developmental psychologist Donald Winnicott (1960) prescribes to the belief that only the true self can be creative and that it is the true or authentic self that is capable of enjoyment and happy fearless exploration. This seemed the case with participant Empoli, who seemed to have an early penchant for exploratory fun as recollected in several instances, which gave imagery and life to this type of basic love and collaboration between the youthful self and art's expressive opportunities:

Yeah, I remember when I was 7 or 8. I was always drawing with my brother. We would sit on the front porch and do warlike games. He'd draw a battleship and then I would draw a submarine to attack and so on.

Continuing, Empoli fondly described doing the holiday art projects at school.

In school I always liked making Santa Claus out of red construction paper and cotton for his beard. Then, there were the Valentine day boxes in second grade. We would cover shoeboxes with shiny colorful strips of material.

The joy was not making art so much as 'just making things'. But I remember doing something called ground art. It was such a tactile experience, moving the dirt and digging holes, and slicing into the dirt with a square shovel making perfect perpendicular right angles.

I grew up in the north, so in the winter my brother and I and the neighborhood kids would make snow dogs and snow dragons, igloos....then, we would fill an old insect sprayer with paints and color them.....[smiling at their ingenuity].

Like Empoli, participant Imola remembered a certain freedom in a "large playroom for all four" of them. She recalled: "We always had paper and crayons around. We were pretty free about messing up the place and if I was hungry.... I would draw my favorite food and eat it."

Later, a sense of shyness was countered in play with film director qualities.

As a teen—well—I was pretty shy but—I had a super-8 film camera without sound, and I did a bit of playing around with film and ‘directed’ a few silly commercials with my cousins.

Another participant, Como, definitely enjoyed art both at school and at home. In both settings creativity was appreciated and her talent and thoughts were sensitively kindled:

Art classes in school – I loved it but I thought I was incompetent! At home, my mother helped us. Well, my mother was an unschooled draftsman, she could draw, she had a natural talent and I’d imitate her.

We took a bit of art in school but mostly we were raised knowing how to sew. I sewed all my doll clothes at 6-7 years of age and I knew how to knit. I was the kid in our family who was interested in crafts. I would have made a perfect homemaker but I am too mean (laughing). But I always loved to use materials, plant fibers—anything. I painted on canvas too but I loved to sew, to knit, and to embroider. My grandmother and mother showed us how to embroider—these were the solitary crafts. You could just sit and think. I was a pre-Title 9 child [referring to a program started a year or two later encouraging girls in sports]—so we just jumped rope and played jacks but no real school athletics.

The manner of involvement is somewhat distinguished by the setting. As, participant Verona had noted, her parents were ‘builders’, the father a construction contractor, who during the participant’s childhood, was “ever so slowly” building their home. She was no stranger to “2 x 4s, concrete slabs, and levels”, rather, these intriguing carpentry tools later became a part of her aesthetic armory. She remarked on how architectural concepts with its myriad of planes and linear divides have found a strong presence in her prints, her sculptures and drawings.

Dad signaled me out—I was the second of five girls. Dad was always building and designing and building ... in fact my youth was centered around his construction and building the house. Actually, *I* am a builder... I re-modeled my home by myself....I’m also an electrician and I can do a bit of plumbing. Anyway, when I was little I became Dad’s right hand worker and I had to work hard! I learned that to work hard was to gain Dad’s attention. He wanted me to be an architect but I have always feared math....[!] But any surface, any old piece of cardboard I’d find, I’d paint on it!

4. Competitiveness, public recognition, and prize winning in the arts

Many participants brought up the notion of youthful competitiveness in art making, often amongst siblings or familial/friend contexts (“my brother could really draw”, “I was the artist”, “drawing with my brother...he’d draw a battleship and then I’d draw a submarine”). Later, competitiveness, public recognition, and prize winning raised its head within the childhood classroom settings as well.

Participant Firenze stated:

I wasn't the only artist in the family. My older sister was very artistic well into the university years and then abandoned it. Actually I always thought my brother, a doctor, was really a frustrated architect. There was always this *competitiveness* among us. We were four children and there was a sibling type of solidarity against our parents but not when we were making things. There was something always unsettling about art. My family was more competitive than I had thought.

Participant Ancona recalled how the family viewed them:

My brother was the mathematician, the left brain, while I was the artist, the right brain...typical sexist paths.

Participant Livorno also shared how she had been serious and contemplative as a child, and especially conscious of color, which was a hallmark of her work in the MFA program:

As a child I guess I had already developed a *strong sense of aesthetic judgment*. I remember coloring with a girl cousin once, she did everything delicate and ethereal. *I noticed the difference* of what I was doing with what she was doing. She was delicately filling in spaces with soft colors and I was intensely covering every inch and getting bright solid color. I still remember the colors and the scene—magenta and teal blue.

Another participant stated that in school and at home:

Between us kids there was competition for who could draw better.

Participant Como remembered a system of equity in her upbringing although she alone became the artist in the family:

She [mother] employed an equal opportunity rule for we three sisters – what one got, we all got. I remember she would take us out at the beginning of the summers and buy each one of us a big sketchbook and colors.

5. The inner artistic self and public recognition

Confirmation of the youthful inner self as it becomes a public entity, shapes and colors not only how we present ourselves to our environment but how we perceive ourselves. It is a gradual process of constructing identity, which begins in infancy and continues through life—a complex collaborative construction, in part crafted by the individual, in part imposed by others (Bruner, 1983, 1998; Jarviluoma, Moisala, and Vilkkio, 2003). Some participants recalled important moments of recognition of their artistic talents.

I won first prize for a portrait that I did and I liked the way the hair turned out. I thought it looked so real (Li).

I was a bit like Huck Finn—“yeah, a good kid with a wayward father” [laughing at the thought]. I even painted a fence—it was a contest—I won \$100 for it—it was the First National Bank.... they were renovating the building and had a community contest to paint the temporary wooden entrance....it took me 4 hours to paint it. I did sort of a Thomas Hart Benton-ish scene with curves and puffy clouds – pictorial

panel—sinuous curves and magic realism—first I did one area with a 1-point perspective and then used a 2 point perspective for the second area...I was pretty free with perspective. They [the family] have kept the piece all these years—in the basement—its still there (Fi).

The other kids copied my [art] ideas (Aq).

People thought me pretty good at art, and also as a student, I was not the very best—[gasp]—even that young, I already had well-established labels of success! I was a very good student, but I specifically remember a school art contest. I didn't get first prize and I felt bad about it even though I got a prize for my entry. It was third grade. Then at a Halloween party, again I was really disappointed at not having my drawing selected. *I was competitive in my head* (Ge).

Having drawn horses, “only horses”, had set Imola apart, but talking of this, she related how a moment of innocent comparison was difficult to accept.

When I was about 8 or 9 we went to visit another family with a girl about my age—they wanted me to meet her because she was such ‘a talented artist’—and she was! She drew horses too...but they were amazing, full of movement while mine were static. I didn't really understand what had happened but I remember feeling uncomfortable.

6. Self-awareness and self-assertion (crystallization) of the self as an artist

A few of the comments seemed to usher in an idea of how the youthful artist identity asserted itself in the external world.

At the house, there was a room that had a nice little framed painting of horses and an English foxhunt. It was a nice little scene in a nice little niche of the house but I took it over – I took down the foxhunt painting and put up one of mine then slowly I took over the wall. There were, and still are, about twenty of my paintings on the wall. *I was staking out my identity* and I claimed the wall by replacing the hunt (Fi).

I don't know if I told you that funny time when I was in second grade and a little girl asked me what I wanted to be and I said an artist and she scorned me and said I couldn't make a living as an artist – [laughing] at the age of 7, I was being dissuaded from my becoming an artist by another 7 year old!!! (Fi)

I remember in grade school – 5th grade – I was drawing a rocket ship and the teacher came along and turned it into a tree. She changed my idea into something mundane. *I was furious*. I knew instinctively [laughter with a knowing look] that what she did was incorrect....I knew that my drawing was my drawing.... it was only for me to alter. I remember she lived in a baby blue house with baby pink trim (An).

Summary of sub theme: Praise and recognition

In concluding this segment on Praise and Recognition of the artistic self in childhood and adolescence, the narratives seem to indicate that childhood identity is gained and eventually defined through awareness of the self, a self which is an interface between the inner and outer self, the private and public self, a self “construed as a functional interaction between behavior and environment” (Rachlin, 1997, p. 85) with clues to self-knowing positioned as positive or negative responses from other people and events which mirror our behavior.

As can be inferred from the following comment by one participant, early praise is remembered and treasured for the span of life. Positive response to early attempts in art-making, and continuing encouragement in the field, allow students to dare to venture along paths of self-discovery (Bruner, 1997, 2003; Winnicott, 1960). There is a marked poignancy to the statement of participant Genova which gave voice to this concept:

I remember in 7th grade a *lay teacher* was brought in for public speaking. She came in and the first thing she said was how much she liked a particular drawing on the wall and she asked who did it—it was mine. She was very complimentary about it. Later that same day she praised me on my public speaking ability. Two huge compliments in one day, *I have never forgotten what a wonderful day that was. I still remember the flavor of it.*

Summary of Part I

Exposure and stimulus and a nurturing environment are precursors to a child's healthy interest and participation in learning, and later, expressing him/herself (Erikson, 1968; Winnicott, 1960). Long term effects of positive reinforcement of child behavior and performance result in continued comfort and satisfaction, and even, daring (Ryder, 1987), in that domain. In the present study, accounts of exposure to the fine arts along with accounts of positive responses to youthful attempts at art-making, as narrated by the participants confirmed that these influences and responses of praise and recognition functioned as identity indicators (Bruner, 1997) and became embedded in the participants' memories. These embedded indicators became part of the authentic core and carried forward 'ambient-acquired-knowledge' of the self, the artistic self, as the child passed from one developmental phase to the next (Adamo, 2007; Erikson, 1968; Polacco-Williams, 2003; Winnicott, 1960).

The participants of the study all carried this reinforced artistic self into adulthood and, it is this, the core artistic self that they later tapped into as they re-matriculated in the studio arts.

Part II: Description of the artistic self in adulthood

- (a) Description of the artistic self in adulthood: Artistic identity
 - (b) Description of the artistic self in adulthood: Artistic inspiration
 - (c) Description of the artistic self in adulthood: Return to the studio arts
- Summary

During the first interview, the participants provided a backdrop for their interest in the arts accompanied by anecdotes of artistic influences and creative stimulus through school, family or social environment. Along with this were descriptions of how art and art-making had established a place in their lives. The first phase of life—childhood through to adulthood—has already been accounted for, and what follows is each participant's description of his/her mid-life adult self as related to the arts. From these recollections, a portrait of the artistically sensitive adult emerged.

