

# **Beyond the Palace Arts: The Artful Expression of Women**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the stories of women that relate to their artful expression, with particular attention to the dominant discourses of Western Culture, and associated societal structures and practices, to which women and art are subject. Although there has been extensive research regarding creativity and art, there is little research available regarding women's artful expression as voiced by women themselves.

The research method involves bringing together a collective of four white women, living in Western Canada, to share their own stories of artful expression. The methodology integrates aspects of poststructuralist, feminist and participatory inquiry.

This research reveals the differences, tensions and contradictions between the discourses of women and art.

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*D*edicated to

all women in their search for artful expression of personal meaning



# I'm Painting A Picture

## INTRODUCTION

### **Explaining the title**

A friend of mine, Denton Pendergast, has always referred to “High Art” as the “Palace Arts.” Many of the famous works of art over the past 400 years of Western culture were commissioned by ruling monarchs, royal courts and churches. History indicates that men were commissioned to produce these works of art, rarely women (Chadwick, 1996).

The word art derives from the Latin “*artem*” meaning to fit together, to put together with skill (Onions, 1982). I use the phrase “artful expression of women” to describe women’s skilled, putting together activities that represent and give evidence of our understanding of ourselves and our world. These activities are not limited to sculpting and painting but include various other activities such as stitching, dancing, singing and writing.

### **An Early Note to the Reader**

It is my intention that this work not remain a static presentation regarding women’s artful expression but enter into a dynamic engagement with each reader. My hope for this work is that it become a site for an exchange of views, an on-going argument concerning women’s expression through art. I encourage the reader to indulge in discussion with the work. I invite you to participate in words and/or images, to make use of the margins, the double spacing, and even sticky notes.

### **Personal Interest**

I think I have always wanted to be an artist despite the fact that my mother told me often enough that there was no artistic talent in our family. I did have a great uncle who was a painter though. I remember visiting his home only a few times. The walls of every room were covered with his work. While I was visiting, he spent most of the time in his studio, and came out only for meals. The door of the studio was always closed and I was never invited inside.

As a young girl I learned to play the piano and eventually learned to play, with some confidence, the works of famous composers of the past – Bach, Mozart, Chopin. But I had little enthusiasm for playing classical music to entertain family and friends and let my association with the piano slip away in my teen years. When I went away to university I took my father's army beret with me. I hoped that people would see me as a French artist. They didn't, and I put the beret away. Later, I married a man whom I thought was very creative and artistic, and I spent the next 15 years supporting his creative ventures. I delighted in buying him art supplies, paper, paint and strings for his guitar. During those years I also dabbled with photography and weaving but I never seemed to give either of them serious attention.

It was not until I was in my early 40s, when my partner gave me the book *Drawing with the Right Side of the Brain* ( Edwards, 1989 ), that I realized I could draw and so began to develop that skill. With my partner's encouragement, I started framing pieces of my work and then with great courage, actually hung them on walls of our home where others might see them.

In my first year of graduate school, one of our professors, Dr. Brian Harvey, invited us to present our learning in our own way. The traditional paper was an option, but only one option. I knew immediately that I wanted to express my learning through art. As a busy graduate student, this class project gave me permission to commit time and energy to my art. After exploring some alternatives, I began to draw cartoons of my dog and to write some self-reflective poetry, trying to capture the different learning theories in image and verse. It was difficult but also exhilarating work for me as I searched for and developed my own images of understanding. That project remains the highlight of my first year of graduate school.

In my second year, I took an Interpretive Inquiry course with Dr. Antoinette Oberg. Our conversations about being spoken into existence and the possibility of speaking ourselves into existence differently were breath-stopping for me. I read feminist art literature and found stories of women and the art projects they have undertaken, projects such as the women's postal event (Parker, 1986). This project was initiated in the 1970s by a woman isolated on the Isle of Wight. Through the post, she started to exchange small images with other women. These small drawings expressed their feelings of being confined to positions of childcare and domestic responsibility. Later, at an

exhibition of their work, these women said “We are trying to make sense” (Goodall, 1986, p. 213).

These stories inspired me. I wanted to hear more stories about women and our artful expression. I wanted to hear stories that reveal how we are spoken into existence through the dominant discourses in our culture. Yes, I too am trying to make sense!

### **The Purpose of This Research**

The purpose of this research is to describe and explore the stories of women that relate to their artful expression. Although there has been extensive research regarding creativity and art, there is little research available regarding women’s artful expression as voiced by women themselves in the telling of their own personal stories.

The focus of this research is on the dominant discourses to which women and art are subject, and the differences, tensions and contradictions among these discourses. (Discourse here refers to particular ways of organizing and regulating meaning within cultures/ideologies.) Davies (1993) notes that the process of making visible these discourses and the social structures that are constituted through them, opens up the possibility for disrupting them and for speaking into existence other ways of being.

Breaking open the dominant myths of the male genius and the female caregiver embedded in the stories of our western culture, may offer women not only new knowing but also new positions as intentional producers of culture.

Awareness of the dominant discourses that influence women and art will alert educators to the need for educational strategies that support and enable women to understand both their limitations and possibilities of artful expression.

Finally, this research is intended to initiate new conversations regarding women and their artful expression.

### **The Research Question**

How is the artful expression of women affected by the dominant discourses and associated societal structures and practices to which women and art are subject?

### **Historical Context**

Traditional western art history has been described as “an identification of art with the wealth, power, and privilege of the individuals and groups who commissioned or

purchased it” (Chadwick, 1996, p. 10). Feminist art historians point out that all major art movements have been dominated by men and the part played by women has been “written out”. Art history, in fact, exclusively refers to work by men and the artist is assumed to be male (Pollock, 1986; Wolf, 1990). Gombrich’s (1978) *The Story of Art* does not mention even one woman artist although this popular publication presents countless works of art where women are represented.

Of course, women have always made art. In medieval times much of the work of women was recognized as art (i.e., fine needlework, pottery). At that time there were no rigid divisions between art made with paint or stone and art made with thread or fabric. Rather a variety of forms and media were linked to their ritual functions (Davies, 1994).

This integration of art is still evident in many traditional cultures today where art saturates daily living. As the Balinese explain it “We have no art – everything we do is art” (Cushman, 1992, p. 53). Not content with just a functional life, these people seek to bring beauty and understanding into their everyday lives. They ornament their clothing, their cookware, the walls of their homes and their own bodies. Craftsmanship is integral to their celebration of life and their crafts reflect the common experiences of the community, their landscapes, seasons, legends and mysteries. In many of these traditional cultures, it is mainly women who have possessed, handed down and transformed craft skills (Itienne-Nugue, 1995).

Chadwick (1996) traces western art history’s focus on the artist as a learned man, and the work of art as an expression of a gifted individual, to the early Renaissance. At that time the family was still a unit of production as well as consumption. Family businesses were a common feature of society with their workshop procedures and collaborative artistic production. In these guild workshops, often organized around members of a family, all work was attributed to (i.e., put under the name of ) the senior male member of the family. The prodigious output of these workshops helped to define the artistic genius of the ‘Master’ of the workshop. Crafts produced by skilled artisans became identified as works of art by an individual creator, an inspired genius. For centuries there has been the popular assumption that assistants worked on the less important areas of a production. Twentieth-century art historians have now re-attributed some of the finest work of that era to specific women members of these guilds (e.g., Marietta Robusti Tintoretto). When Marietta died in childbirth at the age of 30, the

Tintoretto production slackened considerably. Writings of the 17th century explained this decrease solely as a result of a father's grief. This decrease of production can be re-read in terms of the loss of a very capable assistant.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, life drawing of the male nude became central to training programs of European art academies. It was argued that "no great art could rely on clothed figures as this would destroy the atemporal universality and classical idealization required by great art" (Davies, 1994, p. 432). Women were barred from membership to these academies and excluded from their training programs until near the end of the 19th century. As a result, women became isolated from the theoretical and intellectual debates that dominated the arts.

The Enlightenment movement of the 17th and 18th centuries supported the separation of workplace and home. Rousseau argued that women were submissive, naturally inferior, and lacked the intellectual capacities of men, "that they had no ability to contribute to art and the work of civilization apart from their domestic roles" (Chadwick, 1996, p. 40). Women became subject to the division of public and private spheres of society (i.e., professional activities including the production of art, and self-sacrificing domesticity). By the late 18th century, the artist was represented as the Man of Reason and woman as the irrational but charming, entertaining, and beautiful object of art (Pollock, 1986; Ralston Saul, 1992). History had transformed Marietta Robusti, mentioned previously, into a muse and model for her father. She has been transformed from the producer of art into a subject for representation, a sign for male creativity (Chadwick, 1996). Women continued to paint but did not exhibit and were not considered artists. Excluded from public life, women had a limited area of experience to consider in their painting or writing. Of course, there were additional practical constraints. Women required a companion or chaperone in order to even meet with a publisher.

In the late 19th century, when women were finally given access to the nude model, the impressionist movement turned from classical and historical painting to scenes of contemporary modern life, recreation, and public spaces, including sexuality and commercial exchange. Men had freedom to visit and represent these public spaces. The male artist became associated with the anti-domestic, anti-social behaviour, isolation and disorder. In contrast, women could not go to a Paris cafe alone. If they were there at all, it was only to work, often selling their bodies to clients and artists (Davies, 1994;

Rosenman, 1995; Wolf, 1990). As the separation of work and home intensified and families moved to the suburbs, women found it increasingly difficult to remain involved in production and trade. During this period, women who managed to practice their art were subject to the domestic constraints of the developing nuclear family and restricted to art that reflected their natural domestic femininity. Mary Cassatt's (1884-1926) ability to paint children was attributed to her womanhood rather than her artistic skill. Chadwick (1996) quotes novelist and critic J.K. Huysmans as declaring that "Woman alone is capable of painting childhood" (p. 41). The concepts of woman and artist became contradictory.

Up until the late 1960s, the paradigm of the artist was unquestionably masculine, the notion of genius was male gender specific and the history of art offered little space for women, whose art was seen as second rate and inferior to that of men (Deming, 1990; Pollock, 1986). The Women's Movement of the past 30 years has confronted these accepted views of art and artist and has re-discovered women artists long hidden from history. Current feminist art historians consider art history as neither neutral nor universal, but rather as reinforcing widely held social values and beliefs and informing a range of activities including teaching, publishing, and the buying and selling of works of art. The Women's Movement has revealed the social, political and economic conventions of Western society that determine who is able to produce art and gain renown (Chadwick, 1996; Pollock, 1986).

However, women continue to juggle domestic responsibilities with artistic production, resulting in smaller bodies of work, and works of smaller scale than those produced by male contemporaries. Cubb (1994) notes that ideas of uniqueness, one-of-a-kind and genius continue to prevail because they are important to the art marketplace. David Bohm, considered one of the world's most intriguing thinkers, still expected his wife Sarah to run his affairs, hold down a job, provide hot meals every evening and continue with her sculpture and painting (Peat, 1996).

Art history continues to privilege prodigious output and monumental scale over the selective and intimate and the category "woman artist" remains an unstable one. Women continue to be "critically" reviewed in patronizing terms. Anne-Sophie Mutter, the renowned German violinist has had to survive slobbering media attention. "She commands the stage like a young princess, voluptuous in a strapless designer gown that

accents the alluring curve of her shoulders and the luxurious corona of her billowing tresses” (Walsh, 1988).

Regrettably, few women have been able to bequeath their talent and experience to following generations and some wonder why they pursued their art at all. In a biography of Canadian novelist, Margaret Laurence, King (1997) quotes from Laurence’s last journal “I wrote books and I did raise my kids. But mostly what I did was write books. Why? I no longer know” (p. 382).

### **The Significance of the Study**

Scholars have defined human beings as meaning-makers and consider symbols, metaphors and imagination central to the construction of meaning (Carlsen, 1995; Mezirow, 1995). Symbols, metaphors and imagination are also fundamental components of art. However, much of the art of women in Western culture has been devalued, repressed and invisible. Even the traditional domestic arts of women (i.e., needlework, millinery, quilting) are no longer needed or valued and most women have become only consumers of art (Deming, 1990). We dress ourselves in the fashion designs of others; we decorate our homes with the paintings of others; we listen to the music of others on our stereos and we watch visions of others on TV and at the cinema. These others, mostly men, speak for us and make meaning for us. We see ourselves through the eyes of these others.

“A true art for all cannot be developed by extending the audience of art to include all humanity, but conversely, by a process whereby the capacity for constructing and organizing the raw material of art (a capacity which has been particularly characteristic of specialists in art) is appropriated by all” (Haug, 1983, p. 38). If women are to enter the world as conscious, intentional meaning-makers, we need to make public the events of our lives and wriggle free of the constraints of private, individual experience.

This study makes public the stories of four women, stories concerned with their artful expression. I invite the reader to reflect on personal stories of artful expression and to bring forward those reflections in meeting with the stories which appear in this text.

## Chapter 2

**Visiting the Galleries****REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This study, concerning the artful expression of women, is situated within the context of feminist and feminist poststructural theories and concepts. I believe these theories are useful in exploring and describing how women and their art are positioned within Western culture.

As I begin to write up these theories and concepts, I am reminded of Lather's (1991) argument that "any effort at definition domesticates, analytically fixes, and mobilizes pro and contra positions", and so advises the use of the phrase "*toward* a definition" (p. 5). Therefore, it is my hope that this review will serve to bring the reader *toward* an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of this inquiry. Further, in referencing the work of numerous individuals here, I am aware that their writings were produced in mere moments in time and it is not my intention to fix their positions.

**Poststructural/postmodern theory**

The term poststructuralism is often used interchangeably with the term postmodernism and is used to refer to concepts developed by a diverse range of French writers including Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Derrida. Their writings recognize the impossibility of a universal theory or the notion of a transcendent "truth" and focus instead on difference (Chadwick, 1996; Davies, 1994; Wolf, 1990). Poststructuralist theory dispenses with the "Grand Narrative" and the possibility of objectivity. Rather it views all knowledge as socially and historically located, acknowledging too its own partiality. Within the conceptual web of poststructuralism, foundational views of knowledge (e.g, the Truth of Plato or the Reason of Descartes) are under attack as is modernism's lust for absolutes and certainty in knowing. "Poststructuralism holds that there is not final knowledge; the contingency and historical moment of all readings means that whatever the object of our gaze, it is contested, temporal and emergent" (Lather, 1991, p. 111).

Poststructuralist theories call into question apparent truths, dismantle dominant ideas and cultural forms (i.e, the authority of the author, the painter, the photographer), and break down the division between the one who knows and the ones who are written

about or represented (Davies, 1994; Lather, 1991; Wolf, 1990). These theories also question the concept of disinterested knowledge and the notion of neutrality of language.

Poststructuralism considers the connection between meaning and power, and how power is exercised. Chadwick (1996) notes that power is not exercised by open coercion but through its “investment in particular institutions and discourses, and the forms of knowledge that they produce” and so raises “questions about the function of culture as a defining and regulating practice” (p. 12).

Poststructuralism moves beyond structuralism’s recognition of the constitutive force of social structures and discourse, and opens up the possibility of agency to the subject. The act of making visible these structures and discourses, that a person is ‘subjected to’ and ‘constituted by’, allows for a different way of reading, seeing, and understanding (Davies, 1993).

Poststructuralism is not one theoretical position with one fixed meaning but does carry fundamental assumptions about language, meaning and subjectivity (Weedon, 1987).

**Language** – Although language is the means by which we communicate, a vehicle for expression, poststructuralist texts expose another role of language: to control what can be said, or even thought and by whom. Language is seen as not simply representational but also as a system of signs by which meaning is produced “a matrix of enabling and constraining boundaries rather than a mirror” (Lather, 1991, p. 105). Pollock (1986) insists that systems of meaning, particularly language, incapacitate as much as they empower the production of meanings.

**Discourse** – Michel Foucault, the French theorist, produced the concept of a discursive field in an attempt to understand the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity and power. “Discursive fields consist of competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes” (Weedon, 1987, p. 35). Davies (1993) introduces this difficult concept of discourse by looking at the concept of ideology first. She uses Barrett’s definition of ideology as “the generic term for the processes by which meaning is produced, challenged, reproduced and transformed” (p. 14). This, however, does not account for the plurality of meaning or contradictions in meaning. The poststructuralist use of the term ‘discourse’ shifts the concept of ideology to multiple, possible meanings.

Since discourse is understood as that transparent medium through which we see our world, discourses are taken up as one's own, in ways that are not visible. Davies uses the example of a pane of glass. When looking out at the view, we disattend the pane of glass; so too it is with discourse. However, we begin to recognize ourselves in the identities and images projected to us, through social practices and institutions (i.e., the family, school, advertising, cinema) (Pollock, 1986).

Weingarten (1995) contributes to the concept of discourse by describing it as an “historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories and beliefs ... that are embedded in institutions, social relationships and texts” (p. 135). For example, within the discourse of art, we use the term ‘masters’ of art, and the unequally valued categories of art and craft.