To recap their stories, following the phase of youth, only two respondents went on to study the fine arts at school (an illustrator and an architect), with four others becoming professionally qualified in the arts sectors much later (one switched from high school English teacher to graphic arts, one from medical technician to graphic arts publications, another from nurse to photographer, and the fourth became an art teacher). Therefore, in mid-life, of the ten respondents, five were what could be defined as working professionals in the various art fields (one illustrator, one architect, two graphic artists, and one art teacher). But the artistic mandate was not their own and although their work

was arts related, their art talents were being used in the service of others. In mid-life, all returned to the studio arts setting and took studio arts courses in which they addressed personal artistic expression. The other participants were employed in non-arts related positions, one teacher, one medical worker, one documentary writer, and one clerk. All returned to the studio arts in search of their artistic self. Added to the portraits of the artistically sensitive adults was, now, the autobiographic sketches or storied biographies (Bruner, 1997) of what seemed to be adults in flux, who were on a quest for some sort of change, and some sort of self-actualization in an arts related area.

The organization of Part II of the interview excerpts conformed to the themes uncovered through data analysis and were reduced and addressed as *Description of the artistic self in adulthood* with sub themes of (a) Artistic identity; (b) Artistic inspiration; and (c) Return to the studio arts setting, followed by a summary.

(a) *Description of the artistic self in adulthood: Artistic identity*

“The problem of identity—personal, cultural, social, sexual, and racial—is one of the most vexing critical issues of our time” (Jarviluoma, Moisala, and Vilkkö, 2003). And while one is not born with an identity, the process of constructing identity begins early and seems to be a complex collaborative construction, in part by the individual, in part imposed by others (Bourdieu, 1984; Bruner, 1983, 1998; Jarviluoma, Moisala, and Vilkkö, 2003). In fact, with regards art indicators, it seemed that while the respondents shared common ground in youth, in adulthood, the narratives were fairly singular as each adult

participant discussed a personal perspective on art and art-making as opinions aligned with their varying individual life views. Notwithstanding the individualistic view of art, some thematic commonalities were found.

Surfacing from the narratives of these participating re-matriculantes was the common act of crafting of their artistic selves in adulthood, a crafting of the self, which had begun in youth—a budding artistic self in youth which had received praise and recognition, had come alive with some sort of inner compensation, and had gained a sense of competence by producing a work of art. One of the two participants who went on to study the arts at college shared the following:

I applied to undergraduate school and graduate school at [UC] Berkeley. It wasn't the greatest graduate program for architecture but I really liked California and I felt good on the campus. It was a bit frightening, at first, coming from the Midwest but then I liked it—I graduated with a Master in Architecture from Berkeley when I was 28.

Others, instead, spoke in terms of acquiescing to adult responsibilities. Participant Aquila, who grew up in a rural area, related how easily she was swayed from any personal artistic ambition:

I began college and I did a year or so but the message from the family was obvious. Learning, especially for women was not really a consideration or desired. There was a lot of work at home.

One participant spoke on how the artist self bowed to the idea of a real profession.

In college I was an undeclared major and then an art major for about a year - then I put art on the shelf and followed my studies in History – 18th-19th century history.

Another participant grew up in the 60's and 70's and her story sounded very much like that of feminist scholar bell hooks as described in her book *Art on my mind: Visual politics* (1990). She recalled being dissuaded by family and even by her own thoughts, from the possibility of 'daring to be an artist'.

I kind of wanted to study the arts but—my parents wouldn't have approved—it wasn't suitable, especially for a girl—you could never make a living as an artist—only very few people had *that type of luxury* to go into the arts.

The photographic arts had been relegated to a type of hobby for Imola:

I took chemistry, biology, the medical sciences—and I loved it—but I knew I was clever at photography –I got serious once and dedicated time to some nature studies when we vacationed.

Summary of sub theme: Artistic identity

This flow from the artistic youth to the artistic adult was not smooth for all. Even for the two participants who continued with art directly into college/university ("I attended the same college that my mother and grandmother went to"), the path was riddled with obstacles ("I didn't have that fast, confident attitude"; "a bit frightening at first"). For the others, the journey to further schooling in the arts would take more time.

As stated, in the early adult histories of all but two, art-making and the creative urge were placed to one side, and succumbed to life's more pressing concerns (marriage, children, school, employment) after leaving high school.

Indeed, several participants (Aquila, Genova, Imola) talked about having followed the 'safe path', the 'traditional path' ("women were not supposed to think about careers", "my dad said—oh yeah, all by yourself in the city—", "get your degree in nursing") as opposed to the creative but risky path of art-making. Therefore, many reasons, including familial influence, monetary needs, and/or fears of not succeeding ("I didn't get in [to film school]", "I had to make a living") were initially influential in deferring a fine arts career. In all but two cases, the respondents did not pursue the fine arts beyond their first phase of scholastic training until much later. With regard to the connection between identity and art-making in mid-life, participant Genova shared the following.

When I was young and doing my undergraduate degree and taking art courses, I guess art was almost a social thing, I was part of a group and in a sense, even though I never felt that I fit in, I owed my identity, whatever identity I had, to that arty group ...to being an art student. We would all work and chat and the work and the socializing would be one. I worked alone also, but not with my head. Now, I don't like to be distracted. I work better alone or in silence. Discussion with others is necessary but the work is better alone. I guess I have become that artist.

(b) Description of the artistic self in adulthood: Artistic inspiration and the muses within

According to Weintraub (2003), inspiration has to do with “the originating breath” of interest, an interest that can come as “happenstance” from the external world or from muses within. Inspiration is often lived as “the gradual infusion of a subtle vitality that is experienced as a metaphysical stirring” (p. 123). It is an important part of the artistic process and it appeared that this thread of art, this special and compelling response to the arts, was a strong commonality among the participant group. All were subject to intense inspiration—that artistic inspiration that confirms the fine arts and, conversely, that response to art that “confirms the existence of this elusive state of being—of inspiration” (Weintraub, 2003, p. 124).

The participants’ storied accounts confirm the notion that art is powerful in many ways (Congdon, 2005) and that it can impact the beholder as well as the maker. As Clark (1969) observed art is an exciting visual experience and has the power to “extend human experience in a way words alone cannot do” (p. 3). All participants recalled periodically returning to the fine arts in some manner, almost “like an addiction” (Fo). All described how they attended museums and openings whenever possible with many of the participants citing particular events in which they had experienced a powerful response to art during these encounters.

The inner self of these participants with its childhood core, its artistic self, was drawn to the arts and stirred. This same inner self was reminded of the strength of engagement (Eisner, 2002) with the primal creative drive of mark-making and art-making

(Dissanayake, 1988, 1992) through the process of ‘seeing’ as intended by Langer (as cited in Gardner, 1984). This was experienced as a type of fortification and inspiration and finally, guidance of the artistic self towards the creative act. The intellectual process of seeing, reflecting on, and responding to inspiration was for these adults, part of what it meant to be an artist—to think and to feel in an artistic way (Leong, 2004). Their ability to hesitate with and to attend to this inspiration was part of the art-making process, part of the artistic endeavor.

As a young working woman, participant Forlí recalled the following.

My first visit to the Philadelphia Museum was incredible, I loved the 19th century portraitures, the realism of the family scenes and Sargent....

Another participant stated that she made a point to be informed:

I’ve always followed art—like going to exhibitions and things—I’d even take in the lectures—well, just to keep thinking—I just didn’t have time [for art-making].

Three other participants would fit important exhibitions into their travel plans. It was a commitment to be “culturally informed” and to be “well-read visually”.

I feel good in museums, I can really lose myself—and the artist part of me is stimulated. I always come home fired up.

It’s great to go to the big exhibitions—last summer we went up to the new addition to the Kansas City Museum—we loved it and returned.

Seeing for these respondents was not a passive process it was a process where one observed and formulated thoughts (Gardner, 1984, Greene, 1988). The seeing and thinking about art was also a means of being an artist and of exercising artistic choices. It seemed that for the participants, the strong sense of admiration for art as a form of human expression was there, but the commitment to art-making was secondary to family, work, life.

In relating their museum exhibition trips, some participants attested to their compelling, maybe even spiritual responses to art, which seemed to denote an underlying sensitivity, an artistic sensitivity leading to an intense visual engagement with art. Indeed, several participants stated how they were overwhelmed:

I couldn't take my eyes away. I remained in front of the painting for what seemed forever. Connecting with art, helped calm the inner me.

It brought tears to my eyes. I knew my feelings were of kinship.

Forlí's narrative revealed an aesthetically mindful person. Her talking about "visiting the museum" anytime she was "sour with life" showed a clearly aesthetic and healing interplay with an old master's sketch.

I was living in Philadelphia and I'd go to the museum again and again...I'd find solace and a sense of well being by just being with this lovely sketch. There was a strong connection.

Participant Ancona recalled always thinking of art as an obvious form of communication with others:

I always thought of art as another language. I have always loved the idea of drawing a word, of illustrating a word or a thought. When I read, I see pictures...don't you? But with the fine arts, like many pieces in museums, this form of persuasive communication is on another level, an inner level.

Continuing, Ancona shared the following as she reflected on a 'spiritual aesthetic experience:

I remember weeping in front of a small Goya drawing at the Prado [Museum]. His under-sketch was just so beautiful... there was this serenity of expression built up with chiaroscuro...it was more beautiful than anything... [a bit of silence, almost *reverence*].... I have ever seen.

With regard to the continual stimulus of inspiration, Participant Livorno, candidate for the MFA degree, shared an in-school experience that tied back to her earlier self. She explained her own experiential delving into an inner inspiration:

I didn't have an interest in representing reality. I was and still am drawn to the space underneath the surface, beneath the psyche at the level of the soul—I'm not sure if you believe in spiritually—not the typical spirituality linked with the church, but a type of space where you make connections without even knowing it—I have always felt spiritual about the arts—because I think of art as an

illusion—like a way of entering that spiritual world. I was reading about a woman, a medium from the last century—we were introduced to her writings in a [fine arts] graduate seminar. She wrote about her spiritual encounters, she had had them at an early age and devoted her life to working with guides—spiritual guides. For one year she made a pact with herself to work and to be influenced in her material art experiences—by her guides. In other words she painted from guided spiritual experiences...so interesting—but you can't talk about this in academia.

When asked: “Were you in turn, inspired by her—her writings?”, Livorno replied: “Yes, and I experimented for almost a month—I found my own inner guides and would stay up all hours...then I had to prepare for a review. I now understand the automatic writing of the surrealists....”

Summary of sub theme: Artistic inspiration

Inspiration is keynote to the artist. With artists and intellectuals, insights and inspiration are frequent and must be paid attention to (Gardner, 1982). Both inspiration and the art of seeing (Langer as cited in Gardner, 1984) are necessary to the studio artist—these make up the critical thinking processes that mentally activate the individual talent prior to mark-making (Ferguson et al, 1990 Gardner, 1982; Tharp, 2004).