To add to the complexity of the concept of discourse, not all discourses carry equal weight or power within a discursive field, for example the family or art. Some discourses are dominant, others are marginal, but it is the dominant discourse that accounts for and justifies the status quo. In addition, we are never subject to just one discourse but a multitude of them. Not even necessarily discrete, discourses may be inextricably connected to other discourses or contradictory to them (e.g., woman connected to mother and intimacy, but contradictory to genius). Working through language and other social practices, discourses construct us and shape what we can know. Discourses are not fixed but always shifting and subject to re-evaluation (Davies, 1994; Lather, 1991). For example, in the dominant discourse of family, the contemporary meaning and subject positions for woman as mother and consumer may conflict with other subject positions that we may wish to assume (i.e., artist).

The discourses and practices through which we are constituted are often in tension, providing multiple layers of contradictory meanings. Davies (1993) uses the metaphor of palimpsest to explain this multiple layering of discourse that is inscribed in our bodies and in our conscious and unconscious minds.

This is a term to describe the way in which new writings on a parchment were written over or around old writings that were not fully erased. One writing interrupts the other momentarily overriding, intermingling with the other; the old writing influences the interpretation of the imposed new writing and the new influences the interpretation of the old. But both still stand, albeit partially erased and interrupted. New discourses do not simply replace the old as on a clean sheet. They generally

interrupt one another, though they may also exist in parallel, remaining separate, undermining each other perhaps, but in an unexamined way. (p. 11)

**Deconstruction** – Conventional reading strategies assume that language is transparent and that it is *through* language that we search for the fixed and solid meaning of the author. Deconstruction is a poststructuralist reading strategy, one that frees the reader to pursue and identify multiple interpretations. It is a strategy that allows multiple meanings to arise, confront and interpret each other and holds the potential of exposing how language is used to perpetuate inequality and oppression (Johnson, 1995). In our search for meaning in a world of contradictory information, a deconstructive approach draws attention to the partiality of any one view or position. It encourages new possibilities, fresh vantage points and perhaps an insight (Lather, 1991; Parker, 1994). Deconstruction is the critical practice through which binary oppositions (i.e., the male spectator and female object), and images of the solitary, eccentric genius that influence views of art, can be formally undermined.

**Identity and Subjectivity** – Subject is the poststructuralist term for person and signals a shift from the humanist concepts of identity and its attributes: autonomy and agency. Subjectivity is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, the sense of self, and the ways of understanding one's relation to the world. The humanist concept of subject presupposes an essence at the heart of the individual which is unique, fixed, coherent, rational and constituted by a set of static characteristics such as sex, class, race, and sexual orientation. Within the humanist perspective women are offered subjectivities that render the status quo as natural (e.g., women are seen as natural caregivers). Poststructuralist theory breaks from this perspective and proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time the subject thinks or speaks. Women, children and other marginalized groups are constantly deprived of agency and autonomy. Their subject status is always partial, conditional and never guaranteed. Subjectivity is not a fixed or semi-fixed essence, but comprises numerous and shifting subject positions, and is constantly achieved through relations with others. This 'in construction' subject, bombarded by the conflicting messages of her world, is continually engaged in the processes of meaning-making (Davies, 1993; Lather, 1991; Weedon, 1987).

Socialization theory focuses on the process of shaping that is undertaken by others. Poststructuralist theory differs from this perspective and focuses on the way in which each subject actively takes up those discourses through which she and others speak/write the world into existence. “Through those discourses, they are made speaking subjects at the same time as they are subjected to the constitutive force of those discourses” (Davies, 1993, p. 13).

**Subjective knowing** – If our subjectivity is precarious, contradictory and in process, it follows that our subjective knowing is as well. “This is what something is to me at this particular time”(Kreiger, 1991, p. 83). Heilbrun (1988) does not see subjective knowing as awkward confessionalism, rather she embraces the personal creation of reality. She used a quote of Rich’s to emphasize the importance to women in sharing their subjective knowing. “that it is only the willingness of women to share their ‘private and often painful experience’ that will enable them to achieve a true description of the world” (p. 68).

**Desire** – Within the humanist concept of the person, desires or wants signal a stable identity i.e., the rational coherent person makes choices. However, within poststructuralist theory, because desire is understood to be constituted through discourse and may result from the influences of others, Davies (1993) indicates that it is possible to see “human subjects as not fixed but constantly in process, being constituted and reconstituted through the discursive practices they have access to in their daily lives” (p. 11).

Weedon (1987) writes “that the political significance of decentering the subject, abandoning the belief in essential subjectivity is that it opens up subjectivity to change” (p. 33). As we are exposed to alternative ways of constituting the meaning of our experience, we begin to see the points where change is possible, where we can begin to consciously re-construct ourselves, and embrace alternate subject positions.

These assumptions about language, meaning and subjectivity are of particular interest to feminist theorists.

## **Feminism(s)**

Contemporary feminism has its roots in the Women’s Liberation Movement. This was a political movement of the 1960s concerned with calling into question the patriarchal

structures of society that were oppressive to women. ‘Patriarchal’ refers to power relations in which women’s interests are subordinated to the interests of men, including sexual division of labour, control of sexuality and reproduction, and access to education and jobs (Weedon, 1987). Through the 1970s women came together to support and encourage each other’s activities and to protest against discrimination. Their often celebratory stance toward the female body and female experience was increasingly criticized as essentialist. Essentialist views consider gender in terms of a fundamental trait or quality that is internal and persistent, within an individual. Essentialist models are grounded in universalizing assumptions and fail to acknowledge diversity (Bohan 1994).

Feminism is not a homogeneous noun, and the heterogeneity and plurality of issues, positions, debates, and voices frequently remain unrecognized. In the 1980s, as women continued to build alliances against a culture which discriminated against them as women, they began to recognize the diversity of women’s needs and interests as fractured by experience, age, race, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation. Women began to realize that what was required was the construction of a new multiplicity of power and knowledge to serve the diverse communities of women (Parker & Pollock, 1986). Feminists of colour and lesbian feminists continue to challenge attempts to identify an inclusive female imagery or female experience, arguing instead that such attempts collapse female identity into a universalized seamless category that is heterosexual, white and middle class (Bohan, 1994; Deepwell, 1995).

Feminism is a contested zone and carries a range of diverse theories. Some feminists maintain an active hostility to any theory, intent on social activism and remaining focused solely on the experience of women (Farganis, 1994). ‘Liberal’ feminists argue that domestic labour and childcare inhibit self-development and self-realization. ‘Radical’ feminist theory stresses biological sexual difference, and celebrates an essential femaleness that can only be realized beyond the structures patriarchal control (Weedon, 1987).

Influenced by semiotics (the study of signs and symbols) ‘social’ feminists insist that femininity is socially and historically constructed. “How the body is lived in and experienced is implicated at all levels in social or socially determined psychic processes” (Parker and Pollock, 1986, p. 29). For example, there are aspects of women’s lives that have been veiled in shame and silence (e.g., menstruation, menopause). It is this social

theory that is linked to poststructural theory and is referred to as feminist poststructuralism or postmodern feminism (Farganis, 1994; Weedon, 1987).

### **Feminist Poststructural Theory.**

Feminist politics are aggravated by the fact that women feel dispossessed from the culture and its language. We lack the terms and concepts necessary to articulate what is specific to women's condition as well as to challenge the way dominant masculine discourses are asserted as the norm (Parker and Pollock, 1986). It is not surprising then that feminist scholars see the field of language as a vital site for their struggle against patriarchy (i.e., the way that women speak and are spoken of; the way that women represent themselves and are represented within a particular culture). There are also non-linguistic cultural practices, visual arts being one, that structure world views and reinscribe social systems through their discourses. Images produce meanings for their viewers and thereby contribute to the construction of those viewers. "Bodies are not born they are made" (Haraway as quoted in Isuak, 1996, p. 8). For centuries women have been objects rather than producers of art and feminists have attacked the representation of women in advertising, fine art and pornography (Davies, 1994).

Isuak (1996) also argues that the body, as well as being the site of the inscription of power and knowledge, is also a site of resistance. Contemporary feminist art critics are re-reading Charcot's photographs and sketches of hysteria (the germ of psychoanalysis). They are exploring the possibility of women's hysteria as a form of resistance to the demands and requirements of the social and sexual roles assigned to them.

Much feminist writing has elaborated the binary notions through which masculinity and femininity are socially and culturally constituted and codified. Robinson (1995) states it directly: "The body is gendered" (p. 138). Bohan (1993) furthers this idea to "one does not have gender, one does gender" (p. 13). Within our systems of representation we do not recognize a person, we recognise a female person or a male person. "Biology provides a bedrock for social inscription but it is not a fixed or static substratum: it interacts with and is overlaid by psychic, social and signifying relations" (E. Grosz as quoted in Robinson, 1995, p. 139). However, if femininity is constructed, then women have room to manoeuvre, to work with that construction and its codes. For example, the classification of artist carries codings of single-mindedness, obsessive dedication, and genius. These codings exclude women. Codes of femininity imply the suppression of personal desires in

favour of family and others, dabbling and amateur. Attempting to break open and disrupt these binary codes, feminists use deconstructive strategies first to identify the binaries and then to transcend them by simultaneously being both and neither.

Parker & Pollock (1986) note that although feminists practices and theories are founded in a political movement, the struggle of feminism is not to be incorporated as a new -ism. It is a struggle about meanings, a struggle against dominant and established systems of meanings. To revolt is to believe that change is possible, to recognise that the present situation is socially conditioned, not natural or inevitable. Feminism has challenged those areas of social life which were deemed to be non-social, based on human nature i.e, motherhood, sexuality, childcare, the body. Feminist poststructuralism then, is a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations, to identify areas and strategies for change, and indeed, to lay the groundwork for a transformation of society (Lather, 1991).

## **Art and Culture**

Art, as an expression of creativity has been the topic of extensive research over the past 50 years. For many years, it was believed that creativity was inherited or a 'God-given' phenomenon; you either had it or you didn't (Ebert, 1994; Lubeck & Bidell, 1987; Thompson, 1991). More recent philosophical perspectives allow that "to be human is to be creative" (Floistad, 1993, p. 202). Notwithstanding all this research, the history of women's art continues to be a history of exclusion (Deming, 1990). Traditionally, women are seen to channel all of their creativity into the creation of their children; likewise male artists sacrifice all for their art (Levinson, 1995).

The Tate Gallery in London, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and other major institutions of the visual arts continue to sustain a history of art which is mainly a history of the achievements of men. This invisibility of women artists reproduces a process where work by men is taken seriously and work by women is ignored (Wolf, 1990). The "Grand Tradition" of art recognizes a very narrow scope of art forms, painting and sculpture being two of the highest forms. Weaving, quilting, knitting and other traditional textiles are perceived as labour-intensive, slow, painstaking and devalued as women's work, non-work, crafts (Jefferies, 1995). The established social institutions of art (i.e., academies, systems of patronage and mythologies of the artist as the inspired

creator) circulate the dominant definitions and accepted limits of what is ratified as art and how it should be consumed.

For the past 50 years, beginning with early feminists such as Virginia Woolf, women have disputed the traditional notion of a masterpiece as a spontaneous and timeless creation of an individual genius. They argue that masterpieces are not created in isolation without context or history, but are an accumulation of a tradition (Rosenman, 1995).

In art, ideas move from the centres of power (i.e., the established social institutions of art mentioned earlier), to the margins and back again. Ideas are validated on the way in to centres of power but often unacknowledged on the way out. Parker & Pollock (1986) have deconstructed art history to reveal that work done by women was often first devalued and then later appropriated. Of the many examples they cite, the lack of acknowledgement of Navajo women weavers by abstract painters from New York exposes triple marginalization through gender, location and method of production.

Parker & Pollock (1986) note that historically art has gained meaning in opposition to industry. Art is idealised as the opposite to work and the artist is mythically idealized as a free agent of creativity. However, the process of art is a skilful activity which yields a product and the freedom of the artist is, in practice, subject to the market economy. Nochlin (1988) refutes the ideas of genius and freedom. She sees these myths as disguising elitist privilege and social institutions, including education, that regulate access to training, advancement and success.

Historically, in Western society women have been conspicuously absent as producers of art while conspicuously present as the subject-matter. Curiously, housework, the most characteristic form of female labour, remains absent from the images presented of women. "The reality of housework is as invisible as the woman artist" (Parker & Pollock, 1986, p. 139). Many of the art works that are produced by women are often accused of being trivial and speaking only to women (i.e, having content that is only of interest to women and not the general population). However, the content of artwork is highly significant because ideology(s) is almost always present, whether or not it is overt or hidden, vested in or against the status quo.

Culture, of course, does not just reflect social life and respond to transformations in ideologies by producing different images and texts. Culture participates in the construction and maintenance of social life, produces meaning and images of our world,

shapes our sense of reality and even our own identities (Parker & Pollack, 1986; Wolfe, 1990). The cultural media of painting and writing of the 19th century enshrined women in the private, domestic world. Later, film continued to confirm and reinforce familiar images of woman as wife, mother, prostitute, mistress, single mother, middle-aged woman and to limit women's social interests to those of the family, self-sacrifice and romance. TV now represents women as family-oriented and consumer-oriented (Chadwick; 1996; Deming, 1990).

Feminist film critics and theorists view visual representation as a field divided along gender lines. The active male artist or spectator is set against the passive female object, the spectacle. This controlling position of the male spectator makes the viewing position of a woman problematic. Feminist artists have responded by presenting images that destabilize the positioning of woman as object. Feminist artists have gone further in their resistance to the dominant discourses of art. Chadwick (1996) cites the re-photographed works of Walker Evans which she exhibited as her own, as an act of refusal of "authorship, rejecting notions of self-expression and originality" (p. 384).

Wolfe (1990) voices the opportunity of postmodernism for women and their art.

It seems reasonable to suppose that new forms of cultural expression, by virtue of the fact that their very existence challenges and dislocates dominant narratives and discourses, provide the space for different voices to speak and for hitherto silenced subjects to articulate their experience.(p. 9).

The focus of this research is on the artful expression of women and the dominant discourses and associated societal structures and practices to which women and art are subject. It is my intention to use the stories of women to make visible these discourses, including the differences, tensions, and contradictions among them, and the possible subjectivities of women within these discourses. The artful expression of women is caught within the language and desires embedded in these discourses. Applying a deconstruction strategy to the stories of women, in order to expose the binary oppositions between the dominant discourses of women and art, may provide insight to the limitations and possibilities of women's artful expression.

## Chapter 3

**Mixing the Paints****METHODOLOGY****Research Context**

Feminist, poststructural, and action theories inform my research method. These theories have released research methodology from strictly prescribed strategies and boundaries, have opened up new possibilities in the study of the human experience, and have allowed for different ways of making sense of our social world. Epistemologically, these theories assume that the researcher and participants are interactively linked as partners in the research process. The transactional nature of this inquiry requires a dialogue between the investigator and the subjects of the inquiry. Further, this dialogue must be dialectical in nature in order to transform ignorance and misapprehensions into more informed consciousness (i.e., from accepting historically mediated structures as immutable, to seeing how the structures may be changed and to understanding actions that are required to effect that change) (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Punch, 1994).

**Feminism** – I use a feminist approach in my research as feminism brings politics to the centre of the research table. Feminism is committed to changing existing power relations between men and women in society. These power relations, associated with gender, structure all areas of life, the family, education, culture and leisure (Weedon, 1987). The ideological goal of feminist research is to make visible women's experience, to break apart the oppositional male/female dualisms and to transform the patriarchal structures of society that oppress women (Davies, 1993; Lather, 1991). My inquiry attends to making visible women's stories of their experience with artful expression. When women tell their own stories, stories of their unique circumstances, they often challenge old discourses, distortions and silences (Daly, 1977).

**Poststructuralism** – The focus of my research is on the discourses of women and art. The process of describing and exploring discourses embedded in the written and spoken stories of women allows me to highlight the complex social constructions to which women and our artful expression are subject. Poststructuralism provides agency to the speaking subject, and allows her to expose and break down existing discourses and

then to speak and write into existence other ways of being (Davies, 1993). My exploration provides an opportunity for participants to step outside of the male/female dualisms and entertain multiple, even contradictory positions. Cixous (1986) argues for a multiple wholeness for women, that embraces both sides of the oppositional and hierarchical dualisms of the current constructions of femininity and masculinity.

**Action/Participation** – The writing of Jurgen Habermas served as my original guide to the action/participatory aspects of this research. From Habermas’ perspective, social research is an interactive rather than a controlling process, where participants aim for mutual understanding over the coordination of their subsequent actions (Hamilton, 1994). Habermas rejects the observer-observed dyad where the subject is positioned either in the role of a dominating, privileged observer or in the role of an observable object, submissive and passive before the gaze of power ( Habermas, 1987). Habermas, with his Kantian concern with human freedom and social emancipation, attempts to replace the detached spectator paradigm with a paradigm that recognizes the importance of democratic participation (Levin, 1993). I believe that structuring my research as a working collective, brings recognition to these issues of mutual understanding and participation. Using the collective structure, I am able to provide a space for a number of voices and stories to be heard, for participants to interact with each other in a dynamic way, to identify common experiences and contradictions, and to build new understandings and new stories together. This is a research approach where both the researcher and the researched become “the changer and the changed” (Lather, 1991, p. 56). By implementing a collective design for research, I am also recognizing and attempting to counteract the “paralysis of isolation” where different models of experience remain fragmented and divided, making it possible for society to infinitely reproduce itself in its present form (Haug, 1983).