Inspiration and insightful seeing are the intellectual tools of the artist. Painter Livorno recounted gaining understanding of this process within the graduate studio. She described how she had always “used an intuitive sense of color” especially in large abstractions, but

the program made her question this intuitive self and inform it intellectually. She shared the following:

My intuitive tools were strong—I intuitively created before, but it was different when you were made to think about it...why the lines, why the colors....they asked....getting to the conceptual core. I hadn't used much critical thinking in my painting because I thought it hindered my intuitive mode of art making. I used thinking in my selective visceral mode, but I avoided what the *teachers* meant by critical thinking [now I use it].

(c) Description of the artistic self in adulthood: Return to the studio arts

Graduate school in any field offers plentiful returns. *It extends the time for personal evolution* and within this evolution the student tends to have a flexibility of thought as he/she augments knowledge and abilities and also, confronts new ideas and opinions as part of an area based community of learning. The decision to go to school, and certainly to return to school, is a decision to commit oneself to this period of change and exploration. Serious output and productivity may come later.

The reasons for a return are numerous but it is important to note that the return to the university/college setting has to do with belief in the system of higher education (“For me, education is the key to freedom”). All the participants had been educated within the college/university settings and held undergraduate degrees; basically they all recalled their years of higher education as favorable—as a valid and worthwhile time in their lives (“I loved learning”, “It was an important phase for me”; “I felt good on campus”).

Positive school experiences lead to positive consideration of the school system, and it has been noted that people who have had a successful college experience remain interested in returning for further educational opportunities (Belanger & Valdivielso, 1997).

Therefore, as verbalized by the participating group, the educational setting of the college/university appeared to be a terrain of impact on lifelong learning trends (“I felt I could do anything”; “I wasn’t sure what I was looking for but ...”). Certainly, the participant group fit this profile of people who had had success in learning in a university or college setting, and were still interested in learning as a tool for re-definition of the self. In short, they knew where to situate their learning and they were familiar with the setting.

Implied here is also the belief that the university is a place of serious learning. Noteworthy is the fact that these mid-life adults did not enroll in a local art club or a non-accredited extension program. They were interested in seeking art instruction from professionals and they had returned to the university structure as a center of high learning, of advanced degree learning, where they were taught by accomplished teachers, who were considered validated as they had been appointed through competitive selection processes within a competitive institution (“It’s a good school”, “I took a master class through the University of New Mexico”). The scholastic pact was an exchange. Re-matriculation brought assurance of quality of instruction, assurance of a quality setting, and assurance, as much as possible, of artistically informed classmates. Re-matriculation also brought with it economic and/or social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Boyer, 1974) in that society recognizes as units of worth and merit, the studies and degrees of an

institution of higher learning such as a University. Participant Aquila shared the following considerations:

Returning to school and then, teaching, and then returning to school—all were different chapters of my life. I was 32 in phase one when I started searching for a degree, [spurred by] income and earning potential. [The return to school for a standard degree] was using a bit of that self-esteem that I had acquired from working outside the house. I was seeing what I could do—going from a menial job to exploring my possibilities back in school. I was successful. Then—after I had been teaching for quite a few years, I returned for the MFA degree, another phase.

Thus the mid-life students of today, part of “the most educated generation” (Knable, 2000), are “significantly more inclined to seek this venue [higher education] of self improvement and self empowerment as mature adults” (Belanger & Valdivielso, 1997, p 32). These mid-life students came to re-matriculation as a vehicle for reshaping their self-confidence (Ossofsky, 2005) and perhaps even restructuring their professional lives (Gardner, 2002). These adults had been influenced by education and this was not only reflected in their lifestyles but, also, in *their daring to re-define themselves* by returning to the university setting. The accredited system of a university or college along with the unquestionable level of expertise of the faculty rendered the choice of setting obvious for the participants of the study (“I knew the professor and trusted [his knowledge]”; “I didn’t want to consider art as a hobby—I may not have time to be the type of artist I want [to be], but I respect the arts”).

Therefore, the decisive enactment of the mid-life return to graduate school and the determined crafting of an artistic self can be seen as an attempt to improve oneself or even to redefine oneself. It represents thoughtful attention to oneself, and is here considered in terms of self-actualization (Huitt, 2004) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001). Within graduate studio arts courses, competence in art-making along with knowledge of content is sought so as to best articulate one's individual voice through the artistic medium but also through the written and spoken word.

Clarifying the link between art-making and self-actualization, one participant shared how, even in mid-life, he was engaged in crystallizing his stance in life.

Being creative has given me an identity as an artist and in the last 3 or 4 years I've gained solidity of who I am as an artist and ... being mature let's me define myself rather than having to be measured by an outside ruler.... someone else's instrument.

Summary of sub-theme: Return to the studio arts

The return of non-traditional students to campus offers "an effective new revenue stream for the universities" (Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2004, p.16) and serves both parties in a benevolent trade between institutions of higher learning and non-traditional older and/or working students. The phenomenon has been widely documented and is known as the 'graying of the campus' (Belanger & Valdivielso, 1997; Boyer, 1974; Cohen, 1998; Edelson and Malone, 1998; Newman, Courturier, & Scurry, 2004;

Rosenbaum, 2004; Verduin, Miller, & Greer, 1986; Weinstock, 1978). Within the adult range of re-matriculantes came the continued presence of mid-life adult students who seemed to be living out what Eisner (2002) described: “[e]ducation, in turn, is the process of learning to create ourselves” (p. 3). As one participant stated: “After all this time, I’m *still* becoming who I really am”.

The return of non-traditional students to campus in search of a serious approach to art-making took this phenomenon into the arts studio and the search for the artistic self (“I had a moment of clarity and decided it was time for a change”, “I felt I had to recapture my inner self and renew my acquaintance [with art]”). Thus it came about that, without ceremony, these mid-life adult students took their place in the art classroom alongside 20-year-old students, with no particular vantage point other than perhaps knowing a bit more history (Weinstock, 1978).

Summary of Part II

The findings revealed that for most of the participants in adulthood, the arts had become one life thread among many, and not necessarily, the most important one. Only two respondents continued with schooling in the arts directly out of high school, an illustrator and an architect. As one participant remarked, in adulthood that “comfortable embrace of protection and encouragement”, as represented by the praise and recognition that all the participants had enjoyed in youth, did not resist the onslaught of life and responsibilities of adulthood. It, meaning art-making or the creative side, “would have to

wait” as voiced by one participant. In fact four participants did not continue with art school or enter college even though having successfully completed college track programs. Three women stated that they married soon after high school. All eventually returned to school, but much later, after raising children. Another said he got involved in political protest movements and expressed himself through a chosen west coast ‘70s lifestyle. He returned to finish his BA much later as a mature adult with offspring and financial responsibilities. Four others “got serious about how to make a living” and completed their university studies in the standard 4-5 year period, but not in the fine arts.

The storied accounts also indicated that within the adult, the power of the arts was still felt, and that the artistic self which had been seeded in youth continued to influence the adult. The fine arts and studio practice were seen as a means of “being true to myself” (Im).

The return to graduate studio arts coursework and to art-making was seen as a quest for area competence, for guidance by qualified teachers, and for art dialogue in the community of others. Each of the study’s mid-life adults had assumed the role of the student, and over the course of the three-part interview series, sought to inform both themselves and the research by “reminiscing, identifying, repeating, and evaluating” and bringing reflection to life’s changes” (Jarvilouma, Moisala, & Vilkkko, 2003). They recounted their ‘in school’ experiences as they mentally reviewed their storehouse of memories.

Coming into maturity and even, returning to education is a type of forward moving quest, which involves the self gaining consciousness as a life actor through reflection and ‘full attention to life’ (Greene, 1978, p. 163). Questing is also a search for understanding the self, assessing the life course and enabling personal navigation (Sternberg & Spear-Swerling, 1998). Under this aspect, the evolution of the self became a sequence of life phases and thus an ongoing process of self-discovery.

As one participant explained:

Returning to school was an opportunity to use my visual talent and to apply my—now mature ideas on life and humanity. I wanted to make photographs about life and love of the environment.

Part III: Reflections on mid-life re-matriculation in the studio arts

- (a) Age-sensitivity and mid-life re-matriculation
- (b) Risk-taking
- (c) Maturity as it impacts creativity
- (d) Creativity as it impacts maturity
- Summary

The gathered data, the participant's spoken and unspoken words, and the complex whole of the emergent narrative were all quite pregnant with life experiences.

Articulating the connections and making meaning of the descriptive segments of lived experience was at "the center of our attention" (Seidman, 1991, p 12) confirming that "the very process of putting experience into language is [in itself] a meaning making process" (Vygotsky, 1987).

The third interview (Seidman, 1991) was structured so as to solicit commentary on the individual reflections about the phenomenon in question: mid-life re-matriculation in the studio arts and the implied connection between creativity and maturity. The third interview offered a mix of descriptive accounts of mid-life identity issues (Edelson, 2000; Gibbs, 2005; King and Hicks, 2004) and the tapping into the aesthetic core (Bruner, 1997; Dissanayake, 1988; Winnicott, 1960) with regard for self-actualization as intended by Maslow (1943, Huitt, 2004) and Bandura (2001).

The return to graduate studio arts coursework and to art-making was seen as a quest for area competence ("I wanted studio practice"; "I was deficient in lab

techniques”), guidance of teachers (“I knew the professor”), and for art dialogue in the community of others (“knowledgeable conversations”). The participants sought to make meaning by reflecting on and contextualizing their ‘in school’ experiences as they mentally reviewed their storehouse of experiences.

Re-matriculation in mid-life for the participants was a type of forward moving quest, which involved the self gaining consciousness as a life actor through reflection and ‘full attention to life’ (Greene, 1978, p. 163). Here, this questing also seemed to be a search for understanding the self, for re-connection with the fine arts and for enabling personal navigation (Sternberg & Spear-Swerling, 1998). Under this aspect, the evolution of the self became, for these re-matriculating adults, a sequence of life phases and thus an ongoing process of restlessness, seeking change, risk-taking, and self-discovery. Part III of the study’s findings gathered the participants’ words on (a) age-sensitivity and mid-life re-matriculation; (b) risk-taking ; (c) maturity as it impacts creativity; and (d) creativity as it impacts maturity. Hints of the mindfulness behind these actions were captured.

(a) Age-sensitivity and mid-life re-matriculation

John Dewey asserted that “education is not preparation for life, but is life” (cited by Weinstock, 1978, p. 27) and, as author Weinstock further observed, this living of life as a lifelong educational process, was already taking shape as a reality in the late ‘70s with “the influx into postsecondary education of men and women beyond traditional college age” (p. 28). Serious commitment to learning is a challenge and certainly, serious long

term art making is an intellectually engaging process. It represents an in depth education in the arts and can also function as a means of re-establishing that connection between the inner and outer self and eventually lead to further self awareness and self empowerment (Dissanayake, 1988; Edelson, 2000; Eisner, 2002). In this study, the mid-life respondents had taken on the challenge of serious (formally re-matriculated) education in the studio arts, however, within the context of the first two interviews, and especially in Interview II, where the participants described their studio experiences, discourse on age was scarce. Of the ten participants, only four referenced age in relation to re-matriculation.

Participant Empoli shared the following, unsolicited, commentary on age:

Outside school, I always enjoyed being the only artist in the group—not like here where I am one of many—it was a source of identity for me—I was one of a kind, like representing that kind of person—here I am one of many and so there is competition. I like competition but I am age sensitive—you know, like if a mathematician doesn't come up with a major theorem before the age of thirty, he's out. But then [age] identity is why I feel good at work, one reason why I love my work—we are five white 50-ish males and we have a common history—with shared experiences and the same references.

One participant remembered feeling awkward at first among the younger graduate and undergraduate students but after the initial encounter, “it was ok, I was treated like everyone else”. However, another participating artist stated that it took awhile to get over the age difference:

I was paranoid about age and it made me feel classified as the ‘other’... someone negative who didn’t quite belong, someone who was missing the ticket—then it got better—in the graduate classes I don’t feel that”.

Other participants voiced their concern with feeling age-sensitive. Two thought they were perceived as “other” or “different”, and a third voiced the notion that they, mid-life re-matriculantes, were “invading a young person’s place”. However, coupled with this perception as the ‘other’ or as ‘inva[der]’ seemed to be a stronger, dominant sense of entitlement, an entitlement to learning and education, to opportunity, to life. Participant Empoli shared the following:

Well—Gloria Steinem said you become more radical as you age and less cowed by cultural norms. You’re more opinionated and less shackled by convention. I think this is true—you can try things that are ‘unsafe’—like going back to school.

I really believe that art is not age limited. Obviously younger people have better, quicker coordination and I guess they can learn something new....although I have not seen evidence of this in the university courses. In the figurative works, some of these students are so off. There was this student doing a mythological figure—the face was ok but the hands were askew with the thumbs on wrong—an agony to see it. I wasn’t sure if I should point it out but I did.

(b) Risk-taking

The participants while reviewing their complex human activity (Stokrocki, 1997) sought to generate meaning by reflecting on their return to the studio arts and the meaning of their efforts. Considerations of risk inherent issues were forthcoming.

The very act of re-matriculating for these mid-life individuals was an enactment of ‘personal navigation’ indicative of a decision to move forward, to change. And one important component of self-navigation as explained by Sternberg and Spear-Swirling (1998) is risk-taking, which was expressed by all as they recounted how they felt pangs of uneasiness: the risk of going to school in mid-life, the innate risk of the public critiques, the risk of daring to investigate one’s potential, the daring to be an artist. In particular all expressed concern for how their artwork and their art ideas were received during the critiques; some found the critiques encouraging (“he liked it”) and some disappointing (“I didn’t get the response I needed”, “really uncomfortable”, “the comments had little to do with me [and my work]”).

Necessary to the equation, however, was consideration of the chosen domain. Art-making by its very nature is a form of expression and is performance oriented in that it is made to be shared with an audience, with risk-taking implicit in the form. Art-making and the showing of one’s art involve risk; however, on the other hand, without the element of risk, there is little venturing forth. Being capable of risk-taking was noted by Maslow (Maslow, 1943; Huitt, 2004) as a factors in self-actualization. In fact, anytime one goes toward change or edges their ideas beyond the boundaries of the self and enters unmapped territory, risk becomes a factor. It, therefore, followed that risk-taking itself was obliged terrain for the participants. In this study, noteworthy, was the fact that to activate a personal exploration of what life means using the intellectual and sensorial format of art was indeed to take a risk—and the varied risks had been accepted and dealt with by all the participants.

Risk was viewed as part of the quest and here the participants had to confront several ‘demons’—age, art critiques, fear of failure. The risk of being in an inappropriate age frame for return to school was part of being a ‘non-traditional’ re-matriculating adult. As stated, universities and colleges are still geared for the ‘traditional’ age bracket, but in the past decades campuses have seen an influx of older students, especially graduate students, who return to school for further qualification and/or knowledge. As participant Genova remarked, the comfort of numbers helped: “I met another mature student in the class and we went on to take many classes together”.

The risk of being subject to criticism in the art classroom critiques is real at any age. The anxiety of having your instructors and the faculty exam commissions review the content, execution, and explanatory statements of your work can sometimes prove unbearable (“after the first critique, she never came back”; “tears”; “I didn’t pass the review”; “something snapped”). As one participant remarked, his living through the critiques was experienced as high risk—a risk of failure, which “engorges your cerebral cortex” and triggers a “flight or fight” response. For these art students there was no way of avoiding the classroom critiques and so, the critiques had to eventually become, as one participant suggested, a means of “learning”.

Risk comes with exhibiting one’s work or one’s ideas in all fields, but it is especially blatant in the arts. Somehow failure can be particularly cutting, however, the opposite, acceptance or approval or even laudable phrases, also abounded and the

unexpected praise from the faculty was lived as “a personal success”, a “wonderful balm” or a “much needed celebration” of one’s artistic merit. Participant Ancona lived this moment when she was “invited by [Professor] to show my work” in a selective university setting—“I was honored that he chose my piece.”

But the tensions of having your work critiqued by professors and graduate student colleagues can be difficult. For some of the participants graduate school proved interesting (“I love it”; “it wasn’t easy but I finally learned to draw”; “he [the teacher] liked my [prototypes for] sculpture”) but for others, returning to school was also taxing. Participant Verona shared the following vision of how she was living the experience as a first year MFA student in sculpture:

I’d recently grown into self-esteem, into a feeling of competence. I had built up quite a bit of self-esteem in the undergraduate program, but coming to grad school sort of knocked me off the pedestal so to speak—with regards to my art abilities. Now I am seriously questioning my own ability...it’s making me go to a higher level of thinking, productive thinking; my listening skills have improved, and it is helping me—I guess—it’s about flexibility—and I am showing flexibility in conforming to the present atmosphere.

Participant Verona continued as she recounted how:

The critiques were really hard what with everybody asking—Why is this composition like it is? What is it saying? This reasoning ... it is the hardest thing I

have had to do: to analyze my own thought process and what I am doing... and then *say* what I am doing.

Participant Genova also felt the critiques were difficult but instructive: “you have to have resistance [because they’re] learning opportunities—especially listening to the comments about other artists’ work”.

Another participant suggested that one “has to withstand the criticism—and it’s difficult to do”, while a second participant recommended: “you have to be thick skinned”.

With regards to facing one’s own demons such as fear of failure, fear of not performing well, one participant, a graphic artist, saw the process in the following manner:

I love my class this semester, such freedom. You know we were doing a nude drawing from a life model—and, I just drew and drew and was scratching through the paper trying to get it right. I got the proportions off and the gesture....we were doing watercolor with ink—but I wasn’t afraid to fail—and that is a new feeling for me. In my job I can’t fail, I can be mediocre, I can be many things, but I can’t fail. So you calculate everything. In the drawing class, like a friend told me, you just go outside that comfort zone and it felt good. And I was learning!

(c) Maturity as it impacts creativity

As stated, it is the researcher who raises the research question up for scrutiny, however it is implied that the issue is circulating within the participant group though

perhaps remaining unspoken. The issue that the researcher had considered somewhat untouched here was that of the non-traditional age frame of the participant group.

Therefore, the researcher made direct inquiry as to the relationship between maturity and creativity, asking each participant how maturity impacted creativity and, how creativity impacted maturity. All participants responded without hesitation, which suggested that the issue of age and maturity was present in their thoughts.

As one participant stated “Becoming mature has to do with coming into your own, becoming who you are”. Maturity did mean just that for the participating adults. Maturity had brought with it the ‘luxury’ of being concerned with the ‘flow’ of one’s own life and not living life as merely “a chaotic response to external events” (Csikszentmihaly, 1991). This taking charge of one’s existence, and of being attentive to the self as a way of being ‘responsible’ to the large view of life, seemed to come with maturity (Gardner, 2001). Knowing yourself appeared to be what these people were seeking so as to communicate that which they deemed important. Contemporary expressionist painter and performance artist, David Hammonds (Ferguson et al., 1990) expressed this concept in his statement: “If you know who you are, then it’s easy to make art”. This struggle to know oneself and be able to declare it, was echoed in participant Verona’s words: “This reasoning...it is the hardest thing I have had to do—to analyze my own thought process and what I am doing...and then *say* what I am doing”.

Participant Genova saw how changes in the family structure can make you seek out self awareness:

When I first decided to go back and take an art class, I was terrified. I had lost both parents a few years ago and it jarred me into thinking about my own mortality, my own life—that adult type of delving in depth... digging and studying...it affects your art and content choice.

One of the MFA candidate-participants spoke about how being older helped her to survive criticism which is a component of any graduate arts program.

You need a survival strategy to be an artist today.... I think you have to be thick-skinned and almost “mean” to get ahead. If I think about the people who teach, like at the Chicago Institute ... well, they can be like a hornets nest and you have to withstand the criticism. It’s really hard. It’s hard here too. When I was young, I was soft and I learned you could never be successful [that way]. With age I became careful.

Verona who claimed to be “perennially immature...but grad school is making me grow up” shared her thoughts:

Maturity and creativity....they are different elements. I suppose it is the life experiences that influence your work. If you are 21, it is hard to create because you haven’t seen much—you don’t have much [visual storehouse]—you have not visually seen things. I think young artists don’t know how to creatively see. I see planes, lines, breaking it down...I see beyond the obvious, I can think about the abstraction of the object. Seeing comes from the mind...it is mental and has to do

with thinking.... it is not restrictive....I think that time with yourself leads to maturity.

Another participant, Forlí, seemed to agree as did other participants who extended their thoughts on how maturity might enhance creativity.

Being *mature* means that you have had the time to develop and time to recognize what you need in life. Self-esteem in a young person is so important, but now, [as an adult] I don't *need* to be recognized—it's a more private dialogue.

Participant Genova described how her relationship with her own work changed with competence and maturity:

I am not so enamored [of my art work] as when I was young—I can see the flaws now.

Participant Como championed maturity in the artist while also realizing that great potential—the spark of youthful spontaneity.

As a mature person you have more time to process your ideas mentally and artistically and *you have time* to try stuff out. There is insight into deeper layers of content that a young art student may not have. On the other hand, I do believe in that spontaneity that some young people have, they just whip some shit out and just do it spontaneously....I instead labor over [a work, an idea]—I really process the thought and the work. It can be a help or a hindrance - depending on what you are trying to do.

Summary of maturity as it impacts creativity

The words of the participating graduate students were united in stating that maturity brought depth of content and a continuum of meaning to one's art-making ("I couldn't have done it ten years ago"). The respondents suggested a satisfying seriousness of purpose: "I carry my art problems everywhere, to work and to bed—I lose sleep until I can solve the problems ...trying to find the best way to approach the canvas—it's exhausting [laughs] but I love it"; "I've added knowledge to my sensitivity". Participant Forlí seemed to summarize the process when she suggested a sort of timeline for how art appears to us during life's age frames.

There's a big difference between art as a child and art as an adult. In my teens art was about beauty, later, in my 20s to mid-30s, art was about irony... gesturing, and now, it's a comment on life.