**The use of stories** – We are all story makers, and studying the stories of women, stories from our lived experience has become an acceptable research approach. (Brookes,1992; Daly, 1997; Haug, 1983; Weingarten,1995). Weingarten uses “story” to refer to the narrative form that a person gives to her experiences, thoughts, feelings and beliefs. Our stories, related to our artful expression, have embedded within them, the discourses and dominant myths of women and art to which we are subject.

Some stories in our culture become dominant stories, reflecting the dominant discourse(s), and over time these stories are selected as the legitimate stories. Other stories are repressed, trivialized and marginalized. According to Bruner (1990), narrative requires a sensitivity to what is canonical and what violates accepted canon. Some experiences are considered acceptable and speakable and others are not. The discourses to which we are subject, also shape the stories we can tell. We are caught between representing ourselves accurately and representing ourselves acceptably. There are gaps in our stories as well. These gaps hold within them, aspects of our experiences that we take for granted or that we consider unspeakable.

***My position as principal researcher*** – Feminist poststructuralist theory makes problematic my position as researcher. Positioning in feminism is an awareness of the situatedness and partiality of claims to knowledge and so contests the researcher's objectivity, political neutrality and authority in authorship. "All texts are personal statements" (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994, p. 578). Further, although this is my research project, to which I have already given considerable effort, I feel I am caught. I have attained a certain level of knowing and competence regarding the subject of my research but I cannot position myself as the all knowing one, qualified and competent, in research that aims for social emancipation. It is my intention to interrupt oppressive, authoritative discourses, not perpetuate them.

As I processed this dilemma, I was inspired by the words of Donna Haraway ( as cited in Marcus, 1994).

Situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular. The science question in feminism is about objectivity as positioned rationality. Its images are not the products of escape and transcendence of limits (the view from above) but the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living within limits and contradictions – of views from somewhere. (p. 572)

I see that even as the researcher, my position is assumed incomplete and requires engagement from others positioned differently (i.e, other members of the collective). In addition, I have attempted to position myself in a number of different ways in this work: as the researcher, as a member of the collective, and always as a woman connecting with other women in my world. Although I have identified them as three distinct positions,

they are not. As I developed this work, the three positions were always informing my understanding to a lesser or greater degree. However, in the different stages of the research I consciously tried to assume either the position of researcher or participant. My own story of artful expression is included as a part of the text, has become blended with the stories of the participants and contributes to our collective work.

All of this is not to deny that I am the principal researcher of this work and that I have considerable influence and responsibility in guiding and constraining the work. However, by engaging in critical self-reflection, particularly through diary writing, I have tried to remain sensitive and aware of the overlapping of my representations, that are embedded with my values and beliefs, with the alternative representations of the other participants.

**Human Subjects Protection** – The proposal for this research has been examined and approved by the Human Subjects Committee, University of Victoria. As I considered members of the collective as partners in this research, I have attempted to inform them fully of the nature and intent of this research project. For instance, all members have a copy of my research proposal. Before our initial group meeting, the members read and signed informed consent forms (Appendix A). Problematic, however, is the fact that members of the collective are known to each other and the information they shared with me, the principal researcher, is shared with the other participants. This raises the issue of an inherent invasion of privacy in the project's structure (Morgan, 1988). In other words, I am not able to absolutely guarantee the confidentiality of the participants. In order to provide as much anonymity as possible, I initiated the following measures. The participants provided code names for themselves and I have used these code names in the transcribed texts and in this thesis. I cautioned participants to bring stories that they were comfortable in sharing. Group information was considered confidential among group members. After the tapes were transcribed, I mailed copies of the transcription to all participants and they deleted or change information that they felt would compromise their privacy. Also, once the tapes had been transcribed, I destroyed them and assured members of the collective that, excepting ourselves, only my committee members would have access to the transcriptions.

Although I see no serious risks to members of the collective, I do believe that participants are affected by the research experience. At the beginning and ending of each

session, I invited members to share their feelings regarding the experience. I kept a record of their comments in my thesis journal. This process allowed members to consider and express emerging feelings and kept me alert and sensitive to their vulnerability.

## **Method**

***Inviting Participants*** – Initially, I had to decide on the number of participants to invite. The size of the collective seemed to impact so many other considerations: the number of meetings, space requirements, adequate time for the story of each participant, building trust among members, maintaining individual interest and participation, even the viability of the research project. I found little literature on research that comprised collectives, and the two year time duration of Haug's (1983) collective frightened and intimidated me. After discussions with Kim Daly regarding her recent study with a collective (1997), I decided that a group of four or five participants was appropriate. This size of collective minimized the difficulty of scheduling meeting times, allowed space and time for everyone to participate, and kept the number of required meetings (four or five) within realistic bounds.

***Selection criteria and selection process*** – I required participants who were actively engaged in their own artful expression, participants who exhibited an ability to articulate and reflect on their personal experiences, participants willing to share personal stories and process those stories with others in a group environment, and finally participants willing to make a commitment to the four to six hours of group work. In order to foster discussion, and provide a level of comfort, I sought participants that shared a reasonable amount of homogeneity in background (Morgan, 1988). I also considered diverse interests in art in order to increase the base of possible stories.

As a first step in attracting participants, I sent letters of invitations (Appendix B) to the women currently enrolled in the Master's Program in Arts in Education at the University of Victoria (enrollment of 14). This group was to be on-campus for the summer program and members were well known to each other. As these women were all on-site at the university, I believed I could easily schedule time there for our meetings. Approximately 75% of the class responded to my invitation and expressed interest in, and encouragement for, my project but only one class member felt she could undertake the

time requirements. A number of the women expressed disappointment that they could not participate as they felt they had little uncommitted time. They could squeeze in an hour or two for an interview but could not manage four to six group sessions. Many of the women wished to provide me with some support and gave me leads to other groups. I received strong statements from these women that they felt over-extended with responsibilities to family and career.

This response scenario described above played itself out again when I approached two other women's art groups. The time commitment and tight schedules of women continued to be prohibitive to finding participants. As time moved along, I became doubtful that the project, as I had designed it, could even be enacted.

Well immersed in the dilemma of finding appropriate participants, I realized that there were women within my own close community of friends that not only met the selection criteria but had expressed an interest in my research work. Caught in my binary beliefs, I had not seen women known to me, and participants for research, as connected. I made a list of eight possibilities for the collective, selecting women with a wide variety of interests in the arts (e.g., music, drawing, textiles, writing, and dance) and with post-secondary education. The first three women to whom I sent invitations agreed to participate without any hesitation. One woman asked me why it had taken me so long to call her!

**Texts** – The texts gathered and used for analysis are comprised of our personal stories and subsequent conversations. Aware that the design of my research limited the number of women giving voice to their experiences, and wanting to gather voices from a broader population, I decided to document in my thesis journal the utterances of women that I met in my community during the research process. When I met women in a casual way and mentioned my research topic, women usually showed interest and engaged with me in some conversation about their own ideas or experience with artful expression.

**The research space** – I used my dining room as the research space. It is a comfortable place with a large handmade cherry table, where we could sit together and share food and refreshments as well as our stories. An amplifier and tape deck are also in this room, making the process of recording convenient.

## **Research Sessions and Analysis Readings.**

The method and analysis aspects of my research do overlap and are not easily separated without introducing some confusion. In order to provide some clarification for the reader in following my method and analysis, I have used the term “session” to address the method process and the term “reading” to more specifically locate the analysis process.

My method involved the meeting together of a collective of four women for a total of five sessions. We each brought, to the collective, a personal story that we had written, a story significant to our artful expression. We used these stories to explore the discourses and discursive practices of our culture and ourselves as women and as artists ( i.e., to consider and call into question what we had always taken for granted, to identify where we have made accommodations, and compromises). This method was inspired by the autobiographical methods of the collectives of Haug (1983) and very recently Daly (1997) and their search for the traces of situations where women either construct themselves into existing meaning structures of their world or develop forms of lived resistance to those structures.

The analysis of the text comprised uncovering multiple meanings in the text and questioning meanings that we have taken for granted. This analysis emerged through the process of multiple readings of the text using a number of different strategies. I have included details of these strategies with the descriptions of the specific readings.

**Pre-Session** – Members of the collective were not familiar with the orientation of feminist-poststructural research or language as used in this research (e.g., discourse, power and powerlessness, deconstruction, language as a site of feminist struggle, subject and positioning of subject). Ten days prior to our first meeting, I prepared and sent out a reading package for them to help with orientation and language that included excerpts from Connelly & Clandinin (1990), Davies (1994) and Scheuing (1995). Also included with the package was a copy of my research proposal.

**Format of sessions** – During each session one member of the collective read her story aloud to the group. This gave us the voice of the story-maker, and her own verbal expression of the story. It also allowed the listeners to experience their own feelings for the story as the story washed over them. As a second step, we re-read the story individually, silently, using a deconstructive reading strategy (Appendix C) and made notes of our findings. This strategic reading constituted the first step of the analysis. We

then used our notes and thoughts from this exercise in a subsequent joint analysis of the story (i.e., discussing binary positions revealed, looking at what was implied by the writer, uncovering values and beliefs that lured us into the story). For the purpose of analysis, I considered these first readings as Reading One.

**First Session** – This first session also served as an introductory session. Although participant members were all known to me, they did not know each other. I had a number of intentions for this first session.

- to allow group members time to establish some comfort and familiarity with each other and the research space,
- to provide time for questions concerning the pre-session material,
- to review the purpose and method of the research and issues of confidentiality, safety, trust and tape recording,
- and finally to provide my story as an introductory experience of our method of inquiry, using the format described earlier.

I also explained my positions in the project, first as a participant, engaged with the collective in the exploration of discursive elements of our stories, and second, as the researcher, ultimately responsible for the further analysis, description and presentation of our exploration.

**Second Session** – As I had already started to transcribe the audio tape of the First Session, and had clearly heard participants struggling with language and concepts such as dominant or marginal discourse, and positioning of the subject, I introduced this session by reviewing again some of the concepts of poststructuralism and deconstruction. I also highlighted some of the discourses that we had uncovered in the first session. A second story was introduced by another member of the collective and we analyzed that story using the format stated earlier.

**Interim Second and Third Sessions** – After the Second Session there was a space of three weeks before we were able to meet again. This was late summer and we had to accommodate holidays and the beginning of the school year. I finished transcribing the tapes of the First and Second Sessions and sent copies of those transcriptions out to the collective. This provided an opportunity for members to read and reflect on their discussions as well as their own stories, to indicate areas of the transcripts they

considered confidential and to stay connected to the study during the long interval between sessions.

**Third Session** – Initially we discussed our feelings and reactions to the transcripts of the First and Second Sessions. A third member of the collective presented her story for analysis.

**Fourth Session** – We considered the final story from the group. As this was to be our last session together, we also discussed our experience with the process, and considered again our pseudonyms and personal introductions in the final presentation.

**Reading Two** – After transcribing the Third and Fourth Sessions, I re-read all of the stories and conversations that now comprised the text. I realized that I had four stories and twelve hours of conversation with which to become familiar. It seemed to be overwhelming. I made a first attempt to examine and organize the material. Through several thorough readings of each story and its associated conversation, I compiled a list of all the beliefs and values that surfaced for me. These lists revealed a multitude of discourses to which we are subject and the many contradictions and tensions within and among our personal and societal belief systems ( see Appendix D for sample). Now that I had identified the various discourses in the text, I assigned codings to the different discourses and elements within those discourses for further reference.

**Reading Three** – I mailed copies of the Third and Fourth Session transcripts, together with copies of the ‘beliefs and values’ listing I had compiled, to members of the collective for their examination.

**Reading Four** – I had great difficulty finding containment and order for the analysis of the four stories and their associated conversations. Although I understood that order and containment are not objectives of deconstruction, I was also aware that I needed some way to structure my analysis for presentation. I decided to use the dominate discourses that arose in the readings of my story, and then consider them as a template to analyze the other three stories.

**Fifth Session** – Members of the collective, after reading and reflecting on the transcripts and beliefs/values listings, began to discuss with me on an individual basis, their further insights and critique of our process together. I asked that we meet once

more as a group, so that all members could witness each other's reflections. The following questions served as a basis for our discussions in this final session.

- Do you see more choices for yourself?
- How do you construct yourself differently?

I also used this session to present my template interpretations from Reading Four and to incorporate feedback from the group (Appendix E).

**Reading Five** – Although Reading Four had given me confidence that I could organize the material for presentation, and also had provided some insight for all of us to the weavings of the major discourses through all of our stories, I found the template analysis too constraining. This analysis restricted our experience to specific limited categories, and did not allow for the multiple meanings and the shades of meaning of the dominant discourses in the four different stories and conversations. I resolved to consider each story separately.

After much deliberation and discussion with colleagues, I decided to embark on an analysis strategy outlined by Kirby and McKenna (1989) called “hurricane thinking” (p. 146). Applying their strategy to my data, I used small cards to write out the separate data elements of each story and associated conversation, including page numbers from the text. Then I placed my research question at the centre of a page and moved the cards around the page, attending to their links or contradictions to each other, and their links or distance from my question. I found this to be a very difficult process, setting up, arranging, and rearranging the cards but as I worked with this dynamic deconstruction process, threads of meaning began to appear and different relationships became clearer to me. The process seemed to evolve into an unravelling, an unpicking of the text, followed by a search for and recognition of threads of discourses that had been woven through the text. It was a very messy and at the same time an insightful experience. The exercise allowed me not only to follow threads of meaning through the text, but also to recognize threads that ran across others, contradictory to them. For example in Ruth's story and conversation, I found a strong thread of the artist alone, removed, uninvolved. Crossing this thread, is the thread of women, connected, in relationship. These two threads are contradictory and are problematic for Ruth. She says that she must struggle to stay alone. Following these threads provided me with new perspectives and a number of interpretations to the text.

After working in this manner over a few days, and feeling that I had identified threads of meaning and relationships that contributed insight to my research question, I documented my interpretations for use in my discussion of the analyses.

### **Issues of Validity.**

Lather (1991) argues that postmodernism destabilizes assumptions of interpretive validity (i.e., separating true from false) and shifts focus to the dynamics of meaning. She puts forward the further postmodern assumption that “audiences are fragmented and multiple in their production of any meanings that a text might have” (p. 44). Said in another way, the text is stripped of its external claims of authority (Lincoln and Denzin, 1994). Lincoln and Denzin call this movement away from validity and textual authority as the “crisis of legitimation” (p. 579). Lather (1991) offers to reconceptualize validity for research that is committed to a more just society. She enlists the techniques of triangulation, reflexivity and member checks. I saw these as appropriate for my research.

**Triangulation**, including multiple data sources, methods, theoretical schemes and a design that considers counter patterns as well as convergence is important in establishing data trustworthiness. I addressed these points in this research by including as text, the stories and conversations of participants and utterances of women from the community, and by initiating the collective format that allows for the input of various perspectives.

**Reflexivity** is a guard against the imposition of the theoretical preconceptions of the researcher. As a basis of knowing, I have documented both reflections of self and other participants involved in the research project. I have also consciously positioned myself within the research. I am a participant too and my own stories are subject to the research analyses.

**Member checks** is closely associated with reciprocity. Here the researcher is charged to enter into a “mutual negotiation of meaning and power” with the participants (Lather, 1991, p. 57). Participants are not objects but active subjects empowered to understand and change their situations. The philosophy and design of this research project includes, and is sensitive to, the involvement of the participants throughout the emerging analysis of the project. I have also retreated from the universal spokesperson and allowed participants of the research to speak too. I am guided by a quotation of Said, “who speaks is more important than what is said” (as cited in Lather, 1991, p. 47).

### **A Caution to the Reader**

My readings of the text are neither correct or final. Therefore I do not assume that the reader will always agree with my interpretations. In fact I encourage the reader to consider and move beyond my interpretations, to pursue and clarify other multiple meanings. Multiple and contradictory interpretations serve to break open the old shapes of our stories and to allow new inspirations and perspectives to burst forth.

### **Structuring the presentation**

In developing a format for this presentation, I was intent on ensuring that the stories and voices of the participants remained a central focus. During my analysis I found that each story and discussion offered various threads of meaning of the discourses of women and art. Therefore, by structuring the presentation around the stories I was able to consider different aspects of the discourses without losing sight of the participants and their stories.

Using the voices of the participants from the transcripts allowed me to present the participants in the act of making sense, of becoming aware of their constitution of self, particularly as it may relate to their production of artful expression. I have provided further comments in order to facilitate the reader's awareness of the possible subject positions available to these women, subject positions available both in the normal and more marginal discourses of women and art in our Western culture. In order to consider the 'in process' nature of subjectivity, I have also included the further insights of the participants after they have had an opportunity to reflect on the research experience.

## CHAPTER 4

**HANGING THE WORK FOR VIEWING****PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS****The Participants**

The members of the collective played a major role in this study. They wrote and presented stories, participated in the preliminary analysis of those stories, read through all the transcripts of our conversations, considered their constructions of self, as it relates to artful expression, and have continued to read and comment on my interpretations of our stories and conversations.

The choosing of pseudonyms was problematic for the participants. They felt that they were offering a part of themselves for public viewing and asked only to be credited with that offering. After much discussion regarding confidentiality, they decided to take pseudonyms that they could identify as that aspect of self that contributed to this study. I invited each member to submit a personal statement introducing herself to the reader.

**Lily**

Ok, I think I know what is so weird about this self-description: I'm going to try to tell you who I really am, but then be totally anonymous because of our agreement to use pseudonyms. Seems weird to me.

Who am I? Pacien says "name five things off the top of your head – don't think" ...so ... I'm a singer, a step-parent, a teacher, a lover of nature, a songwriter, a daughter. And I don't feel described by this list. Yuck.

I am a West Coast Canadian woman in mid-life. I find myself fascinating. What matters to me? The natural world, honesty, creative experience, my family. I was raised (2nd of five children) in a family that respected science, practicality, thrift, privacy, sharp-wittedness and independence. Every value a blessing and a curse.

The past few years of disability, pain and free-time have changed me. I am emerging more centered in my body and spirit. Hooray! My new vocation, teaching voice, aligns my desire to help people inspire themselves with my love of song. What a huge relief to discover work that energizes me while it pays the bills!

**Pacien**

I am currently just settling in to my second career and find myself at a very comfortable and fulfilling time in life. While my passion is for quilting, sewing and embellishing fabric, I value many things – family, friendship, leisure and the arts (theatre, music and visual).

**Ruth**

From Toronto originally, graduate of the Ontario College of Arts, student of Art Therapy here in Victoria. Painter, dancer, lover of water, journeys and thus islands.

**Eli**

I have done many things in my life: data processing, politics, cabinetmaking, managing a non-profit society. I believe that I have been a successful doer. Now I am a student again and seriously searching for my own knowing of my world. I have begun to use poetry and painting to facilitate my search.

## PRESENTING THE STORIES

Throughout this study, I have used the metaphor of painting a picture to hold the various aspects of the research together. As I pursued methods to present this part of the research, that includes our stories, conversations, and the analyses of them, I became aware that I desired an image to hold all of that together too. I found that image in the story of Penelope by Homer (as cited in Scheuing, 1995).

Penelope was a weaver and the wife of Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*. While Odysseus was away from home and presumed lost in the Trojan wars, Penelope avoided choosing a new husband and held back her suitors for 3 years by weaving and unweaving a shroud.

Penelope: My power as a woman and weaver emerged as I worked not by consciously thinking of it ... I simply concentrated on the task: the doing by day, and the undoing by night, in never-ending rhythm. This gave me focus and discipline to continue year after year... the creation of beauty and the undoing of it. Both are equally challenging, a changing story, a changing weave, forever new, forever undone. (Scheuing, 1995, p. 189)

In this study, our work together, as a collective, was the work of the "day" Penelope. Each of us wove a personal story and then the collective picked up, considered a number of the story threads and continued to weave with them in conversation. As the researcher, I became the "night" Penelope. By night, I unpicked our weavings, unravelled our stories and conversations, searched for and followed the threads of discourse, particularly those regarding women and art, that were woven through our stories.

I also found the metaphor of weaving helpful in describing the multiple threads of discourses that run through our life stories and through which we are constituted. In a weaving, the warp threads (the length of the weaving) run parallel to each other and are gathered together in different combinations as the weaving progresses. The weft threads (the width of the cloth) run in a opposing direction to the warp threads and are constantly intermingling with, and interrupting the warp threads. As the weaving proceeds and the warp and weft threads are combined, recombined, and interrupted over and over again, a pattern appears on the surface of the weaving. This pattern becomes the focus of the weaving, making it difficult to trace the individual threads and combinations of those threads.

Discourses like threads in a weaving, may run parallel to each other, are often in combination with each other, and are constantly intermingling with, and being interrupted by, other discourses, often contradictory discourses. The resulting patterns help to form the stories of our lives. These story patterns are so complex that it is difficult to recognize and identify the discourse threads that are woven into the stories, those meanings on which the stories rest.

I worked to unpick, to deconstruct our stories, to hold the separate threads of discourse, to recognize the combinations of threads, their interminglings and interruptions with each other. It was not an easy task. As I unpicked the threads, they would, now unravelled, immediately tangle again on the floor beneath me. As I continued, again and again, to pick up, to hold, and to follow the different discourse threads, of women and art, running through our stories, the main story pattern fell away. I began to discover other interpretations. I gave names to these interpretations, to these threads of meaning that I had found.

In the presentation that follows, I have considered each of our four stories separately. Each story allows me to highlight different aspects and different nuances of the discourses of women and art and the subjectivities of women within these discourses, and to bring forward the challenges for women, as I see these challenges, in the production of artful expression. In formatting the presentation, I have provided an introduction, a general commentary, interpretative analyses and a summary to each story. My interpretive analyses, “threads of meaning”, include selected voices from the transcripts that I have used to follow the threads of discourses through our conversations. I encourage the reader to follow our voices, to capture us in the act of making sense, in becoming aware of our constitution of self, both within the discourses of women and art, and also as producers of artful expression. Notice, too, the language we use when speaking from within the dominant discourses (i.e., I assume, it’s acceptable, traditional, natural). I have provided interpretive comments to bring forward explicit awareness of the possible subject positions available to us, particularly within the dominant, traditional discourses of women and art.

In order to consider the ‘in process’ nature of our subjectivity, I have also included our reflections after the research experience. Our voices reveal our further insights into

possible subject positions we may wish to assume, both within the dominant and more marginal discourses of women and art.

The stories are presented in the same order that we, as a collective, considered them. I invite the reader both to follow our path of discovery, by picking up, holding, and feeling the accumulated weight of the threads I have selected, and to initiate alternative searches for threads of meaning and possible subjectivities of women. Again I reiterate, that my interpretations of the text are neither correct or final but are created to shed light on the dominant discourses and discursive practices within our Western culture that may be associated with the artful expression of women. A transcript notation is included to assist the reader (Appendix F).

## ELI'S STORY

### Introduction

This is the first story that the collective considered. As this story also served as a learning example, the subject positions in the story are simple and easily recognized.

Within the conservative discourse of our culture, women are positioned at home with their children and men are positioned out in the world. In this same discourse, the artist is positioned out in the world and so by association, the artist is male. Further, women are defined by narrow and discreet roles in the dominant discourse and these roles serve to deny us other subject positions (i.e., women are defined as mothers and caregivers, not artists). The following story and subsequent voices of the collective illustrate this conservative discourse.

### ■— Slappy Leaves Home —■

**A**s I thought about what story to tell, I started wondering what stories I knew in my young life that would have influenced my idea of an artist. I was read to every night as a child and I had books that were read to me over and over again.

I just couldn't think of any books that were about artists. I remember that most of my childhood books were about fairy princesses and maybe a dragon or two. So I decided to look at some of my favorite books to see if there were any artists at all. I started with my all-time favorite. My mother said it was the book I always asked for, and I still have this book. Here is my story of Slappy the Duck

Slappy was tired of going to quacking lessons. He wanted to go out and see the great wide world and become a person. He ran away from home, leaving his mother and well-mannered little sisters behind. On his journey he met a number of people, a school teacher, a farmer, a washerwoman, a hunter and an artist. Each of these people showed him what to do to become a person by describing what they did. Of course the instructions were very difficult for a little duck but he persevered and struggled until he met the artist.

The artist was sitting alone in the countryside, with his easel and brushes, painting the scene before him. When Slappy asked the artist how to become a person, the artist told Slappy that his shape was all wrong. The artist tried to stretch, and flatten, and bunch up Slappy's body to conform to the artist's idea of a person. These manipulations hurt Slappy so much that he escaped and ran home to his mother and little sisters and then, quite contentedly, resumed his quacking lessons (Church, 1947).



## Commentary

Eli's story from childhood offers only very conservative subject positions to the women. In her story, women stay at home, are well mannered, and maintain the status quo. In contrast, the male is offered adventure and the possibility of a number of different subject positions. One of the 'out in the world' positions offered to the male is that of the artist. However, the artist has very strictly defined attributes and not even the young male in the story measures up.

## Threads of Meaning

### **A** *The artist is male and out in the world.*

In the utterances that follow, the collective considers how the artist is positioned in the story. The women in the story are excluded from the position of artist.

- 1 Eli: I thought it was interesting that the artist was male in the story. It wasn't a female artist and there wasn't a group of artists together.
- 2 Ruth: The lone male – out in the landscape
- 3 Eli: If you were going to be an artist you would be an artist out in the big wide world. You wouldn't do that at home. Mom duck didn't say – let's get out the crayons and sketch for the afternoon.
- 4 Eli: How could I be an artist? I am the wrong shape to be an artist and particularly as I am a woman, I would feel even further removed. That wouldn't be open to me!
- 5 Ruth: You are not supposed to be an artist anyway.

Eli and Ruth point out that the story follows a dominant discourse of art (i.e., that the artist is a lone male, out in the world) (1 & 2). Eli reveals the contradiction between the discourses of the artist and the woman at home (3). The artist belongs in the public world. Women live in the private world of the home that does not include the production of art. Eli discloses her frustration. How will she ever be an artist?(4) Even the young male did not measure up, although according to the dominant discourse, he did have a chance. The position of the artist is very unique and this position is definitely not open to Eli. She is even the wrong shape! Ruth brings forward the cultural storyline that dismisses even the desire of a women to be an artist (5).

**B Excitement and success are out in the world.**

In the dominant discourse, the artist is seen as the rebel, seeking to experience and represent the new, the unusual, the excitement, and the adventure of life. The reader will notice language that the participants use, indicating the dominant discourse (i.e., ‘things are a given almost’, ‘we are assuming’)

- 1 Eli: I think I liked the story because Slappy would go out into the big wide world. That’s the part that I liked – the adventure of it.
- 2 Ruth: ...yes – all those things are a give almost, in a book that was written a while ago, it would always be that kind of formula. Little girls stay home and boys go out on adventures.
- 3 Lily: It also says how you learn to be a person is that you go out and find out from grown-ups who have identities that are based on what they do.
- 4 Pacien: Yes all of them were (in the book).
- 5 Eli: And you would have to go out into the world to do that (to be an artist). It wouldn’t be available at home.
- 6 Lily: You wouldn’t learn that from your mother and little sisters.
- 7 Eli: It is Slappy who rebels. The women didn’t rebel, they stayed. The girls stayed home.
- 8 Ruth: We are assuming that in order to better himself, he has to go out. He feels he has to go outside of who he is, to make something more of himself or to be more exciting, fuller, richer, better – prove something. You have to leave yourself as opposed to grow within yourself. And I think that is an

assumption or expectation that we have in our world, in our society. ...

The inward in our society is not as valued because it is not as visible.

The voices of the collective reveal the continuing gender division of public and private spheres. The male is positioned as the rebel in the exciting and adventurous 'big wide world' and the woman is positioned at home (1,2,7). In our western world of binary opposites, the outside world is exciting, full of adventure, and risk, and the home is stable, unchanging, and safe. Lily notes that it is adults outside of the home that offer identities to children, identities based on roles (3). Eli suggests that the subject position of artist is not available to women in the safe home. The role of the artist exists outside of the home (5). The subject position of the artist is clearly contradictory to women at home. Lily offers the further insight that women at home are unable to offer acceptable identities, those associated with roles, to their children. Women at home are just mothers and sisters (6). Ruth notes that, in the dominant discourse, in the assumed discourse, success is out in the world (8). She puts forward an alternate discourse that a rich, exciting life may be attained through inner growth. However, she sees this as a less valued discourse in our western society.

**C Women are caregivers and stay at home where it is safe.**

The voices of the women here serve to highlight further the subject position of women in the dominant discourse.

- 1 Lily: ...the first thing I thought of was the statement "My mother said it was the book I always asked for". There is the implication that your mother would know and remember best because she is your mother. And then you read the story and he (Slappy) ran home to his mother and his sisters. He ran back to the women, the females. That was what defined home.
- 2 Ruth: I wrote down that the women, the nurturing, the home ... which was stable and always there.
- 3 Eli: Yes. It wasn't his young sisters who went out into the world. They stayed at home.
- 4 Lily: Not only did they stay home but they were decent, well-mannered ducklings.
- 5 Pacien: And there was a mom but no dad right?
- 6 Pacien: What do these sisters and mom do at home?

- 7** Ruth: All the things that women used to learn how to do, were related to the home and they would learn to embroider and they would learn how to cook, learn all the chores, and they would learn all these things which maintained the home life, family. It wasn't acceptable for women to learn certain things that were associated with outside. For a woman to learn to become an artist, was scandalous when it started happening.

The collective reveal that the women in this story are positioned as caregivers, nurturers and are attributed with gentleness and stability (1,2,4). Women are aligned with home, a safe place (2,3). Pacien points out that there is no dad in this domestic scene either (5). We don't ask where the men are. We know. They are out in the world. But Pacien does ask a question. "What do these sisters and mom do at home?" Ruth indicates that the position of women, when this book was circulating in the 1950s, was to maintain family home life (6). She goes further to reveal the extent to which the position of artist was unavailable to women. It was scandalous for a woman to become an artist (6).

**D Our roles define who we are.**

The following threads of conversation consider the close association of role and identity.

- 1** Lily: In that whole book, people are defined by what they do, as opposed to where they live, or what they believe, or how old they are.
- 2** Ruth: I think a certain amount of who we are, is what we do. But it's not the whole story of the person. I found Europeans somewhat taken aback by questions about what you do. It was invading to them because it was often prying on social status, money – really asking what kind of income bracket are you in.
- 3** Eli: And is that something you would say "I do art" in response to that question "What do you do?"
- 4** Ruth: I don't know what to say when people ask me that. I do many things and I don't have that THING. I tend to think of it as a career or job related question, that's the only way it makes sense to ask. Otherwise there are such diverse possibilities.
- 5** Eli: Yes, this afternoon I was a swimmer.
- 6** Ruth: Yes. I don't have that one thing. I mean I do art, I do food, I do all kinds of things.

Members of the collective acknowledge the strong connections between subject position, role and even status in our society (1,2). Ruth has difficulty with these connections and attempts to break them (4). She does not want to be limited to a specific role. Rather she desires the availability of many roles. Ruth does not see her subjectivity as fixed, or tied to a specific role. In fact, she does many things (6). “What do you do?” That familiar question in our society serves to close down and limit other possible subject positions. How can a caregiver be an artist too?

**E It is difficult to change who we are.**

In the musings that follow, the collect grapple with the idea of stable and fixed identities.

- 1 Ruth: He goes out to, in effect, become something and as I see it – is a duck, is a duck, is a duck.
- 2 Pacien: But he wanted to become a person.
- 3 Ruth: So there is that constant thing – even though he is actively trying to take on roles that are out there, his role is given to him and it doesn’t allow him to/
- 4 Eli: He is not allowed to be an artist and a duck.
- 5 Pacien: He wants to change and it just can’t seem to happen.
- 6 Lily: I really reacted when you were reading it and he had to have quacking lessons! I thought – what kind of a story is this? He has to learn how to be a duck – he is a duck! He wants to be all these other things but even being himself, he has to be given lessons about how to do it.

Ruth begins with the thought that Slappy’s position is fixed. After all he is a duck (1)! Pacien voices Slappy’s desire to take on another subject position (i.e., a person) (2). Ruth acknowledges that Slappy is indeed actively trying to take on other positions. However, she believes his role has been given to him, excluding him from other roles (3). Eli agrees. The allowed discourse considers the roles of duck and artist as mutually exclusive (4). Although Slappy desires change, the subject position of artist is not available to him (5).

Lily reacts strongly to the idea of Slappy taking lessons to be a duck! She asks an important question here. Does Slappy need lessons to learn how to be what we believe he is naturally? A poststructural answer is Yes. Slappy is both actively taking up the discourses of being a duck and being influenced by others who teach and practice those

discourses. He is being spoken into the subject position of a duck. I relate Lily's question and the poststructural answer to women. We too are given lessons and spoken into existence as women by others in our society. Like Slappy, we are given lessons for that which we think is natural to us. It is difficult for us as women to step into other subject positions (i.e., artist) when the dominant discourse holds us firmly in our 'natural' position of caregiver.

### **Woven Summary**

Eli's story and the voices of the collective resonate with feminist art literature that charges that the dominant discourses of the artist are contradictory to the dominant discourses of women. In Eli's story, the artist is positioned as male, a rebel, alone and out in the world. The women in the story are positioned as well-mannered and safe at home. I find it interesting to note that, in this children's story, there is no mature male in the home environment. The young male, who is at home, can't wait to try out the challenges of different subject positions offered in the public space away from home.

The collective has also considered the extreme difficulties involved when an individual attempts to position herself outside the 'natural' positions allowed in the dominant discourse. With reference to women in particular, it is difficult for a woman to take on the subject position of artist when she is constantly being spoken into existence as a caregiver.

## Lily's Stories

### Introduction

The dominant discourses of various art forms are conservative and have tight limits on acceptable subject material. The subject material sanctioned by an art form serves to maintain and reinforce the dominant discourses of our society. For example, the lyrics of an acceptable jazz song may portray a strong, active man and a passive woman. When a woman attempts to work within an art form, she is caught between representing her world acceptably or risking to represent other possibilities, perhaps her own truth.