(c) Creativity as it impacts maturity

Creativity for the participants represented a means of communication, a means of self-expression that coincided with their humanistic/artistic vision of the world. "Both [theorists] Read and Lowenfeld believed that the arts emancipated the spirit and provided an outlet for the creative impulse" (Eisner, 2002, p 32). "Following the desire to create, acting on this desire and using creativity" (Eldeson, 1999, p. 3) is a means of taking ownership of our lives and leads to self-reflection by the nature of its endeavor in that the "arts are a means of exploring our own interior landscape" (Eisner, 2002, p. 11).

Creativity and creative problem solving also foster interaction with our social world (Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1978; Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi & Gardner, 1994; Gardner, 2001) and can be seen as guiding (Greene, 1978) the artist self to a larger consciousness.

Participant Empoli had this to say about being creatively engaged:

Being creative keeps you more engaged with life. For me it has been sequential...sort of a continual exploration and adventure. But you have to be flexible because what you imagine and what you do, you know—where it takes you, are two different things. Like my maps and targets are sequential—they are punctuated with color and the popular icons that I grew up in—those eternally recognizable simplistic symbols.

For the participating artists, the mid-life perspective on how creativity impacted maturity was varied but all favorable. Maturity as it influenced creativity brought “comment[s] on life” while creativity as it influenced maturity, brought “selection of life’s moments” and the “choice of being receptive”.

Another participant shared the following:

Creativity keeps one ‘in’ life...it breaks down the paradigm – creativity means being receptive where nothing is boring. It is a non-judgmental receptivity. You take in all the ideas and visuals and see what fits, keep these that you choose and toss the remainder out.

And still another respondent, Como, elaborated by saying:

Creativity helps you manage shit that otherwise could overwhelm you. There are two types of creative people out there—creative people who are rigid and then creative people who let creativity help field what comes their way – people who are flexible. It is a life philosophy. Like that NPR program with a contemporary poet...
...life became a series of survival skills—creative survival skills.

Another participant, Genova, noted the following connections.

I believe you might actually be more creative in your mature years. As you age, you gain that historical perspective on art and also ...a historical perspective on yourself.

When you are young, you *think* you are creative. And it is true, but [only] on the surface... For awhile [as an adult] I didn't feel as creative as when I was young because I just had a few ideas, but then I found that *my ideas were better, more developed* and not just flashes in the pan. Now, [in maturity], I don't take the easy way out, I don't give up on a work or idea, I follow through with problem solving. Also [as an adult], you tend to create a body of work—saying what you think is important. [Thoughtful as she considers how maturity enhances creativity]...when I was young, it was a matter of whatever structure or thought came to mind, like....say, I'm interested in good and evil.... so I would go for the 'garden of evil'...but [my art work] is related to just one thought, there was no continual theme to my work, I was operating on intuition. Now [as a mature artist] I still get divergent art directions, like my species and plants....however, even though I try

many different mediums and styles, I have an intellectual base...a focus for my informed statement....I stay focused until I have exhausted my subject.

Sub-title: Satisfaction and enjoyment through scholarly enrichment

Another important motivational category of adult learners involves satisfaction and enjoyment through scholarly enrichment—where adults are still sensitive to that sense of accomplishment and to the notion of ‘seeking knowledge for its own sake’ (Edelson & Malone, 1999). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) also writes on the elements of enjoyment in relation to creative “flow” – a process in which “concern of the self disappears, yet paradoxically, the sense of self emerges stronger after the flow experience.” Participant Aquila described how being active and in her case, being creative, added a pleasurable aspect to life—she seemed to intimate that for her, the act of participating in life became a social enrichment of sorts.

I can’t imagine being bored—life is invigorating—like the French say, *joie de vie*, the joy of living—without that you cannot be an artist—it is one characteristic of being an artist, you feel that joy of life. And it is circular—it comes back to you.

Other participants related the following:

There are more options of what to do in life if you are creative. I have lots of future goals – lots of projects filed away waiting for my attention. You’re never bored if you are an artist... I’m easily amused.

You just feel alive and like you're doing something for yourself. I've been taking classes after work and I fit it all in....making a living, having a family, it's totally enveloping—art enriches all of it.

Sub-title: Art-making and therapeutic resonance

Several participants linked the arts and adult creativity to healing and this concept ties in with Congdon's theories on the "downright powerful nature of art" (2005, p. 37). As she sees it, the art-making process has a therapeutic resonance and has long been linked with maintenance of mental health. One participant remembered that at a certain point in his life, he saw art-making and learning as a kind of rudder:

I was on automatic pilot after my marriage failed, easy to get lost. Then I had a moment of clarity and decided it was time for a change. I returned to campus and took painting.

Participant Genova seemed to be in agreement, with her statement:

[Art/painting] is good for the soul, the body, the mind....it's like health food and exercise! Pursuing answers, researching areas of thought, learning things....learning how to represent ideas....it is all very stimulating.

Participant Firenze who had found emotional stability in returning to drawing, remarked on the healing component of arts related activities:

Even reading is a form of healing for me. I take copious notes when I read, I like to define those connections that come to me – like how the old fellow in Mann’s Magic Mountain, Meiner Peeperkorn, is so much like Captain Ahab. I have moved away from *heavily marking books* but I still put checks and indicators for landmark passages. It is a sort of personal source of sustenance, of continuity...and this recent re-reading literary works from my youth, I felt compelled to read those things from my university self, that time of being a graduate student in Berkeley which was such a positive time for me.... to recapture my inner self. My rapport with the visual arts is the same—I felt I had to renew my acquaintance with the arts.

Sub-title: Maturity and the freedom of expression

Participant Empoli remarked on the connection between maturity and creativity, introducing the element of freedom of expression.

I’m really not sure there is a connection in the middle age range, from college to mid-life, but at either end of the spectrum there is. As a kid, you approach art free from cares and then again, later in life you are again free of pressures...despite my trying to please my MFA professors, you are basically pleasing yourself. I am now free of the deadline syndrome and it’s better—it’s more like a novel now rather than an anxious paper – the glazes sometimes need weeks to dry properly—I’m still working on the pagan piece.

Another participant shared a fairly recent involvement at a senior center which seemed to support the notion of freedom that participant Empoli had considered.

A few summers ago, I volunteered at a senior community [art] program in the city...I was surprised at the strong connection I had with elders....I found my father, my uncle, time and time again in these elders. And I could see how surprised they were with the clay and being free with the material. They were *beyond being embarrassed* and so they just enjoyed themselves. That's the age thing, giving up the pretenses.....one lady who was very silent, started talking more at the end of a project...I was convinced the act of art-making has loosened her fears.

Summary: Creativity as it impacts maturity

Creativity was held in high regard by the participating artist group. Art had many meanings, all connected to and evolved within the individual's context of life experience. All participants described that for them creativity was possible and though, the analogies differed from person to person, art for all of them represented an advantageous way to live one's life. Participant Imola likened creativity to making choices.

Creativity is being able to choose and select life's many moments—choosing the thoughts and images that you want to live with, is how one creates their life. When you are young you just find yourself in the midst of other people's choices... later you make your own.

Summary of Part III

Awareness and understanding seem to be cornerstones of any human quest for knowledge. Suzanne Langer (1979) stated that the sensitive eyes are the portals to the arts, they are the windows towards the visible world, and they are our tools, which, just as our minds, serve to comprehend our world. These tools, these senses, can be enhanced and cultivated to help us see with thoughtful perception and therefore, to clarify our many quandaries. Particular here, as indications emerged from the dialogues, was this continued search for solutions, the on-going commitment to creative endeavor, and the activation of the agentic self (Bandura, 2001) leading to robust, purposeful maturity wherein one seeks out that which is important to the inner core.

Summary of Findings

The findings indicated that certain commonalities amongst the participant group emerged from the study. These shared elements of social existence are summarized as follows:

Time-resistance thread of arts and art-making

- There was an important and time-resistant thread of arts and art-making that had been developed in youth as a core trait. This arts sensitivity and arts confidence became established firstly through arts related influences attributed to the family, school, or the community ambient, and secondly, through praise and recognition of the youthful artistic self attributed to family, school and community circles. This ‘human proclivity’ for the arts and art-making is common in all men and women (Dissanayake, 1988, 1992), but needs to be kindled to pass onto further stages. Among the respondents, this sense of the self as an artist was kindled; it was influenced, praised, and given public recognition with the result being that an aesthetic core comprised of a certain arts sensitivity and arts identity became a part of each participant. The artistic self in youth had been confirmed.

Responses to artistic stimuli and the development of the potential artist within

- This aesthetic core, the artistic self, then passed on to life’s next phase, adulthood, and remained embedded in the adult self whether or not the person continued with an arts career. The artistic self now in adulthood, even if not actively pursuing the arts, exercised influence through sensitive responses to artistic stimuli. In the respondent

group this core influence was seen in some as a response to identity in that two pursued degrees in Art and Architecture. Others reserved art expression for later on, but all retained an “inner, more innocent, artistic self”. Among all the respondents, the influence took the form of a strong sensitivity to the fine arts and a continued following of the arts through exhibitions and lectures. Although only two had taken degrees in the fine arts, many were now employed in arts related positions. Later, all returned to the fine arts studio with interest in pursuing self expression, in “reacquainting myself with the arts”, in “seeing what I could do”, or in “following what I wanted to do long ago”. All respondents had re-matriculated in the fine arts graduate studio as mid-life adults. The adults that worked in arts related jobs, sought to bring their talent and professional arts experience to their own artistic endeavors. The others did the same. All respondents had re-matriculated in studio arts with the intent of developing the potential artist within. Self actualization was at work, armed with self-efficacy and self motivation. Personal navigation as intended by Sternberg and Spear-Swirling had shored them in the graduate arts studio and all participants described their experiences as “important”.

Decisive move toward the artistic self through re-matriculation

- The multiple meanings that the respondents voiced had to do with how maturity had impacted creativity for each one of them, and, the corresponding process of how creativity had impacted maturity. The findings here were fairly consistent among the participants. Maturity was seen to bring depth of thought and content to their art work and also, the art process. The act of self-fulfillment, considered an adult phenomenon

(Maslow, 1943), and here seen as a decisive move toward the artistic self through re-matriculation, was also sensed as an element bringing depth of thought and content to their lives. Maxine Greene placed great value on the project of self-creation in life and throughout her writings she attributed much to the act of intelligent deliberation and attention to “defin[ing] oneself through the projects with which they become involved” (Salvio, 1998, p 101). Greene also reminds us that fundamental to social theory is the human need to congregate and “to create our identities within a plurality” (1988, p 51) Each participant sought some sort of confirmation of that life long companion of art sensitivity, that artistic self, that aesthetic core, and they furthered this confirmation through the common act of mid-life re-matriculation in the studio arts, thus uniting themselves to a plurality of artistic effort within the artistic community. Each personalized not only their journey, but their art within the context of their varying existences. In fact, each participant had come to this study with an identity mass or persona that was in search of re-definition as an artist and perhaps, as a person. The following shows how the sequential journey was lived by one participating mid-life artist/student.