Although an artist is seen as a free agent, the success of an artist's product is subject to the marketplace. The marketplace, too, has limits of acceptability that reflect traditional societal discourses. This appears to be a closed loop. It is difficult for a woman to step outside of this loop and attain any financial success with her art.

The idea of artist as genius is perpetuated within the dominant discourses of art. This genius has natural, creative power and secrets. And this genius is male. In both of Lily's stories, we can observe her struggling with these notions of natural genius and acceptability in art.

### ■— A Man Who Brings Flowers —■

It was after my first performance at a music festival. I had driven the five hour trip home in my little green car, with a pad of paper on the passenger seat for all the songwriting ideas that were coming to me. I was really excited! I felt like it was the beginning of being a songwriter. Up to that point, I'd only considered performing music I'd learned from books and other people's records. I began to envision a life for myself that included writing my own songs. Wow!

Back home, I had a visit from Bruce, a songwriter I had met at the festival. He had taken an interest in me (there was something of a romantic charge between us). He had explained the implied 7 in the extended jazz chords – something that had always eluded me. I felt I had been let in on a big secret – the kind of thing that real musicians took for granted. I hadn't known what question to ask.

Anyway, Bruce comes to visit and I'm overflowing with excitement about the song I've written: it sounds to me like the 1930s tunes I've been playing ... more complicated chords than folk music. I play my song 'A Man Who Brings Flowers' and Bruce asks me about the lyrics "is that what you really believe?" I am taken aback. Of course the words aren't what I believe – I've written lyrics that sound like a real song from the 1930s.

*a man who brings flowers could never go wrong  
a man who spends hours making love in a song  
he may pick as he chooses, such a man never loses in love...*

Bruce encourages me to make it say what I truly think. I wonder if I can. Some days later I have indeed been able to change the words.

*a man who brings flowers could never go wrong – wanna bet?  
a man who spends hours making love in a song – ooo  
He may pick as he chooses, such a man never loses in love ....(cough,cough, cough)  
Well I may be a sucker for romance but I sure never fell for those lines  
I'm Suspicious of men who bring flowers  
there's no trusting the ones who bring wine, cause  
a man brings a flower when it's cash that he owes  
he drops by for a shower, leaves behind dirty clothes ... and so on...*

In fact, by the time I got to the last verse, I realized I still wasn't being entirely honest, and so I wrote:

*there's pride in the strong and the single, but it's not necessarily free  
deep in the heart of this woman, I believe that somewhere there must be  
a man who brings flowers thinking only of love,  
as he pleases he pleases  
I go weak in the knees for a man who brings flowers.*

The idea of writing lyrics that I believed in was a revelation. After that experience, I began writing intently, and performing more and more of my own material. I received lots of recognition.

It was many years before I realized that this episode was not the beginning of my songwriting. I have found songwriting attempts in journals from my early teens and I won a contest to write the Camp Song when I was 11 or 12. Somehow I had dismissed all that.

## An Additional Story

**N**ot long after this I met a jazz clarinetist who was really starved for people to play jazz with and he knew that I played piano and he said – I want to know if you can ‘swing’. And I said, I do play some jazz standards out of books but I can’t just read the chords and make stuff up. And that is what I understood jazz musicians do. And he said – well just play me one of these songs out of your book and I’ll know if you can swing – you either can or you can’t. That’s like saying you are either a bla bla bla or you’re not, and I’ll be the judge of that.



### Commentary

In the first story, we follow Lily as she moves from the subject position of performing the songs of others to a position of producing her own songs. This is not an easy, straight forward transition. The initial step in the process occurs when she envisions that she is capable of writing her own songs. In her first attempt to write, Lily uses accepted subject material that reflects traditional societal discourses. The man in her song is active, successful and has choices. The woman in the song is invisible, only implied, and there to passively receive flowers and love from the man. Lily’s second attempt reveals a break from the traditional discourse. She brings a woman, herself, directly into the song. She is an active participant, questioning the success of a man, laughing at his acts of love. She is suspicious of his actions and does not fall for his lines. Although Lily has begun to represent her own beliefs in her writing, these beliefs can be contradictory. She is both suspicious of the motives of the man who brings flowers and, at the same time, wants to believe that this strong, active, loving man exists for her.

Traditional beliefs are deeply embedded in us, making new subject positions unstable and precarious. Again, following a traditional storyline, the man is Lily’s story is unquestionably a songwriter. He holds art secrets, he has authority, and gives Lily permission to consider her own beliefs.

Lily’s second story reflects the traditional discourse of art that assumes the natural talent of an artist. Again, in this story, it is the man who has natural talent, authority, and will judge the talent, if any, of the woman.

## Threads of Meaning

### A *There are real songs.*

The dominant discourse of art disciplines recognizes only a limited range of acceptable subject material.

- 1 Pacien: You say that many times, I can be a real songwriter, I wrote a song that sounded like a real song.
- 2 Lily: I think that the subtext of that was, if you are a real songwriter, you tell the truth. So that is a whole different idea of what a songwriter was.
- 3 Ruth: There seems to be a huge difference in the lyrics between the first and second set ... the first one being, like a discourse of a woman in the 1930s and what she might sing about ... and the second one, a polarity, the reaction to the first one, negating.
- 4 Lily: I know that the first part was not my reality and the second was kind of mine ... I still sing it exactly like this and then the commentary, the coughing, comes in the second verse. I suck the audience into thinking this is just another one of these songs at the beginning.
- 5 Lily: The world of art says this is the range of what we can consider when we say 'song'. It's pretty defined. And you know that it is defined when someone goes outside of it. I wrote a song from the point of view of someone who had a hamster in a science fair that died. And I knew when I wrote that, that it was outside and that it becomes a funny song just because of the topic.

Pacien notes that Lily desires to name herself as a real songwriter and her songs as real songs. Lily has finally broken the code of the art of songwriting (1). In the story, Bruce has offered Lily an alternate discourse for real songwriting (i.e., to tell her own truth). Previously, Lily had been caught in a strict discourse of jazz that dictated to her acceptable subject material for songwriting. She did not believe that her own truth fell within acceptable songwriting material (2). Ruth traces Lily's songwriting process from first using acceptable subject material, to moving on to material that is, in fact, contradictory to the acceptable (3). Lily uses humour to write against a familiar topic in jazz (i.e., a active and successful male). However, in order to engage the audience initially, she "sucks them in" with the familiar, the allowable (4). Lily notes that humour is also a

reaction of audiences to unfamiliar subject material. When Lily steps outside the normal range of topics, her work is not taken seriously. Audiences receive her story of a dead hamster as a humorous story (5). Humour is used by Lily as a resistance to acceptable subject material and humour is the response of audiences to marginal material. I find myself pondering the question: Just how does a woman present her truth, a truth that may be contradictory to the dominant discourse, in a way that it may be taken seriously?

**B A real artist has secret abilities.**

The dominant discourse of art upholds the idea that real artists have a natural talent, a secret knowing that is unavailable to non-artists.

- 1 Eli: In your story, "I felt I had been let in on a big secret". I think that a lot of us think of art that way, that there are some big secrets in there and they are not for everyone to know. And real musicians know them.
- 2 Lily: And if they find out that you don't know them (secrets), more than likely they'll just dispense with you.
- 3 Pacien: You have to pass the test.
- 4 Lily: You have to pretend that you know them. It turned out not to be the reality but I was convinced. ... That's like saying you are either a bla bla bla or you're not, and I'll be the judge of that.
- 5 Lily: Well I thought he might be right. It might be something you have or you don't have. I didn't know.
- 6 Eli: And that is what I thought about art too. That is a dominant discourse in art, either you have it or you don't.
- 7 Lily: It's talent, you are born with it or you can work really hard and be mediocre.

In these threads of conversation, the collective explores the notion of a natural knowing, an innate talent of artists. Eli echoes Lily's belief that artists have secret knowing (1). Lily discloses a danger in approaching the art world. If an individual is "found out" to be lacking natural talent, she risks being dismissed from this world (2). Pacien likens this ordeal to attempting to pass a test (3). There is an intrigue set up in the art world. If Lily does not have innate knowledge, she must pretend to possess it (i.e., in order to be accepted in the art world, Lily must perpetuate the belief in secret abilities) (4). Lily, Eli and Ruth all voice their early belief of a natural talent in artists (5,6,7). There

is also a corollary to this belief as well. The product of hard work is mediocre (7). In the dominant discourse of art, the “natural” artist has a position of power over others because he has secret knowledge, knowledge that you can’t just learn through hard work.

**C *There are masters of art.***

The dominant discourse of art attributes unique works and styles of art to individual male artists.

- 1** Ruth: When you look at what they call the masters, because they were the first to create work in that way or of that quality, ... something that came out of this person’s work, and there is a level of sincerity there, a level of self that makes it distinct.
- 2** Lily: And they were all guys I guess? And that is why they are called masters.
- 3** Ruth: Exactly, well do we want to get into that? ... but I always find it interesting as to why there are some people who stand out and some people who don’t. Sometimes we see the timing, the culture, who was given the money to work... but I don’t think it is just a matter of the external elements, I think that it is a very natural process as well.
- 4** Lily: Young songwriters, just trying so hard to do something that hasn’t been done before, that sounds different, that is going to make them stand out as being truly creative people.
- 5** Ruth: Yes, it’s sad in a way, it’s another trap.
- 6** Lily: I don’t think my field, songwriting, is recognized as an art form – period. Some people would call it – craft.

Ruth steps into the dominant discourse of art that embraces the position of an autonomous, genius artist. The uniqueness of an art work is credited directly to an individual (1). This discourse does not recognize the gradual group development of a technique or the inspiration of others. Using sarcasm, Lily raises the issue of gender labelling in art (2). The use of the label ‘master’ implicitly excludes women. The master is assumed male unless specifically stated otherwise. Although Ruth agrees with Lily, she wishes to move the discussion away from gender labelling (3). We never ask Ruth why we shouldn’t “get into that”. Are we afraid that the topic is too dangerous, too large, too controversial?

Earlier in our conversation, Ruth had voiced her belief in the autonomous artist. Here (3), she considers other discourses that acknowledge the contributions of social and historical elements to success and recognition in art production. Although Ruth considers other discourses she remains committed to the discourse of natural talent.

Lily notes the extreme energy of young songwriters that is applied to uniqueness and originality, requirements of the traditional discourse of art. The desire to discover and represent new meaning is driven by the desire to stand out, to be recognized (4). Where Ruth has previously presented uniqueness as a real measure of success and mastery, she notes here that the requirement of uniqueness is a trap as well (5).

The polarization of art and craft in the discourse of art is revealed by Lily. She believes that songwriting is creative but it is not considered an art form (6). Creativity is a central tenant of the dominant discourse of art. However, this same discourse recognizes only specific forms of creative work as art. Within the dominant discourse of art, I see no way that Lily can attain the successful subject position of master. First, there is the gender barrier. Second, Lily's songwriting is not even considered an art form. Songwriting belongs to the less valued creative work of crafts.

#### **D Women fit into molds.**

The following threads of conversation reveal further the tension between the subject positions of artist and woman in the traditional discourse. The artist is a risk-taker and the woman maintains the status quo.

- 1 Ruth: What I understand from you associating your work with established song writing, with what has been done before, approved of, as opposed to something unknown, is about fitting into a mold somehow. I associate that more with women, historically, and what was expected of them. That they are expected to fit into molds and not to plow into unknown territory.
- 2 Eli: Certainly that is how history is written – men explore, men can make mistakes, and we try, I try to fit in with what is acceptable.
- 3 Ruth: Acceptable yes. Even if it means being an artist, which is not the typical woman thing. You can still be an artist and follow through with this acceptability thing. That you are doing things that are already approved and known.

- 4 Lily: I think of my world of songwriting and I look at who is stepping outside of the idea of what a song is – well almost nobody- male or female, it's really rare.
- 5 Pacien: I was thinking about your story that you accept that Bruce is a songwriter. What makes Bruce a songwriter?....
- 6 Lily: It was significant that he had taken an interest in me. And isn't it interesting that it happened to be a man? I didn't connect with a woman songwriter that gave me permission to be.
- 7 Pacien: And here "Bruce encouraged you to write what you truly think .... I wonder if I can".
- 8 Lily: But I still feel like what is still happening for me as a songwriter is – that I still find places where I limit myself because of my idea of what a song is and what a musician does. For the last three years I have been making songs without much writing and without playing instruments and I kept thinking there is no place for these songs ... I started giving myself permission to present and it was as valid as everything else that was happening. It took me three years to get to that place. So it is still that same kind of growing edge, permission to do what feels right without feeling too constrained by an idea of what it is supposed to be.

Ruth identifies that the traditional position of women, including women artists, is not that of innovator but rather of acceptability (1,3). Eli maintains that the subject position of explorer and risktaker historically belongs to men (2). Although Lily does not see either gender taking risks in songwriting, she admits surprise that it is the permission of a male songwriter that allows her to interrupt the normal discourse of a jazz song (4,6).

The question Pacien asks is significant. "What makes Bruce a songwriter?" (5). In her story, Lily sees herself progressing to the position of writing her own songs but she does not name herself as a songwriter, an artist. Bruce writes his own songs too, and Lily has no problem naming him as a songwriter. Pacien refers to another part of Lily's story that reveals the power of Bruce's position. Firmly positioned as a songwriter, he can encourage Lily's songwriting, make suggestions, influence her. Lily's position as a real songwriter is tentative here. She is unsure of her position. (7).

When Lily is working at the margins of songwriting (her growing edge) she encounters a serious tension between her writing desires and the constraints of the acceptable discourse of songwriting (8). Her work does not fall within accepted limits of songwriting and she questions whether there is any place for her work. Although it has taken time, Lily has moved to a more active subject position. It is no longer a male songwriter that gives her permission to push out the edges of acceptable songwriting. She has given herself that permission.

**E *But I have to entertain my audience.***

The role of entertainer is close to that of caregiver and so it is a subject position easily granted to women in the dominant discourse.

- 1** Lily: And then as a performing artist, which is different from being a writer, where are the real edges of a performance, when does a performance stop being interesting? How much can you stretch those edges and still reach people. I think that you have to risk losing them in order to find out and that is the hardest part.
- 2** Pacien: Do you always have to engage people, as a songwriter? Can't you just engage yourself?
- 3** Eli: And what is my expectation of an audience – that it has to be riveted to me always?
- 4** Lily: Absolutely. That's what an audience is! I have an obligation to entertain and that might not be really what I want to do. Perhaps what I am really moved to do is a whole series of things that are quite introspective. I think that I would lose a lot of my audience if I didn't do something more upbeat, rhythmic, lighthearted.
- 5** Ruth: The story-tellers in Morocco get a lot of hassle from their listeners if they divert at all. I am thinking that there are a lot of cultures like that where everyone knows the story and they want to hear it over and over again
- 6** Eli: I am wondering as women what are topics that we would really like to search out meaning and can't?
- 7** Lily: Aspects of sexuality for sure.
- 8** Ruth: So we don't often go there because we can't be making people uncomfortable all of the time.

- 9 Eli: For me aging is a topic that is really important to me at the moment and I don't write about it and I don't draw it. Why? Because I can't hang it on a wall, I can't read it to people.
- 10 Ruth: That makes me think of women in their essential beauty that they are always assumed to have. There's very few acceptable moments for a woman to be ugly, to have ugly thoughts, ugly behaviour, ugliness.
- 11 Pacien: Yes. That is a big part of it, I think.

Lily reveals a tension in the performance and presentation of her art. There is a tension between her desire to explore the margins of songwriting and her desire to entertain her audience (1). Lily is struggling to fulfill the pleasure and amusement needs of her audience as well as to pursue her own learning edges in songwriting, an act of self interest. Pacien's question challenges the traditional position of entertainer that Lily has taken, a position that may exclude her own needs (2). In response to Eli's question (3), Lily admits her strong feeling of obligation to entertain her audience (4). It is clear that she does not feel obligated to teach them or challenge them. Rather, she maintains a subject position of caregiver. She also fears that if she does not care for her audience, they will leave her. If we do not care enough, will we be abandoned? Ruth's example of the Moroccan storytellers and their controlling audiences offers some further insight to Lily's dilemma(5). Our culture has dominant storylines that contain our beliefs and values. If we divert from these familiar storylines, do we not disrupt beliefs and values too? Perhaps a songwriter, in the traditional position of caregiver, does feel a strong obligation to respect and take care of the beliefs and values of her audience.

Members of the collective consider interests they wish to pursue in their art (i.e., for Lily it is sexuality, for Eli it is age) but they feel that these subjects instill discomfort in their audiences (7,8,9). Ruth's comment brings forward an explanation that these interests may have an ugliness component that contradicts the dominant discourse of woman as – always beautiful (10). A woman in the subject position of caregiver/entertainer is inhibited from exploring interests that do not nurture the beliefs and values of her audience, including those interests that do not affirm the beauty of women.

## **F The marketplace defines the value of my art**

Lily and Pacien attend to the close link of the value of art production to the saleability of art production.