Participant Verona briefly recounted her path to college as a mid-life adult and her eventual re-matriculation in the graduate MFA program.

I wanted to continue on to college but my fear kept me from applying and taking the tests after high school. I guess I didn’t understand how I could do it. For years I wanted to go to school but I was afraid of getting stuck with the math. Finally my

college-aged daughter [then in school] talked me into it and helped me [obtain my undergraduate degree].

Verona related that surviving her grave illness and other events in recent years made her more determined than ever to pursue education. “Education is the key, it is important” and “art is important to me”:

I dragged myself up from the depths...from cancer, from working in the prison system [teaching prisoners] - all institutional erasures - hospital, marriage, prison.

When asked if she could consider it a type of journey, a quest...she responded:

Definitely—it was definitely a quest, it *is* a quest, a quest to succeed, to survive.... after all the negative things—*now it was and is all about me*—I could do what I wanted to do.

DISCUSSION

Stewardship of the artistic self through the fine arts studio

- (a) Restatement of research question
- (b) Discussion of findings
 - Finding n. 1: The deep imprinting of the artistic self in youth
 - Finding n. 2: Reception of this “something special”
 - Finding n. 3: The enduring strength of the embedded artistic self
 - Finding n. 4: Inspiration & art-thinking as part of the artistic process
 - Finding n. 5: The interplay of maturity and creativity
 - Finding n. 6: Re-matriculation as a bridge
 - Finding n. 7: Choice of setting
 - Concluding remarks to the Discussion of findings
- (c) Summary of basic response to research question
- (d) Implications for future research
- (e) Reflections on the study

(a) Restatement of the research question

The purpose of this study was to investigate and describe the nature of the lived experiences of older non-traditional graduate students in the studio arts. The study looked at the phenomenon of mid-life re-matriculation (Weinstock, 1978; Cohen, 1998) as it occurred within the framework of the graduate fine arts studio and sought to understand what the return to school and the return to art-making held for these individuals. Through the collection and analysis of the participant’s storied narratives, each student assumed co-authorship in the description of his or her life journey as it was touched by the act of

art-making thereby insuring that each participant actively contributed and thus participated in the discovery and construction of social meaning.

Guiding the study was the overarching research question: Re-matriculation in the studio arts: What are the perceptions of mid-life non-traditional graduate students in the fine arts?

The study utilized the thematic three-part interview series as suggested by Seidman (1991) with open ended questions which afforded thick descriptive life accounts of the participants' narrated journey from childhood through adulthood as related to the area of the arts and art-making. The constant comparison method of analysis was used to establish categories and emergent themes. Initially the final chapter of the study offers a (a) *Restatement of the research question* and a (b) *Discussion of the findings*; three sections, a (c) *Summary of basic response to research question*, (d) *Implications for further research* and (e) *Reflections on the study* follow.

(b) Discussion of Findings

Finding n. 1: The deep imprinting of the artistic self in youth

One major finding of the study was the deep imprinting of the artistic self in youth, a finding that has important ramifications in educational settings of childhood and adolescence with marked significance for art education, both in theory and the application of teaching philosophies. And although the concept of positive development

favoring acquisition of knowledge across the domains is well known, the chronological scope of the influence such as indicated by this study may add further credibility to the Literature.

With respect to the self, the basis for an inner artistic self and the development of a personal aesthetic taste is generally established in the family and/or cultural settings of youth; as children, a familiarity with scents, colors, music and aesthetic notions is absorbed along with social inclinations as part of that social birthright or DNA (Bettie, 2003; Winnicott, 1960). These aesthetic familial inclinations are later mitigated by contact with the extended social community in which one resides. We might say that our sense of taste, that is, our ‘core’ aesthetic sense and creative imagination is linked to our habitus...that unconsciously enacted, socially learned disposition toward one’s surroundings (Bruner on Bourdieu, 1997). And here the theories of Bruner (1983, 1997, 2003) seem to meet those of Dissanayake (1988, 1992) as the inner self marries the outer self, the private artistic self evolves into the public artistic self. That primal urge of Dissanayake’s ‘homo aestheticus’ to make something special becomes public, using that “specific artistic behavior when the child shapes or embellishes some material of his everyday life with the intention of making it special so that it will be responded to by others for its aesthetic quality” (Dissanayake, 1992, p. 148). The interior primal urge to embellish translates into offering something special to the outside ambient. In terms of psychological development, it is a step of great importance not only for the artistic self, but primarily for the blossoming ego: it represents an act of benign interaction with one’s social ambient and generous offering of the self to the greater family or community. The

urge to artistically manifest our thoughts or emotions is that basic form of communication united with a sort of celebration of the act. The ability of the child's environment to provide space and material for exploration and enjoyment of the artful communication is pertinent to any further attempts. We as art educators understand this phenomenon and tend to stand committed to such provisions within educational institutions.

This 'human proclivity' for the arts and art-making is common in all men and women (Dissanayake, 1988, 1992), but needs to be kindled to pass onto further stages. Among the respondents, this sense of the self as an artist, as a communicator through the artistic mediums, was kindled with the result being that a certain arts sensitivity and arts identity became an integral part of each participant. The artistic self in youth had been confirmed.

Finding n. 2: Reception of that 'special something'

The study's findings also indicated that essential to long-term exploration, engagement and enjoyment of the arts was the favorable reception of artistic ideas and artistic attempts in youth where praise, encouragement, and public recognition are effective. With respect to Dissanayake's 'homo aestheticus' and the concept of a primal urge to 'make special', it follows that the reception of this 'special something', whether a song, a word, or a visual creation, is determinant to further offerings from the artistic self. If the first attempts at self-expression are received with courtesy and enthusiasm, others

will follow. If, on the other hand, the reception is not positive, the desire and attempts for self-expression can be stymied.

In the participant population, a specific arts-related childhood identity had been gained and eventually was defined through awareness of the private and public self, a self “construed as a functional interaction between behavior and environment” (Rachlin, 1997, p. 85) with clues to self-knowing positioned as positive or negative responses from other people and events which mirrored their behavior. For the participant group, the response to their youthful attempts at artistic expression was positive, thus the artistic core continued to grow; it had been stimulated (“lessons in oil painting”; “lots of space to make things”), praised (“I knew I had done something special”; “I was the one that could draw pretty pictures”), and publicly recognized (“she praised my drawing”; “first prize”; “I won \$100!”). This was what occurred, with varying intensity, with each youthful artistic self of the participant group: the artistic self had been encouraged, developed, and validated and, most importantly, it had claimed residence (“art chose me”) as an identity indicator within the child/adolescent, representing an inner true self, an authentic core which had been celebrated in some way.

This identity indicator of art had become embedded in their individual humanness, referenced by Winnicott (1990) as the true self, referenced by Bruner (1997) as the inner self and by Dissanayake (1988. 1992) as the primal aesthetic core. In short, the thread of a youthful artistic self was indisputably present across the entire participant

group and later in life this had become a core quality not only to believe in but also to build upon.

Finding n. 3: The enduring strength of the embedded artistic self

Another major finding was the enduring strength of the embedded artistic self as it was carried into adulthood. Art-thinking and art-making operated as a life long thread enriched by intense responses to artistic stimuli and paved the way for the potential artist within. This supports the idea of an established artistic self in youth, which then accompanies the self into adulthood. The finding was that the youthful artistic self had become integral to the individual's true (Winnicott, 1960), authentic (Dissanayake, 1988), inner (Bruner, 1997) core self and was later sought out in adulthood, as the mid-life adult took ownership of that part of his/her life and searched for artistic expression. The union of the adult self with the aesthetic core was lived as an opportunity for major self-awareness ("my life was clearly written on the canvas"; "the same skills you need to create a piece of art are the same you would...ideally live by"; "I was after art as an expression of those defining moments which we often do not recognize").

As described in the storied narratives, the embedded artistic self exercised influence through sensitive responses to artistic stimuli ("I've always followed art—like going to exhibitions"; "I am well-read visually"; "I love music and literature but the visual arts talk to me"). In the respondent group this core had become a lifelong companion and was seen as an "inner, more innocent, artistic self" which took the form of a heightened sensitivity to the fine arts and a continued following of the arts through exhibitions,

lectures, and readings. And although in early adult life, only two had taken degrees in the fine arts (MA in Architecture, BA in Illustration), six were now employed in arts-related positions and, later, all re-matriculated as mid-life graduate students and returned to the fine arts studio with interest in pursuing self expression (“reacquainting myself with the arts”; “I felt I had more to say”; “seeing what I could do”; “following what I wanted to do long ago”). The adults that worked in arts-related areas brought professional expertise to their own personally mandated artistic endeavors. Self-actualization was at work, armed with self-efficacy and self-motivation. Personal navigation as intended by Sternberg and Spear-Swirling had shored them in the graduate arts studio and all participants described their experiences as “important”.

Finding n. 4: Inspiration & art-thinking as part of the artistic process

According to Weintraub (2003), inspiration has to do with “the originating breath” of interest, an interest that can come as “happenstance” from the external world or from muses within. Inspiration is often lived as “the gradual infusion of a subtle vitality that is experienced as a metaphysical stirring” (p. 123). It is an essential part of the artistic process and this thread of art, this special and compelling response to the arts, was a strong commonality among the participant group. All were subject to intense inspiration—that artistic inspiration that confirms the fine arts and “confirms the existence of this elusive state of being” (Weintraub, 2003, p. 124).

The study's respondents sought out the arts through acts of arts appreciation and when inspired, responded with that "originating breath" (Weintraub, 2003, p. 123) of interest that is the hallmark of any artistic endeavor. The participants shared how the creative muses within were occasionally stirred and how each sensitively partook of this important part of the artistic process ("it's like an addiction", "I remember weeping in front of a small Goya drawing"; "I couldn't take my eyes away"; "I remained in front of that painting for what seemed forever"; "It brought tears to my eyes"; "I'd find a sense of solace and well-being by just being with this lovely sketch"). All spoke of how the thread of art-thinking and art-making had continued to be a necessary component of their adult lives and all described how they were subject to intense inspiration. These rich excursions into the fine arts were seen as fortification and intellectual participation and eventually, guidance of the artistic self towards art-making or the physical manifestation of the creative act.

The intellectual process of seeing, reflecting on and responding to inspiration was for these adults, part of what it meant to be an artist—what it meant to exercise the artistic impulse. In fact, seeing for these respondents was not a passive process, but rather, an active process where the participants had engaged an artistically sensitive perspective in order to observe and formulate their ideas (Langer as cited in Gardner, 1994, Greene, 1988, Weintraub, 2003). The participants' accounts of their strong inspirational responses to art were viewed here as the initial stages of re-matriculation. Both the inspiration and the mindful seeing had been necessary to these re-matriculating artists as they, perhaps unknowingly, prepared for re-entry to the studio.