- 1 Lily: And there are tons of songwriting where the whole motivation is to create a hit, because if you do, you will make a lot, a lot, a lot of money. There are people who apply themselves very intently to becoming good enough to have a hit song. And their definition of good is – what triggers a hit. And I think that is the dominant discourse in the world of songwriting because there is not an organization of songwriters that I can join that attends to authenticity. There is a whole range of them that I can join that attend to business.
- 2 Pacien: I feel in my art field – that to design something original, or work something out that's original, that is easier or a shortcut for someone, and then get it published, or write a book about it and sell that book – that is a higher form.
- 3 Lily: Some original work never makes any money because it is too original.

In the dominant discourse of art, the value of original work is assessed by its economic value. Lily introduces the economic motivation of art production. She refers to the importance of monetary return in the dominant discourse of songwriting and refers to the many songwriting organizations available to her that focus on business (1). Pacien too considers originality more valuable in fabric art if it is saleable (2). Both Lily and Pacien see the value of their art as subject to the marketplace. However, there is a tension between original work that fits into marketable art production, and original work that is outside the margins of market acceptability (3). Women may be caught between producing art that is acceptable to the marketplace and producing art that has personal meaning. Lily notes that she cannot find organizational support for her interest in authenticity (1).

## **Woven Summary**

My interpretations have uncovered within the stories of Lily and the discussions of the collective, a number of contradictions and tension in and between the traditional discourses of women and art. Master's of art, all of whom are men, are positioned as

naturally talented producers of distinct and autonomous work. Women are not positioned as innovators; rather women produce 'approved of' work. Lily has voiced her struggle in stepping into the subject position of innovator. She wonders if there is any place for her work. I believe that underlying her wonder are serious questions. Who will value her work? Who will even accept it? The women of the collective feel caught between producing work that is acceptable, that respects the beauty of women, and using their art to explore personal and perhaps distinct interests of women that may include elements of ugliness.

In the dominant discourse of women, the subject positions of caregiver and entertainer are not dissimilar. Women positioned as entertainers maintain, nurture and support, rather than challenge the traditional storylines of our culture. Further, if women produce and perform work that addresses their marginal interests, they run the risk of producing work that has no economic value. In our traditional discourse, the value of art is fettered to its marketability.

## Pacien's Stories

### Introduction

In the dominant storyline of our culture the fine artistic skills of a woman are often intently focused on, and seriously applied to, the well being of her family. Where an artist invests energy and passion to create works of art, a woman expends her energy and passion to raise her children. The stories of Pacien concentrate on the skilled practices of women exercised in care of their children and highlight the intensity of the subject position of caregiver.

Pacien read her story “Why Am I Doing This” to the group but then, as she said, “more stories just tumbled out” during our discussion of her story. Her “tumbled out” stories are about her own mother and I have chosen to present them first. I invite the reader to follow the subject position of her mother as it is later taken up by Pacien in her own story.

During the discussion regarding Pacien's stories, we watch the collective consider the lack of recognition and value given to traditional skills of women.

### ■— Pacien's Tumbled Out Stories —■

**M**y mother sewed forever and ever and ever when I was growing up. If I wanted to see my mom after dinner I would just go down into her sewing room and sit there and watch her. And that is how I learned to sew, I just watched her. That's why I say 'as I watched my mother's hands' do all this, because I realized about a year ago these were just my mom's hands doing this. So I would just sit there, night after night, watch her and talk to her. She never taught me anything. She never said 'I'm doing this because this needs to be done here, and these are the facings ...' And she never said, would you like to try this, here you just try cutting this pattern. She never said one word about it and I know now that it was because she didn't think it was something that she should teach anyone. I don't think she thought it was a skill she should pass on to me. Because she was doing it so we would have clothes to wear, because she needed to make them. It was practical, she couldn't buy them. And she used to take in sewing. I remember

her hemming pleated skirts with 82 pleats in them and charging \$1.50. She would even sew for my teachers. My teachers at school would come and she would do sewing for them. I remember her writing in her little book, 50 cents ... whatever she took for that. And that was when she was staying at home and raising us. And then when my youngest sister went to school, my mom went back to work for a retail chain. She worked for them for about 28 years, became a store manager and still sewed at night, just for fun.

She used to make our coats too. I remember that I wanted a leather coat. Leather coats were in when I was in about grade six and we couldn't afford a leather coat but she bought some leather and made me this leather coat that looked just like the ones in the store. And she went to a thrift shop and bought an old coat and took the pile lining out of it, picked it out of this old coat and sewed it into the other coat. So it had a tag on the pile lining and if anyone teased me that my mom had made the coat, I could say 'no she didn't' and show them the tag.

### **Why Am I Doing This?**

It was a Thursday evening about 10:30 and I found myself in my sewing room, frantically piecing together 24 quilting blocks created by my grade one students. I had promised them I would bring in the completed quilt the following day. As I watched my "mother's" hands sew, quilt, embroider, change threads, cut, trim and measure, I kept asking myself these questions: *Why did I leave this so late? Who will even care how this looks? Did any of us learn anything from this activity? Why am I doing this?* I didn't know it then, but I would get my answers the next morning.

I thought back to a week earlier and my well planned morning lesson. I began by displaying a quilt, handmade by my paternal grandparents. The children were interested in the fact that it was constructed with pieces of my Papere's old shirts, Mamere's old dresses, some curtains, tablecloths and stuffed with old nylons. I then read them a wonderful picture book titled "My Grandmother's Quilt", in which the author does a superb job of describing the process, history and themes of quilting and the story told within a quilt. As a class we decided on the theme for our quilt, and then each child took their piece of fabric and created their own individual block.

It felt like a great idea at the time, but here I was days later, now close to midnight, my heart wasn't in what I was doing, and it certainly wasn't my best work, but it was finished.

The next morning I arrived at school fairly early. I displayed our class quilt on a stand, in our gathering spot, at the children's eye level. I wrote my morning message on the board.

*Good Morning Little Quilters*

*What do you think of our Grade One Memories Quilt?*

Then I went about organizing for the day ahead and quite frankly forgot about the quilt. As the bell rang to start the day, I was at the door of the classroom greeting each child as I always do. This usually takes some time, and I often have to stick my head back into the classroom and quickly settle down the earliest arrivals, as they do anything but what they are supposed to do. I realized, as I was greeting the last couple of children, that I hadn't checked the others once, and that not a sound was coming from inside the classroom. Once inside I saw only the backs of all the children as they gathered around the quilt. They were touching each square, finding their own block, feeling the texture of their name embroidered, finding their friends' blocks, quietly complimenting each other, slowly moving to give each other turns at the front. I was completely taken aback.

I joined them at the stand and allowed them to continue their exploration, until they all eventually took their spots on the carpet. When we were gathered I looked up to the board to read the message together and discovered, to my joy, that one of my boys had added to the bottom, in his best printing and best spelling, *terific thank you*. I sat down and took a moment, realizing that here, in these last 15 minutes, was the answer to my questions of the night before. This is why I do this.

My mamere unknowingly passed a small part of this 'art' on to me, my mother unwittingly passed on a whole lot more, and I am pleased that I found this small way to bring my passion to my work and purposefully pass a bit of it on.



## Commentary

Pacien's mother directs all her skills and energy to the support of her family. As Pacien has described her mother, her subject position as caregiver is consummate. This subject position does not offer any value to her skills other than family support. For example, she does not consider her skills a worthy asset to pass on to her daughter. Further, her position of caregiver does not allow her any overt expression of her skills. Her skillful creation of a leather coat must be kept secret, unacknowledged.

A generation later, Pacien finds herself alone, late at night, expending all her energies and skill on a quilt project for her class. However, unlike her mother, Pacien questions the value of this subject position. "Why am I doing this?"

Pacien is a teacher and uses this position to bring awareness of the value of traditional quilt making to her children. She also offers them the opportunity to collaborate in a project with her. Pacien has moved from her mother's subject position of total caregiver. She has engaged in a shared project with her children and has attempted to teach them the value of this skilled, shared tradition.

Although, as women, we may wish to move to new subject positions, traditional positions remain difficult to escape. We have seen this difficulty before in Eli's story of Slappy and Lily's story of songwriting. Throughout Pacien's story it is evident that the subject position of caregiver remains strong in her. She does not reveal to her children the significant contribution of her own skills in this project. As her mother before her, Pacien's efforts remain invisible and focused only on the support of her children.

## Threads of Meaning

### **A** *My mother and I are caregivers.*

The subject position of caregiver is taken up by each generation of women in Pacien's family.

- 1** Pacien: She (my mother) was doing it so we would have clothes to wear, because she needed to make them.
- 2** Eli: You said it was your mother's hands doing it. Mom will make this all right. She will put it all together. She will make it work. She will stay up all night and fix it.

- 3** Pacien: I would go to sleep to the sound of the machine humming away in the other room and then sometime while I was sleeping she would come in and hang it on my door knob and when I woke up in the morning – there it was on my doorknob.
- 4** Pacien: I had promised them I would bring in the completed quilt the following day. (fs)
- 5** Pacien: Then I went about organizing for the day ahead and quite frankly forgot about the quilt. As the bell rang to start the day, I was at the door of the classroom greeting each child as I always do.(fs)

Fully embedded in the caregiver position Pacien's mother channels all of her skills to the practical care of her children (1). The words of Eli and Pacien emphasize the exhausting and committed components of this caregiver position (2, 3). Does this seemingly ponderous subject position leave Pacien's mother any time or energy to pursue other positions (i.e., artist)?

Years later, Pacien is working late into the night to finish a quilt for her class. She speaks herself into existence as a committed caregiver too (4). The subject position of caregiver is potent in Pacien. Once she is in the classroom, she forgets about the quilt on which she has spent so much time, the night before. She is focused on meeting her children at the door (5).

### **B Are my skills valuable?**

In the dominant discourses of women and art, the skilled needlework of women is not highly regarded. Pacien, positioned by these discourses, as were her mother and mamere, questions the value of her skills too.

- 1** Pacien: Who will even care how this looks? ...Why am I doing this? (fs)
- 2** Eli: What I got from that part was that – how difficult it was for you to really value that you do good work! That what you do is valuable, is good, is worthwhile, and those are your questions up here ... But it is difficult I think for us as a woman to believe that what we do, when we are on the floor stitching, that it would be valuable.
- 3** Pacien: To anyone. Let alone six-year-olds. For sure those were the questions I was asking myself.

- 4 Eli: Is that something you put on your resume though, as a teacher, that you are a quilter?
- 5 Pacien: No!
- 6 Pacien: She (my mother) never said one word about it (her sewing) and I know now that it was because she didn't think it was something that she should teach anyone. I don't think she thought it was a skill she should pass on to me.
- 7 Pacien: That's why I say that my mamere, unknowingly passed this on to me because she wouldn't have a clue that she did that. And my mother unwittingly, because she didn't know what she was doing back then. But I'M GOING TO, purposefully going to do it.

Pacien's comments indicate that she has difficulty attributing value to her fabric skills (1, 3). Her words echo the sentiments of Margaret Laurence as she reflected on her life work as an author. Eli recognizes Pacien's struggle to find value in her work and empathizes with her. Eli presents a image of a woman on the floor, her fabric around her (2). The position of a woman using needlework skills is usually a leaning over, hunched over, almost subservient position. A woman does not stand tall and strong, projecting an image of success while engaging in needlework.

Replying to a question from Eli, Pacien is adamant that her fabric skills do not belong on her resume, indicating that the educational institution within which she works does not place value on her fabric skills either (4,5).

It is Pacien's belief that her mother did not think her skills were worthy of passing on to her daughter (6). Although Pacien was not taught, she had taken up the skills of the women of her family and taken up the non-value of those skills too. Now she has come to a new awareness that her mother and mamere did not attribute value to their skills (7). The experience of writing her story and the experience with her class have helped Pacien to position herself differently. She is a skilled fabric producer. Further, she will intentionally pass on her skills.

### **C The never never land of women's skilled production.**

In the dominant discourse, the skilled domestic activities of women are not valued as either art or work.

- 1 Pacien: How much is it grown from necessity though. You do it because you need to do it.
- 2 Ruth: I think it comes from needs but because it is not necessarily efficient ... it gets overlooked.
- 3 Eli: She could have thrown anything together for you to wear. But they were beautiful pieces that she put together.
- 4 Ruth: It isn't efficient in that it takes more involvement that one would want to pay for. I think a lot of what women have done just doesn't compute in terms of salary or wages.

As art is idealized as opposite to work in the dominant discourse, the skilful activities of Pacien's mother are not seen as art. They are just practical activities borne of necessity (1). Unfortunately, these same skillful activities are not seen as good work either. Ruth's comments reveal that efficiency is central to the dominant discourse of work. Domestic activities that consume hours and hours of work at night are not considered efficient and so are overlooked as valued work (2,4). Eli's comment indicates that the activities of Pacien's mother are not strictly practical as they result in beautiful products too (3). However, this aesthetic aspect of her work is not mentioned in Pacien's story and is overshadowed in our conversation by issues of practicality and efficiency.

In our culture of binary meanings, much of the skillful production of women is not respected as art or work and women's creative activities disappear into the space between. As these activities have no category, they become invisible.

#### **D My mother's skilled work is a secret.**

In the current dominant discourse, women are positioned as the primary consumer of the family. Women buy products for their family (i.e., food, clothing etc.) The following utterances of the collective reveal the difficulty women face when they create their own products at home.

- 1 Pacien: If anyone teased me that my mom had made the coat, I could say – no she didn't – and show them the tag.(fs)
- 2 Lily: So it was low status to have home-made clothes.
- 3 Ruth: Talk about undervalued

- 4 Lily: I remember that – when something looked home-made it wasn't as desirable. You wanted to sew things so they looked like they had been made by a machine.

Home-made production is often less valued than factory production in the traditional discourse. Families, whose members wear home-made clothes, are positioned as poor (2). They cannot afford factory labelled clothes. Pacien's mother is caught in a double-bind. As a caregiver, she uses her skills to support her family. However, if it becomes known that she produces clothing for them, her family is devalued. In this dominant discourse, the skilled production of Pacien's mother has to remain a family secret (1).

Again the skilled production of women is invisible or worse, mis-attributed to a factory (4). The positions of caregiver and designer are seemingly incompatible. Although Pacien's mother may have original ideas in clothing design, in order to protect her daughter from shame, she is forced to produce a coat that looks exactly like a factory-made coat. The subject position of skilled fabric designer is unavailable to Pacien's mother as it jeopardizes her position of caregiver.

### ***E I want to look after myself too!***

The subject position of self-caring is not a part of the traditional subjectivity of women. The following threads of conversation convey Pacien's difficulty in preserving her own position of self-caring.

- 1 Pacien: Part of my creating and sewing and what I do in my room is for my own enjoyment. That is where I relax, that is where I just do as I please. But it is usually just for me. So when I was in there doing something, and it felt like it was something for this class, it was for my WORK, I was bringing my passion into my work and I didn't want do to that, it didn't seem right, and I wasn't enjoying it.
- 2 Pacien: I felt very protective of it and I wanted it to be just mine. And it is something that is just mine. I was afraid of bringing it somewhere else. It wasn't that I was afraid that people weren't going to like it. I wanted to keep it to myself and not put it out there. Save it
- 3 Lily: Did that feel dangerous?(to put it out there)

- 4 Pacien: Yes, I thought my work was invading this place and so it was the next day that I realized – OK this is so wonderful that I can do this, that I can bring this here and pass on whatever it is. And I am going to purposefully do that now.
- 5 Pacien: I feel guilty that I have a passion for this now, but I never had to do it in that way, that I had to do it to make money. In fact, I hardly ever sew anything to wear. I just do things that give me pleasure, embellish things, I do a lot of home decor.

Women's traditional subjectivity as caregiver and nurturer is often reflected in the professions that women choose. Pacien is a teacher. However, unlike her mother, Pacien resists being totally caught in the position of caregiver. She uses her art (her passion) to carve out another position, a position where she nourishes herself, relaxes, and does as she pleases (1). Pacien's position of self-caring seems tenuous and she has fortified it with her art. In fact, she uses her art for no other purpose (2). If she applies her art to her caregiving work, does she put her self-caring at risk? Lily asks such a question. "Did that feel dangerous?" Pacien admits to her fear but she also reveals a new awareness. Her art can nurture her class as well as contribute to her own self-caring (4). Pacien no longer locks her art skills to one subject position.

The traditional discourse does not easily attribute the subject position of self-caring to women. Although Pacien continues to use her art for self-caring, she does not do this without feelings of guilt (5). Self-caring and caregiving are contradictory subject positions. Pacien only manages to hold them both within her subjectivity through feelings of guilt.

### **F We can make art together.**

The dominant discourse of art positions the artist as autonomous and alone in his endeavours. In a more marginal discourse of Western art, one that stretches back to the workshops of the 17th century, artists are positioned together, working collaboratively on projects. Pacien, in her story, and the collective, later in conversation, explore this more marginal discourse.

- 1 Pacien: I began by displaying a quilt handmade by my paternal grandparents. The children were interested in the fact that it was constructed with pieces of

my Papere's old shirts, Mamere's old dresses, some curtains, tablecloths and stuffed with old nylons.(fs)

- 2** Pacien: My mamere unknowingly passed a small part of this 'art' on to me, my mother unwittingly passed on a whole lot more, and I am pleased that I found this small way to bring my passion to my work and purposefully pass a bit of it on.(fs)
- 3** Ruth: One of the things that I find so terrific about the story is that it makes a cycle – inspiration that comes from your mother, grandmother and this book 'My Grandmother's Quilt'. There is this inspiration that feeds everyone.
- 4** Eli: There are those old myths, of the goddesses who held the world together with their weavings and their needle work, cloth making. Would the children somehow have a sense of being held together by you and the quilt? Would they feel that kind of connection, see themselves all together, connected in a quilt?
- 5** Pacien: That could be, because they were touching it and seeing who's block was next to theirs, who was here and here. Saying oh look – you are beside me.
- 6** Ruth: So they were talking about it – almost gestalting it – this is me and this is you, and we are in this arrangement now – this is us. .... There is this element of the whole, the group and the representation of themselves and that acknowledgment ... that they were so taken by.

In her story, Pacien resists the dominant discourse of art that values uniqueness and autonomy, and takes up an alternate discourse. She recognizes the connection of her art to her mamere and her mother. Further, she desires to make new connections and pass this art on to others (1,2). Pacien has purposefully taken a subject position of being 'in connection' with her class. They are making a quilt together.

Moving more deeply into this alternate discourse, Ruth is excited by the cycle of inspiration that touches everyone, mamere, mother, Pacien, and now her class (3). This view of inspiration is contradictory to the traditional discourse of art where inspiration belongs to the artist and is connected to the object of art. Eli relates Pacien's project to an ancient discourse of needlework in which needlework and weaving held the world together (4). The stitched-together quiltblocks have facilitated new personal connections

for the children in Pacien's class (5). Ruth interprets Pacien's art project as, not only contributing to feelings of connection between class members, but also allowing an acknowledgement of their sense of wholeness (6). By initiating and celebrating a collaborative project with her class, Pacien has positioned herself outside of the dominant discourse of art that encourages and recognizes individual acts of art production.

### **Woven Summary**

Pacien's mother is presented as well entrenched in the subject position of caregiver. This subject position seems overwhelming as it consumes her, day and night. Although all of her skills are dedicated to caregiving, any public recognition of the products of her skills will bring shame to her children. The subject position of artist is completely unavailable to women positioned as she is.

Pacien's mother works late into the night to complete her projects. The collective notes that the skilled practice of women is often time-consuming, not considered efficient and therefore, in the dominant discourse, does not fit into the category of good work either. Women's skilled practice is lost and invisible, caught between the binary categories of art and work.

When Pacien takes up the skills of the women of her family, the skills come with little attached value. She is spoken into existence and speaks herself into existence as a woman with unvalued skills. However, Pacien has used these skills to support a tenuous subject position of self-caring and to resist the all-consuming position of caregiver. Recently, she has begun to (re)value her skills as 'art' skills and has freed them from serving just one subject position. Her art skills have value for self-care and for nurturing others. Pacien is now speaking of her skills as art skills in a tentative way (i.e., the word art is in quotes). However, Pacien has not yet embraced the subject position of artist within herself.

Pacien's quilt project interrupts the dominant discourse and offers an alternative discursive practice of art. Pacien and her children do not have to be autonomous producers of art but can be involved in a collaborative effort, an effort inspired by past connections.

## Ruth's Story

### Introduction

The traditional romantic discourse of art positions the artist alone and inspired by the novelty and mystery of life. The artist lives in a magical setting, often in a high attic room, far away from the practicalities of life. He is intently focused on his art projects and addresses all of his interest, energy and passion towards those projects. I have intentionally used the masculine pronoun, as this artist is usually male.

In Ruth's story, she attempts to fully assume this romantic subject position of the artist. She reveals to us her doubts, euphoria and disappointments experienced within this position.

### ■ – Romancing the Horse – ■

The music was the thing that pulled at my insides and inspired me to Spain. I was full of yearning to somehow indulge this rhythm that so moved me. The melody was dark and ancient, with a strange caress, sharp, and then pulling inward, like the neck of a Lippizan horse. The sound of Spain was oddly beautiful and undeniably fascinating. I absolutely had to go. I was intent on finding a studio there where I could work with whatever this mystery was that had drawn me.

At twenty-four, when I arrived alone in Malaga, nothing was as I had thought it would be. I felt lost and badly mistaken. I traveled the coast in search of I didn't know what. The music tucked deep in the pit of my stomach, hiding, as if in fear of slipping away in the glaring emptiness. My expectations of having a richly creative winter in Spain seemed like some adolescent dream. What had I been thinking and how could I have spent so much effort to get here? I felt horribly vulnerable.

Then, two weeks later, on a bus through mist laden olive groves, I traveled to Seville. It was there that I made a connection. Like a timeless current, Seville illuminated a place within me that I had felt to be there since I was a child. I found a studio in a rooftop apartment, almost fallen apart but complete magical between the glowing street lamps and the moon. I frequented bars of

crumbling walls, listened to the music and went home to work late into the night. I could not get over the singers, almost contorted in their wailing. I was drunk with the place, and my own passion for it. I had never felt so connected as I did during the hours of drawing and painting on that rooftop, with the wind from the country bringing its sweet air across my patio.

After eight months in Seville, I had two exhibitions in those same spaces where I had heard so many moving artists give so much of themselves. In hanging the work, I felt I could give back some of that which had gone through my very core. The shows were very well received, as if moving the experience full circle. I came out of it with a tremendous sense of having gained some essential understanding about life and my development as an artist.

I stayed in Spain for about a year and a half. I learned a great deal about the country, about gypsies and being a foreign woman on her own there. Had I been more aware at the time when I was approaching people about exhibitions, I would have known that a young North American woman, visiting Andalusia, who thought that she had something authentic to express about flamenco, would be seen as ridiculous. In going ahead with my work, I was assuming that I could just plow through a barrier that if I had seen, I may never have even entered.



## **Commentary**

We follow Ruth as she gives herself permission to follow her strong and intense feelings to Spain. Once there, she is disappointed that she is not able to establish a feeling connection with the magic that has drawn her there. She has not used valued reasons to go to Spain and she feels vulnerable, having placed trust in her feelings. Later, she does connect with magic of Spain and she endeavours to establish herself fully in the traditional subject position of artist. She finds accommodation in a rundown rooftop apartment; she studies and represents intoxicating subject material that she has found in the local bars. Ruth expends all of her energy and passion on her art. Her art becomes her total existence.

In the last paragraph of her story, there is a distinct change of mood and subjectivity. Ruth reveals her disappointment with the subject position of a North

American woman artist into which she has been spoken. She feels she is seen as ridiculous in her attempts to create a novel representation of flamenco and admits to being subject to unseen barriers.

Ruth's story of *Romancing the Horse* provides the collective with our first story of the traditional artist and this artist is a woman! We are intent on hearing more, and in the subsequent conversation, fall to asking Ruth questions that allow us to follow her deeper and deeper into her story. The reader will notice that the threads of meaning are primarily in the words of Ruth.

## Threads of Meaning

### **A *There is magic and mystery to art.***

The following voices of the collective resonate with the dominate discourse of art that perpetuates its magic and mystery.

- 1 Ruth: I found a studio in a rooftop apartment, almost fallen apart but completely magical between the glowing street lamps and the moon.(fs)
- 2 Ruth: I really wanted to see Spain and somehow discover why it was I thought I needed to go... that there had to be something I was connecting with because Spain wasn't really my life, so why was I so interested. So I wanted to work with that, in painting or drawing and find that tension or what ever it was.
- 3 Ruth: And I learned that I wasn't the only one there – searching around for that mysterious thing. There are tons of people who go to Seville, Madrid as well, to experience flamenco, to either study it, define it somehow. There are many people who come who are already attracted to this, because it is very exotic or interesting.
- 4 Ruth: But being far away enlivened the senses somehow.
- 5 Eli: I am taken with the story in that it seems to follow that idea that I have of an artist – searching after a mystery, dark and ancient, gypsies and of course a good artist would be in Europe and he would be in a high garret.
- 6 Lily: Interesting, a roof top
- 7 Eli: a roof top, crumbling walls

- 8 Lily: Archetypal... It is interesting that comment that you made – a real artist would be in Europe – and I have that feeling of – how can you be an artist and live in Canada. Those two ideas just don't go together.
- 9 Lily: I think I need to read where women songwriters have gone because I can't think of that in terms of a songwriter.

In the traditional discourse, the artist is often represented as the lone male, living a romantic, sensuous life in some magical old European rooftop garret, where he uses his skill and genius to capture the mystery, excitement and essence of life. In Ruth's story, she, along with many others, are drawn into this discourse (3,4). In Seville, Ruth finds a magical rooftop studio and she begins to explore her mysterious connection with Spain (1,2). The romantic traditions of Spain, together with the mystery of the Gypsy culture, are a perfect fit of this discourse to Eli. She too is drawn in (5).

Lily notes the power of this discourse that positions a real artist in Europe, and she asks an important question. Is it even possible for her to be an artist in Canada? She recognizes the dualism (8). Lily moves from this question to wondering where women songwriters are drawn. Interestingly enough, she can't think of a place (9). Women have not been included as producers of art in the dominant discourse. Women songwriters do not belong to a history of searching out and representing the romance and mystery of life.

**B *The artist is aloof, a spectator and a presenter of life.***

Ruth has spoken herself into the dominant discourse of art as the aloof artist. She encounters surprises that lead her to new awareness of this position.

- 1 Ruth: And often when I would go there (the bars) there would be groups of gypsies in an alcove just playing, maybe someone would start to sing. There were also actual performances there, so I would sit and draw.
- 2 Ruth: And I think that is why I didn't see the kind of stories that my inhibit me from doing what I do ... coming from Toronto, big city, no one watches to see what you are doing.
- 3 Ruth: And I never really entered into that lifestyle at all, I only experienced it in that peripheral way, where people were playing (in the bars) and people were expressing themselves.
- 4 Ruth: I didn't want to go invading anything but I somehow had to do some of that anyway ... and the longer I was there, the more I was aware of people

and where they were coming from, people like me, and the more awareness I had of that the more I was surprised that I went ahead and did this, but I was glad that I had.

- 5** Ruth: I think there was also jealousy towards North Americans or tourists who can afford to come and visit and stay there.
- 6** Ruth: Yes – and who I am to think that I understand them, that they speak to me, that I can really relate to them.
- 7** Ruth: The artist speaks for us as a culture – they also speak against us as a culture. There are many works of art that are statements against an entire society or group – a generalization ... I am thinking about a business man – there are many images over and over of the business man ... Business men can be artists too and how does that affect them that they are pooled in with this idea?
- 8** Eli: We think we are very free but how many opportunities are there when there is that picture out there of WHO I AM SUPPOSED TO BE?
- 9** Ruth: Then coming out to the West Coast was more about my own story. The work that I have done since I have been out here hasn't been about another culture. ... It deals on just a very personal level.
- 10** Ruth: I like to do that with just what comes up in my life, that involves me.

In the traditional discourse, the artist is positioned as the observer, the spectator (1,3). Ruth, believing that she has positioned herself as an artist, is taken by surprise when she learns she is observed too. In Spain, she finds herself subject to the traditional discourse of women, positioned as the observed, and she feels inhibited by this position (2). As she pursues her art, Ruth becomes aware of the invasive nature of her position of spectator and reveals the tension between her discomfort with invading the lives of others and her desire to observe and represent them (4). She also becomes aware that the local population responds with jealousy to her position as an outside observer (5). Ruth is seen to have a position of power. She can afford to visit and observe their lives. They do not have the financial means to travel, observe and represent hers. Ruth begins to question a discourse that assumes that she, as an artist, can know another (6). Although she does not say it explicitly, I believe her question is: Can I know another well enough to represent her?

The artist speaks for us and against us. Both Ruth and Eli voice the danger of artists' representations (7,8). Artists, in representing individuals/societies according to a dominant discourse (e.g., using Ruth's example of the business man), serve to limit the subject positions available to individuals, and to inhibit them from exploring alternate positions. Eli reveals her frustration. There is a picture out there of who she is supposed to be! The artist's representation contributes to the fixedness of her position.

We see Ruth's subject position as an artist is in process. In Spain, she experienced a radical change of subjectivity. She was positioned as a woman artist from North America. Now on the west coast, she speaks of positioning herself differently. Ruth has moved from the spectator of others and currently addresses her art to her own life (8,9). She is both the subject and object of her artful expression.

### **C *The artist is alone; a woman is not alone.***

In Spain, Ruth has positioned herself as an artist, alone. We see that this is a difficult position for Ruth to maintain. We also watch Lily struggle with the perceived consequences of being alone, of choosing to give her full attention to her art.

- 1 Ruth: It was very easy to meet people there, in that I felt so conspicuous as being all alone. It was a struggle for me to stay alone. I really didn't want to get too involved in people's lives and taken away from my work.
- 2 Ruth: It had to do with me ... and there were all kinds of things coming at me. But I mostly just ignored it for the sake of doing what I wanted to do ... in the beginning, I was very much focused on the work and I really didn't look for anything that might interrupt that.
- 3 Lily: That is a part that had appeal for me in your story, that is, I set aside this chunk of time, and saved money so that I could put this front and centre in my life and see what happened.
- 4 Lily: I am aware to, that as it inspires me, the image of a single woman, apparently not attached, travelling independently, – how challenging that is to imagine – giving myself big chunks of time to do what I want to do and what kinds of consequences does that have for my intimate relationships? Is this the model that I absorbed from WHERE EVER – THAT YOU CAN ONLY DO IT IF YOU ARE SINGLE? That if I really

want to go for my creative work, it is going to put my personal relationships in jeopardy!

- 5** Ruth: Yes. I think there is something in being alone that allowed me to do this and maybe wanted to do this. Because I think a big part of going to Spain, involved my aloneness. Because it was a very sensual inspiration to go there and explore that and Spain was a very sexual kind of place for me. It definitely had to do with that – passion.

In her story, Ruth has stepped into the discursive practice of the traditional male artist. She has intentionally removed herself from relationships with others and is consumed only by her work. However, when Ruth is alone, she feels conspicuous and has to work at being alone (1). In the dominant discourse, women are not alone and Ruth's position as artist and as woman are in tension in Spain.

Lily voices her attraction to being alone as a woman and to attending to her own interests for an extended period of time (3,4). However, she also admits to a tension between her desire to be alone and her desire to maintain her intimate relationships (4). With evident frustration, Lily critically questions the binary nature of a discourse that allows her either intimate relationships or creative work.

Ruth uncovers what may be available to women if they choose a position of aloneness, the position of the artist. In the dominant discourse, women are positioned within intimate relationships (i.e., with children and men). Women's passion remains within these relationships too. Ruth has challenged the dominant discourse of women and has stepped away from traditional relationships for a time. She has taken her passion with her and allows herself a passion for Spain (5). However, it seems that her choices remain binary (i.e., intimate relationships or art).

#### **D *Can I trust my feelings?***

The rational discourse is a dominant discourse of our culture. We value decisions based on reason. Men are associated with reason; women and artists are associated with feelings. Through the following voices, we hear the collective question the value and trustworthiness of their feelings.

- 1 Ruth: The music was the thing that pulled at my insides and inspired me to Spain. I was full of yearning to somehow indulge this rhythm that so moved me. (fs)
- 2 Ruth: I felt lost and badly mistaken. ...What had I been thinking and how could I have spent so much effort to get here? I felt horribly vulnerable. (fs)
- 3 Lily: It is a hard place to be, doubly hard place ... if a major decision is based on feelings, not logic or a plan.
- 4 Pacien: I was saddened by when you first arrived, you were so full of doubt and you talked about the music that had been so freeing and inviting you to Spain, now was hidden and stuck in the pit of your stomach.
- 5 Lily: One of the things that I find myself thinking about it is – the idea that feelings can be trusted. It was a feeling about the music and Spain, and the feeling that you had to go. It isn't so much an idea as a feeling.
- 6 Lily: In my story, I was attracted to somebody because of his song writing. The particular value I am talking about is acknowledging that even though I consciously didn't know where I wanted to go, I actually picked somebody who would take me there.
- 7 Ruth: But it (the feeling) is very deep within me and it is tapping into something that I am a part of but isn't just me ... It can feel pretty frightening if that is not there. It feels like it will never come again. But you don't know, it is a very mysterious thing.

In the traditional storyline of our culture, reason is the valued and trusted basis of decision making. However, Ruth has based her decision to go to Spain on feelings (1). When she arrives in Spain and finds no connection to her feelings there, she no longer trusts her decision (2). In the dominant discourse of reason, the subjective knowledge of feelings is untrustworthy. Having based a decision on feelings, Ruth feels “badly mistaken”. Lily’s comment, that an individual is extremely vulnerable when making decisions based on feelings rather than logic, resonates with Ruth’s experience (3). Ruth’s feelings are fragile, are no match for reason, and must be kept safely locked away. Pacien expresses sadness that Ruth must keep the feelings, that had brought her to Spain, buried inside (4).