The potency and validity of inspiration and ‘art-thinking’ as part of the art-making process had not been considered or anticipated, in fact, the concept evolved from the narratives. At first the study viewed the art endeavor only in a literal, productive sense, that of art-making, but after taking into account the depth of response to artistic stimuli as described by the participants, and the strength of the inner calling, or that which I am referring to as art-thinking, became apparent. The importance of the intellectual process of art-thinking to the creative manifestation or art-making is supported in the Literature (Barrett, 2000; Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, & Gardner, 1994; Langer as cited in Gardner, 1994; Weintraub, 2003).

Finding n. 5: The interplay of maturity and creativity

All participants stated that maturity enhanced creativity by adding depth of content and a continuum of meaning to their art-making (“becoming who you are”; “insight into deeper layers of content”; “I couldn’t have done it ten years ago”). Maturity had brought with it the ‘luxury’ of being concerned with the ‘flow’ of one’s own life and not living life as merely “a chaotic response to external events” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). The respondents also suggested a satisfying seriousness of purpose (“I lose sleep until I can solve the problems”; “maturity of language”; “I’ve added knowledge to my sensitivity”). For some, the path to artistic expression in adulthood was revealed at an early age, but for others, this taking charge of one’s existence, and seeking enrichment of the artistic self came with maturity. Knowing yourself appeared to be what these people were striving for, so as to communicate that which they deemed important. As

contemporary expressionist painter and installation artist, David Hammonds (Ferguson et al., 1990, p. 334) expressed it: “Art is an old man’s game. If you know who you are, then it’s easy to make art”. This struggle to know oneself and be able to declare it, was voiced by participant Verona: “This reasoning...it is the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do—to analyze my own thought process...and then *say* what I am doing” while yet another participant’s words echoed Hammonds’ beliefs as she stated: “Yeah...I believe you might actually be more creative in your mature years. As you age, you gain that historical perspective on art and also on yourself”.

All participants also stated that creativity enhanced maturity (“art means more and more to me, I have become an artist”). Art, art-making, and creativity were keywords for the study and keywords for the participating artists. All were decisive articulate adults with distinct verbal discourses about creativity and “What art is?” Each had a separate window view of the fine arts (“it is pure enjoyment”; “art is spiritual”; “art is a luxury”) and each saw their place in the post-modern art world in quite divergent camps (“I am a social artist; “life’s defining moments”; “seeing beyond the obvious”). But even though, the analogies differed from person to person, the entire participating artist group held creativity in the highest regard and all participants declared that creativity was a necessity (“keeps one ‘in’ life”; “helps you manage shit that otherwise could overwhelm you”; “it is essential to my being”). Art for all of them represented an advantageous way to live one’s life. The creative life was seen as providing “more options”, “joie de vie”, and a heightened sense of being “alive”. Some of the study’s participants linked adult creativity to a personal or even spiritual healing (“good for the soul, the body, and the mind...like

health food and exercise”; “psychoanalytical overtones”; “beneficial”) a concept which ties in with theories on the “downright powerful nature of art” and the innate therapeutic resonance of the art-making process (Congdon, 2005, p. 37).

Participant Imola seemed to verify a theme of Csikszentmihalyi (1994) as she likened ‘creativity in maturity’ to experiencing the right to make choices.

Creativity is being able to choose and select life’s many moments—choosing the thoughts and images that you want to live with—this is how one creates their life.

When you are young, you just find yourself in the midst of other people’s choices... later, you live your own.

Finding n. 6: Re-matriculation as a bridge

John Dewey asserted that “education is not preparation for life, but is life” (as cited by Weinstock, 1978, p. 27) and, as author Weinstock further observed, this living of life as a lifelong educational process, was already a reality in the late ‘70s with “the influx into postsecondary education of men and women beyond traditional college age” (p. 28), a phenomenon known as the “graying of the campus” (Weinstock, 1978). The study confirms this phenomenon as an ongoing trend and positions it in the fine arts studio.

Certain sacrifices accompanied the participants’ decision to re-matriculate but the undertaking was a deliberate act—that of returning to school and assuming the identity of student. Breese and O’Tolle pointed out in their lengthy study on women’s role change,

that “the role of the student is a bridge to the next phase of these people’s personal trajectories [...] it is not permanent and therefore it is accepted and tolerated” in view of the individual’s long term goal (p. 33). One woman from the study by Breese and O’Toole (1995) noted:

I’m beginning again but in a direction that I have chosen to go in and not one that I have to go in. My monetary responsibilities to my children are nearly over and now it is time for me to think about what I want to do. *There is more to me than what I have been.* (p. 33).

This statement seemed akin to the determined effort made by graduate arts studio participant Aquila who shared the following:

My first degree was for a job and then, later, going after the MFA degree, was my wanting to become a better artist. *I felt I had more to say and I wanted to have the opportunity to work on my ideas and express them.* I recognized that art is a language set—and a language needs maturity of thought. I sort of had two things in mind—personal artistic growth and a sense of purpose.

But here, re-matriculation as a ‘bridge’ is viewed differently. The present study has viewed the process of re-matriculation in the studio arts as a determined striving to refine a personal rationale and expressive language in order to explore creative talents. The study did not focus on re-matriculation in the same way that Breese and O’Toole (1995) considered it, that is, as a bridge leading somewhere else, or to another life phase. Instead, this study has described re-matriculation as an achievement in itself, as a

connection between the self and the aesthetic core, and therefore, as an outcome of self-actualization and as symbolic of change. Breese and O'Toole see the return to school as a bridge leading to specific accreditation. Instead here, the study's view of returning to school is a return to art-making and knowledge gathering. There is a difference, here the striving is the process but it is also the great accomplishment.

In looking to the future, it is obvious that each artist will unfold their artistic gifts and also their humanity in his or her singular manner. And in view of their ongoing quest for self-actualization, there is the chance that one or two of them may pilot ahead and become great working artists, but each and every one of them can claim to have made that strong human effort of being true to an inner, authentic, aesthetic core. And, in the larger view, that was their noteworthy social effort, that was the essence of their experience—a silent but energetic and mindful self-actualizing of the educated, mid-life adult within a setting provided by society's institutions of higher education.

Finding n. 7: Choice of setting

The cross over between higher education and the education of adults has been an ongoing feature of the American system since its early beginnings, and most universities and colleges are currently responding with continuing higher education programs, now known as the National University Extension Organization (NUEA) which is keeping alive the idea and support of 'non-accredited' education for the older demographic. Edelson (2000) states that there are about 500 major institutions offering these programs.

And although adults recognize learning as noble and embrace it for sake of knowledge, it should be asked how these non-accredited, non-matriculating university extension offerings are viewed. The present study informs this very area. It indicated that many mature adults, actually by-pass the less expensive and less stressful mature age-oriented learning centers, and opt for the traditional accredited degree process of normal matriculation.

For the participant group, the choice of returning to the accredited graduate campus was especially interesting when one considers that numerous other opportunities for artistic instruction exist. Re-matriculation in a costly, lengthy, and highly taxing university graduate program is quite different than enrolling in some other type of community arts class. Noteworthy was the fact that the expectations from the setting (“they’ve got a good program”; “His [prof’s] one man show in Dallas”) and from oneself were different (“I don’t want art to be a hobby”) and, likewise the social capital is also different (“accepted into the MFA program!”; “juried show”). The study’s participants had chosen the structure of their quest and had sought out serious commitment within a formal university graduate program.

Concluding remarks to the discussion of the findings

With regards to educational theory

In drawing to a close this section on the reported findings, I wish to state that my thoughts as an art educator align with those of the giants in educational thought and

research: the civic mindedness of Howard Gardner, the passionate quest for social sanity of Maxine Greene, the psychological astuteness of Jerome Bruner and Howard Rachlin, the humanity of Kristin Congdon, the caring of Nell Noddings, and the artistic eloquence of Howard Feldman and Eliot Eisner. In addition my thoughts on the power of the fine arts to reveal man's greatness but also man's folly have been stimulated by art educator Terry Barrett, contemporary art historian Linda Weintraub, and perhaps mostly by the social stance of working artist Sue Coe.

With regards to art education

Connectivity of the artistic process to the self is a means of paying tribute to the true, inner, artistic core (Bruner, Dissanayake, Winnicott), however, paying homage to our inner 'homo aestheticus' or the primal artistic urge does not mean that all men and women will become draftsmen, it simply means that another portal of perception and experience would be at one's command, the portal of the sensitive eye, an eye for beauty, an eye for relationships, and eye for compassion.

With regards to naturalistic inquiry

No qualitative study is ever complete since thoughts and perceptions of the present and the past are fluid and change from moment to moment, and change also from listener to listener. Just as an artist bends his artistic messages so as to be understood by his chosen audience, so the narrator of life tales, of past recollections, modifies and adjusts the flow of narrative to suit he/she who listens. In this case I was the privileged listener.

(c) Summary of basic response to research questions

Was re-matriculation in the studio arts lived a quest, and if so, what were they searching for?

Re-matriculation is an enactment of ‘personal navigation’ indicative of a decision to move forward. Certainly, for the study’s mid-life adults, re-matriculation was a quest—it was an attempt to activate their inner artistic cores. Moving forward for them had to do with articulating the inner artistic self in maturity. They attested to having developed an artistic self in youth and then sought to further cultivate this artistic sensitivity in mid-life. The storied accounts indicated that within the adult, the power of the arts was still keenly felt and that the artistic self, seeded in youth, continued to influence the adult. Serious commitment, meaning formally enacted re-matriculation in the graduate fine arts studio, was seen as a means of initiating the quest—the quest of knowing one’s artistic self and exploring one’s potential.

Why have they returned to campus?

The return to the university campus revealed several roots, all honoring the tenets of higher education. For the participating respondents the university campus represented access to learning, to expertise of instruction, and to the possibility of visual and verbal exchange within a community of thinkers. The participants’ re-matriculation was in the fine arts studio setting and therefore, the setting offered assurance of an array of detailed instruction and appropriate studio access in the separate mediums—painting, sculpture,

printmaking, fiber-arts, ceramics, and the celluloid arts of film and photography. For the study's participants, the instruction and individual studio set-ups were flanked with a larger 'artistic community' made up of the artist faculty members themselves, the guest artists-lecturers, and the participants' own studio colleagues, the other graduate students, all of whom were actively committed to investigating the art world and their own aesthetic gifts.

Another phenomenon embedded within their choice was a sense of entitlement to education and entitlement for an opportunity to advance their personal quest for artistic fulfillment within the framework of society's institutions of higher learning. These same college/university doors, which had stood open to them in youth, had over the past few decades allowed access to an ever-greater public including the non-traditional student and thus, were still accessible to them, representing a beneficial exchange between resources and the ongoing needs of the greater public.

Why have they returned to the fine arts?

As Eisner (2003) reminds us, the fine arts refine our beings. They also permit connection with and exploration of life as perceived through the lens of the artistic self. The arts also offer a possibility of communication. In the case of the participating mid-life graduate students, these individuals knew the power of the arts—of the artistic form, of the intense inspiration art can elicit, and of the possible authenticity of the creative act. They had found this self 'treasure' as a mode to explore, live, and communicate when

they were children and now they recognized this as an important life thread in their adult lives. In mid-life they sought to re-vitalize that inner aesthetic self and had taken steps to doing just that through the committed act of re-matriculation in the graduate fine arts studio and they were exhilarated.

(d) Implications for further research

Exposure, exploration, engagement, and enjoyment

In order to promote effective learning experiences within the educational setting, we must be observant not only of what happens in the arts classroom, but also what the long range effects of institutional arts education are. The link between youthful attempts at expression and further interest and development in adolescence and adulthood is obvious and is confirmed by the accounts of the participants. This link also seemed to testify to the connection between the well-received manifestation of the inner self, seen here as leading to a strong sense of self which can bloom into a strong public self. This is true in the arts as it is true in all learning domains.

In the fine arts, with its postmodern pluralism, there is an innate ease of encouragement and celebration, especially when the overtones of therapeutic nurturing are considered. An emphasis on developing personal artistic expression with a format for public declaration not only renders an individual sensitive to the beauty and complexity of the arts, but also offers a possible avenue of self-efficacy and perhaps, eventually, to self-actualization in adulthood (Maslow, 1943, Huitt, 2004; Bandura, 2001).

As devoted advocates of youth, educators are among the truly generous servants of society and fully comprehend the fostering of self-expression amongst their students. For art educators it would seem impossible to discount Dissanayake's 'homo aestheticus' theory and to deny each child the opportunity to engage their artistic self through those types of open, encouraging, and exploratory art programs that educators (Congdon, 2005; Dissanayake, 1988, 1992; Eisner, 2003; Gardner, 1982; Greene, 1988, 1995; hooks, 1995; Ryder, 1987; Unrath, 2007) have long championed. Implied here is that successes in one field cross over into other domains.

An area for further investigation would then be the study of how the youthful 'homo aestheticus' is addressed in the classrooms and community settings and how each child's inner artistic self is either furthered or stymied, what factors are involved, and what the institutional responses might be.

A sense of entitlement as lived by the returning adult

The word 'entitlement' carries overtones of debate. However, it is a phenomenon of great importance in education. From the study's narratives, it can be felt how these mid-life re-matriculantes weighed the pros and cons of their original fears of being the 'other' along with a certain hesitancy about invading the territory traditionally assigned to the instruction of young people. Noteworthy is that their deep-seated sense of entitlement, or 'inalienable civic right' to learn and to advance personal abilities and goals dominated

any fears of intrusion. This sense of entitlement was not a publicly considered opportunity but rather an unspoken assertion of the self by members of the most educated generation (Knable, 2005) and perhaps indicates a growing audacity to seek out further knowledge. Married to this sense of entitlement could possibly be the diminished value of their degree received decades ago—as one participant stated: “When I received my degree it placed me among the elite, but now most people go to college.”

With the well-documented and obvious ‘graying of the campus’ upon us (Cohen, 2003; Weinstock, 1978,) the institutional reception to the influx of older non-traditional undergraduate students and to the return of degree alumni is under scrutiny. It is possible that the sense of entitlement eventually be reviewed and with it the institutional response. Discourse on entitlement is rich with social and intellectual underpinnings and certainly, entitlement as it is felt by the adult population returning to campus would translate into an interesting educational text with implications for educational policy.

Response to praise and recognition: A shared commonality in youth and adults

The present study noted ‘youth’ commonalities such as influences, early praise and recognition of artistic talent, competition, and a gradual self-awareness of the self as artist appeared across the participant group. The research sought to link these ‘youth’ commonalities with the ‘adult’ commonalities, thus merging ‘youth’ and ‘adult’ inclinations. However, the matrix of art-making in the adult years had become complicated. The re-matriculates were all decisive articulate adults with distinct verbal discourses about “What art is?” Each had their own idea of the fine arts : “it is pure

enjoyment”; “drawing and painting are the height of artistry”; “art is spiritual”; “...art is what is under the surface”. Also, each participant saw their place in the post-modernist art world in quite divergent camps: “underneath I am a social artist.... having a mission”; “I was after art as an expression of those defining moments which we often do not recognize!”; “art is solitude”.

All of the individual expressions were interesting but the verbal statements associated with a definition of art, were as varied as life, and seemed to radiate from the discourse context. However, some links between youth and adult commonalities remained intact. Basically, the inner psychological states of an adult had direct reference in early youth. For example, the participants still remained to sensitive to praise and competition: (“I was accepted for the Surrealist Show....”; “I won! I am so excited...Best in Show!”), but now their reasons for art-making contained the theme of healing (“kept me sane”; “catharsis”; “definitely healing”; “I’m making ‘phobia’ boxes”), were seen to have, perhaps, substituted the youthful and simplistic competitive spirit (“I wanted to win”). An interesting study with psychological hues would be forthcoming from narrowing a study to an in depth look at youth and adult responses to arts-related praise and recognition.

(e) Reflections on the study

The most impressive lesson quite beyond learning the research terminology and research foundations had to do with the personal relationship which one engages in when doing a qualitative study involving close contact with people and their narratives. It is a personal encounter for reasons of research and as such demands definition. This type of interview contact

has an intimate character to it in that one person is revealing parts of their life and is taking an emotional risk in doing so. I could sense that the space between the interviewee and I, the listener, gradually became a container for memories and life emotions. It was here that I realized that my stance as an interviewer needed clarification within me, and therefore rendering our 'interview' relationship limpid and transparent to the study and interviewee alike. It was reminiscent of Maxine Greene's call for 'respectful attending to' which leads to a respectful way of living amongst others.

I have come away from the study with the insight that many of the conclusions are tentative, tentative for a variety of reasons including the fact that all is poised for change: these people's lives go on, as do their narratives. However, the in-depth interviewing process, this illuminating of the experience and the attention to the details of a person's narration of that experience is a powerfully human tool, an experience in itself.

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APPENDIX

From: Daria Kerridge, Doctoral program in Art Education, College of Education,
Department of Curriculum & Instruction.

To: _____

Subject: Written Consent Form

I am conducting an arts related research study and here within formally request your collaboration. It is my sincere hope that you will agree to participate in the research as I am certain your perspective and your storied knowledge will inform not only the study but also research in the field of non-traditional graduate work in studio arts.

Honoring a descriptive research tradition, the study will seek an open ended dialogue in an attempt understand the relationship between adult identity issues and a commitment to art making within the context of a graduate studio arts program. Thus, I am requesting that you agree to an interview series consisting of three separate interview sessions of 45-90 minutes each over a period of three to four weeks. An interval of approximately seven days will separate the interview sessions. These one-on-one interviews will take place from December 2007 through February 2008. At that point the interview data will be analyzed and written up for my doctoral paper. The study may later be submitted for publication in a research journal and/or presented at a conference.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and thus you may reserve the right to refuse to answer any question(s) or to withdraw from the participation in the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. As a participant, you will have the opportunity to review previous interview material and also have an opportunity to refute any statement or inference related to your commentary.

The benefit associated with your participation in this study has to do with contributing to the knowledge base about how a serious commitment to art-making, such as is enacted within the MFA program and/or graduate studio arts classes, relates to the adult self in terms of identity. With regards to possible risks, please know that the project does not involve any risks greater than those encountered in everyday life.

Confidentiality will be maintained. As a participant your name will not figure in the written study nor will any recognizable information. A code name will replace that of each participant and the setting itself will also remain anonymous. The interview sessions will be tape-recorded. Please know that all audio recordings from the interviews, along with any written documents (such as artist statements) you bring to the study will serve

no purpose other than data analysis. With regards to any visual images you might wish to share, these also will not be included in the study unless agreed upon. Furthermore, all interview material and copies of all pertinent information related to the study will be held together in secure storage (under lock and key in my writing studio at home) for a period of three years as is traditional in research undertakings.

I am extremely grateful for any consideration you may give to participation in the study. If you decide to sign this consent form we will proceed to the next step, which is scheduling the three interview appointments.

If you have any questions regarding the study, please contact me, Daria Kerridge at 703-577-7716 or email bdk6w7@mizzou.edu. My faculty advisor, Dr. Kathy Unrath is also available for any quires regarding the proposed study: 573-884-8935 or email UnrathK@missouri.edu. Also, if you have questions concerning your rights as a participant in the research, please feel free to contact Ms. Michele Reznicek, Compliance Officer, at the University of Missouri's Campus Institutional Review Board (483 McReynolds Hall) at 573-882-9585.

Date

Name & Signature

Table 1: Trustworthiness: Corresponding Criteria, Concerns, and Methods

Criteria	Concerns	Methods
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn the culture • Test for misinformation • Build trust • Identify crucial atypical events • Researcher bias • Human instrument frailty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity with (graduate studio arts) setting, culture, vocabulary, & intensity of journey. • Multiple interview series with 7-10 day intervals over one month time span. Frequent member checks. Triangulation of main source (interviews) with observation and artifacts. Peer debriefing. All interviews recorded. Inter-linking between cell categories. • Intensity and Respect merged with phenomenological 'detachment'. Three one to one in-depth open ended interviews (60-90 min each). Continual analysis/sorting/coding. Constant comparison. Frequent member checks. • Peer debriefing. Cross hatching of what is said and what is read into interviews. • Member checks and peer debriefing. • Recognizing probable error areas • Rich/thick descriptive accounts of life experiences as perceived by the individual within a context. • Unobtrusive data collection interwoven with interviews. • Journaling/a priori statement/bracketing. • Thematic but less structured open ended 1st Interview flowing to more focused 2nd & 3rd interviews zeroing in on salient elements. • Thorough documentation and sufficient detail • Systematic interpretation by coding and continual refining of categories/ Phenomenological reduction. • Saturation of descriptions • Linking to Literature • Countering Pygmalion effect through non-interactive interviews/ cross checks • Countering Hawthorne Effect through non judgmental 3-part interview/ cross checks/phenom detachment. • Verification & extension through member check • Exhaustive description of phenomenon • Document classification schemes • Phenomenological reduction • Bracketing • Emerging themes/patterns • Codes of thought and behavior embedded in data • "knowledge of social life unfiltered through concepts, operational definitions" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) • Member check of illogical data/ examination of conflicting data/explanations.
Transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide reader with contextual reference 	
Dependability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodological shifts • Establish redundancy • Pygmalion Effect • Hawthorne Effect • Inquirer sophistication 	
Confirmability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory grounded in data • Logical inferences • Clear reasoning for category identification • Accommodate negative evidence 	

VITA

Daria Kerridge grew up in the United States taking a Bachelor degree from San Francisco State University. After living in Italy for twenty five years where she worked in the language arts, E.S.L. education at the university level, she returned to the mid-west and received a M.A. in Art Education, 2004, from the University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, followed by a Ph.D. in Art Education, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, 2008.