Lily contemplates a more marginal discourse. Perhaps feelings can be trusted (5). She decides to value herself for trusting her feelings. It was her feelings, her inner knowing, that led her to new insights regarding her songwriting (6). Ruth, positioned as the artist, bases her decisions on feelings too, but she reveals that it can be a frightening position for her (7).

It is in the realm of feelings that the discourses of reason and art collide and the discourses of art and women finally intersect. However, this intersection of the discourses of women and art, perhaps contributes further to women's struggle for respected recognition of their artful expression. A male artist is perceived to possess some valued rationality by virtue of his gender. A woman artist, however, is doubly removed from the valued rational subject position.

***E I am not valued, but my work is valued***

The value of Ruth's subject status is precarious and contradictory. As a woman artist she is discounted, but her product is valued.

- 1 Ruth: Had I been more aware at the time when I was approaching people about exhibitions, I would have known that a young North American woman, visiting Andalucia, who thought that she had something authentic to express about flamenco, would be seen as ridiculous. (fs)
- 2 Ruth: And the whole thing of being a woman was an odd – I forgot – it used to really anger me when people didn't take me seriously in a conversation because I was a woman. It is very macho there and it can be like a brick wall.
- 3 Ruth: There was enough work sold that made me feel that people really wanted it – that there was something there that they related to strongly enough that they were going to have a piece. So that was an affirmation of what it was about.

Although Ruth attempts to position herself as an artist in Spain, this position is precarious. Her efforts are seen as ridiculous and she is aware that she is not taken seriously (1,2). The subject position of young Ruth from North America is contradictory to the subject position of the skilled artist who is able to create an authentic expression of flamenco.

Ruth experiences a further contradiction. Although she is positioned in the local population as a foreign woman, who is not taken seriously, the marketplace, the traditional measure of worth in our western culture, does give value to her work. Her work sells! Ruth, considered ridiculous in the local art community, is affirmed in the marketplace (3). When Ruth reads this part of her story, her voice reveals confusion, disappointment and discouragement.

### **Woven Summary**

Ruth's experience in Spain highlights the contradictory positions of the romantic artist in Europe and the young woman from North America. Even though a woman may adopt the normal discursive practices of an artist, she has difficulty maintaining the subject position of a valued artist. Ruth must struggle to stay alone and the local population just doesn't take her seriously. Ruth also becomes uncomfortable with the invasive nature of the artist's position as spectator. She remains subject to the dominant discourse that positions women in relationship, and nurturing, not invasive of others.

Ruth's story reveals additional contradictions. Although she doesn't feel valued as an artist, her work is sold in the marketplace. These two discourses, the marketplace and art, present Ruth with very mixed messages and position her as valued and unvalued respectively. The value of her constituted position is inconsistent. What does a woman do when subject to all these contradictions? One choice, the one Ruth has chosen, is to take a more marginal position of artist. Ruth is no longer a spectator and representer of others, rather she represents herself, her personal reflections and awareness.

The binary positions of the artist alone and the woman in relationship, are problematic for women. Lily voices her difficulty in negotiating this duality. Breaking open the traditional discourse in which a woman directs her passion to her children and male partner, Ruth directs her passion to Spain. However, she does feel required to be alone to do this. Women's passion remains trapped in isolated binary subject positions.

In the dominant rational discourse, feelings are not considered a trustworthy basis for decision making. Nevertheless, both women and artists are seen to have irrational (i.e., feeling) connections to their activities. This irrational position is a precarious, and a doubly marginalized subject position for women who are also artists. I do not wonder that Ruth becomes frightened when she loses her feeling connections.

## Further Insights of Participants

After participating in the study and reading the transcripts, each participant has shared further insight to her “in process” subjectivity, particularly as it relates to her artful expression, and to choices and subject positions offered within that subjectivity.

### Eli

In the past, I only allowed myself to play at art after all my domestic responsibilities were completed. Of course, that rarely happened and so I rarely played. I see that I have been seriously caught in the position of domestic caregiver and have recently given up most house work. Most days I try to limit it to 1/2 hour or so. This change leaves me hours and hours to explore the big wide world.

My partner and I renovated and then lived in a house for 15 years. We sold that home about 8 years ago and I have never been able to go back there. To go back is too painful. Sometimes my body just aches with loneliness for that place, particularly when I look at old photographs. Recently, I decided to draw a picture of that place. As the picture progressed, I realized that it was my connection to the wind running through the grass, the lamp shining in the window and the path lined with spring flowers that were of most interest for me. When I look at that finished picture now, I experience no ache. I have attempted to represent my subjective knowing of that wind, that light in the window, that path, and they are in some way before me in that picture.

Eli recognizes her entrapment in the position as domestic caregiver and is now attempting to put firm limits on this position. The curtailment of this position allows her more time for various other positions (e.g., playing, exploring).

She has also given herself permission, through her art, to search for and express her inner knowing of a significant life experience.

### Lily

When we first started to deconstruct stories – I was going oh god – there are a million beliefs here you know – there are all these little beliefs and I haven't examined them all... and I felt a certain level of shame as well as recognition – shame that I had these beliefs that I hadn't examined – even as hard as I had worked – miserable as it had made me. But as we have carried

on with the process, I have found some pleasure in discovering all these contradictory beliefs – that there are beliefs that I have, that contradict other beliefs that I have, and that is kind of delightful – kind of being given permission to be.

I have started to recognize that the beliefs I have about songwriting and performance contradict each other. I think of my songs as an art form, but then I need to entertain, to take care, or they (audience) won't come again. I needed to name that contradiction – audience and entertainment. I want to look at this relationship between art and entertainment.

I realize the energy and time I have used to try to come to one belief. Relative to my choices and creative work, knowing that I carry contradictory beliefs provides the possibility of some freedom. Rather than being hard on myself, trying to decide what is worth writing about – life affirming subjects or struggles etc. – so not to question my choices, just to follow them.

Lily, in recognizing that she does carry contradictory beliefs, finds new possibilities and freedom for her songwriting. Consistency of belief is no longer a requirement for her. She is aware that her subject positions of artist and entertainer are contradictory. This entanglement of art and entertainment is a new place of search for her, in the understanding of her songwriting. Further to her insights here, Lily has begun to gather pictures of friends that she can use as an audience for her songwriting, an audience that values her, an audience that she does not have to entertain.

## **Pacien**

With my art, I am able to take time for myself, to think, to sew, and I do value that time. But when I see other women and their responsibilities with children, I feel guilty, selfish, but it keeps me sane. When I left my full time job, I made jokes about it to ease my guilt. I made up new cards that said "Domestic Goddess". I treated it as a joke to ease the guilt of having leisure time.

I don't cook either and feel guilty about that, and so joke about that too, to get past the guilt, instead of saying this is something I choose to do!

At the beginning of this process, I felt that I shouldn't be a part of this group, that what I do is not an art form. It's not valuable; it just gives me pleasure. As a result of the process I realizes that this was a recurring theme, in my life,

as far as my art was concerned, and it was with my mom too That is why she never taught me anything because she didn't value it and I wonder how far back that goes? But going through the process, I feel now that I am an artist and I value my work even if others don't! I have a really wonderful feeling – that there was this discourse that I was talked into and I have talked myself right out of it!

Pacien states that although she resists the position of full time caregiver, she feels guilty and uses jokes as a strategy to ease the guilt of taking on an alternate position that provides her pleasure. She has become aware that the women in her family are subject to the recurring theme of devalued work. Now, with conscious knowledge of the traditional discourses to which she is subject, Pacien speaks herself into a new position, that of a valued artist.

## **Ruth**

I think that the idea of art is dated. At least in my life and what I want to be doing. Artist – that word and how you become an artist – meant something in a different context but it is – I don't know – more of those romantic ideals. The artist as a professional. That they are different from other people. Art is an extremely fuzzy word for me right now.

I come from that very reason-minded father and my mother was the opposite. She learned things through her body, gut. ... I have always had a tendency to try to figure things out and I realize that it never ends, you never come to a conclusion ...I had a very opposite kind of experience at a (recent) workshop where art was imagery, allowing imagery to just come through rather than a previous conception of an idea. This is where you really had to get rid of your artist role. I thought that people who hadn't come from art training were way ahead. They didn't have to consider that. And it really was just about allowing and integrating yourself with the medium, and looking at it afterwards in terms of what was in there. It was very subjective, very open and not really about figuring out. It was something that was unclear and unfinished, maybe there was a message there.

I think when we go into ourselves deeply and work from that place, we are producing culture, we can connect with who we are and we put that out there. It is something that is unique.

Ruth is questioning the romantic and professional subject positions of the artist. In a recent workshop, Ruth moves away from the position and discursive practice of the traditional artist. Rather than using her art skills to clearly represent an predetermined idea, she engages with the art process and allows her subjective knowing to emerge. This knowing is neither clear nor complete for her.

Ruth's last comment reminds me of words of Georgia O'Keefe quoted by Krieger (1991). "I feel so surely that if it is to be of any value to anyone – it must be your truth as nearly as you are able to put it down" (p. 77). Ruth too is striving to speak from within, to articulate her own subjective truth of experience, as much as it is possible.

### **Weaving and Unweaving**

The stories and voices of the collective resonate with the current literature that argues that the dominant discourses of women and art remain contradictory. The community voices that I collected also echo this contradiction (Appendix G). This study reveals a number of the fine threads of the dominant discourses and discursive practices that serve to hold the subjectivity of women away from the position of artist. Any one thread may be considered of little consequence, but together they become a densely woven shroud that weighs heavily against women's artful expression. In the stories that we presented, women are positioned and position themselves as caregivers, entertainers, in relationship, concerned with the pleasure of others and deferring to others in authority. The subject position of artist remains difficult to include within our subjectivities. When Ruth attempts to produce artful expression, she is not taken seriously, perhaps even seen as ridiculous. Lily's worth as an artist is subject to the judgment of innately skilled men. Pacien does not see her fabric skills as valuable. Eli is spoken into existence as a caregiver, a supporter of others. Further, we are not subject to the language of the discourse of art. We are not masters, geniuses, or naturally talented. Our desire for artful expression is encumbered by the dominant discourses of women and art

However, throughout this collective study, we also reveal that we are not caught up entirely within the dominant discourse of women, and that our subjectivities continue to be in process. As the study progresses, and we become more conscious of the discourses to which we are subject, we are seen to be breaking the threads of the dominant

discourses, taking up more marginal discourses, and intentionally choosing new subject positions. Eli limits her caregiving and begins to give herself time to paint and play; Lily creates an audience that she does not need to entertain; Pacien values herself as an artist and initiates collaborative art projects; Ruth seeks to represent her own subjective truth. We have moved to more marginal discourses and embraced alternate subject positions within our subjectivities, attempting to engage more fully and freely in artful expression. However, our reconstituted subjectivities do not exempt us from contradictions.

## CHAPTER 5

**Stepping Back, Taking Another Look****FURTHER DISCUSSION, REVIEW, IMPLICATIONS, ENDING****Further Discussion**

In this further discussion, I wish to revisit the dominant discourses to which women and art are subject, with particular attention to the contradictions between these discourses, as revealed through the interpretations in this study and in current literature. These contradictions are particularly problematic to women in their engagement in artful expression.

The “normal” subject position of women within the dominant discourses of our culture is that of nurturer, caregiver, entertainer, suppressing personal desires in favour of family and others. The dominant discourse positions the artist as alone, single-minded, consumed by work and male. If a woman is to be an artist, she is constituted, and constitutes herself, as a contradictory subject. Cixous (1986) argues that as this contradictory subject, a woman can never be successful and occupies a place reserved for the guilty, guilty for everything, for not having desires, for having personal desires, for being too much of a caregiver, for spending too much time on her art, guilty at every turn. Pacien gives us a clear indication of her internalization of this guilt. “When I left my full time job, I made jokes about it to ease my guilt. I made up new cards that said Domestic Goddess. I treated it as a joke to ease the guilt of having leisure time”.

In the traditional discourse, women are also positioned as deferring to others; in contrast, the artist speaks for and represents others. A woman, as artist, is caught between representing her world acceptably, as it is represented by others, or representing her world as she understands it. Lily finds herself caught in this place when she writes her first jazz song and she continues to feel limited by the constraints of acceptability. “...permission to do what feels right without feeling too constrained by an idea of what it is supposed to be”. In addition to these contradictions, the artful expression of the subjective individual understandings of a woman,(i.e., unique feelings,intuitions) are considered untrustworthy in the dominant rational discourse that considers objective views to more

closely represent the truth (Krieger, 1991). Ruth attempts to express her authentic knowing of Spain and she is “seen as ridiculous”.

The contradictory knowing of these multiple and contradictory positions (i.e., caregiver vs consumed by work, deferring to others vs speaking for others, motivated by feelings vs reason) considered to be flawed knowing in the traditional discourse, can serve to debilitate women (Davis, 1992). We cannot successfully embody these dualisms within the concept of a rational unitary being.

Poststructural discourse offers women a subject status that is not the rational unitary being of humanist discourse, but a multiple being that searches to dismantle these dualisms and reconstitute them as a “range of possibilities that incorporate rather than negate each other” (Davis, 1992, p. 59). This ideal of multiple wholeness opens up to women the possibility of embracing apparent contradictions with ease, and perhaps on occasion as Lily says “with pleasure”. A poststructural discourse offers women freedom, freedom to hold contradictory beliefs, freedom to be the caregivers and the artists, freedom from guilt, freedom to pursue artful expression of their subjective knowing of their world.

## **Review of the Research Process Including Limitations**

In this review, I have considered our research process from the perspectives of the storytelling, the deconstruction and the work as a collective. Attending to the participatory element of this research, I have included the voices of the other participants where possible. My voice is that of the researcher, reviewing the process of this study.

### ***The Story Telling.***

Pacien: It brought home to me too the importance of telling my stories orally as well as writing them down. But also listening to other women’s stories and inviting women to share their stories. I find that women need that invitation and once it is given, the stories are just abundant. I had forgotten how much you can learn just from that about people.

Lily: There is also the telling of the story in this contained place. It is not only going to be told but it is going to be read, and there is going to be conversation, questions. In an informal context stories get told, and then another story and another story, or we move on to some practical thing –

painting the house ... And what I am saying out loud are thoughts that I usually just write in a little book to myself.

Ruth: Yes. I think that is why it feels so magical here. It's not like everyday life. It is like a piece of theatre that we have created here and we indulge it. We go into the story, and spend time with it and really digest it. Gosh, I can't think of very many situations where a woman could get through a story without things coming up, being interrupted. Or even think that you had that kind of a forum to tell a story.

As we have told our stories, shared them with each other, and allowed them to be printed in this study, we have begun to make public the events of our lives. We have risked being seen, even risked being seen to make mistakes. Heilbrun (1988) notes that up until the 18th century women could speak with authority on only two subjects, family and religion. We belong to a new generation of women. By telling our stories, we are putting forward new information, helping to fill in those large gaps of women's experience with artful expression.

### ***The Deconstruction.***

Pacien: All the feelings and images and ideas that I got from the stories, by listening to them, were overpowering in my mind. I had ideas about it and questions about it and when we would start to deconstruct I would lose that place where I was, or if someone mentioned something from their point of view, their idea, part of the deconstructing, I would think – oh no – I didn't think of it that way at all – I don't want to hear that. ... I don't want to belittle the deconstruction process, just that it felt unnatural to me. But I recognize the importance of it.

Lily: I am just listening to the story and getting this wonderful cozy feeling, I am really moved. I am relating to it in a very different way than when I am reading it, trying to get a grasp on what kind of discourse is here and all of that – but there is a pleasure in that too – but it comes later ... after the work and then the freedom that comes with being able to see that there is choice – then it feels good but in a totally different way that the sitting around and listening to stories ... Listening to the stories was warm and cozy, deconstructing them was like being in a stiff breeze.

Ruth: It was a hard process in that it went against – that just allowing to be touched without explaining and allowing for the moment to be. But it was a real learning for me. And I found it affected – it has already spiralled out into other aspects of my life and how I view things.

The deconstruction process that brought into question our embedded beliefs, was not a comfortable experience for the collective. Pacien called it ‘unnatural’, Lily, ‘a stiff breeze’ and Ruth, ‘a hard process’. In the dominant discourse, women are nurturers and in that subject position we do not call into question and contradict the beliefs and values of others. Our very subjectivities were problematic to the process.

As I write this I am reminded again of the Moroccan storytellers that were criticized if they changed their story. I see now that it takes great courage to challenge dominant cultural values and structures because we have used them in our own self-construction. The deconstruction strategy I had implemented to examine our stories, cut us closely to the bone. The strategy served to deconstruct our-selves as well.

I had charged us with the task of re-evaluating and questioning what we had always taken for granted regarding our artful expression. We had to rethink our stories, our-selves and our positions in the world. And so we resisted. On many occasions through the process, one or more members said “I don’t want to do this, but I know it is important that we do”. And so we continued, even if in a most tentative way.

Lily says that afterwards there is ‘freedom’ and ‘choice’. We have all begun to (re)construct and (re)position ourselves as valued artists, as producers of culture, as contradictory beings. However, I do not want to minimize the discomfort I saw and felt during our journey together. By the time that we reached the last story, I became aware that members of the collective were putting most of their energy and attention towards drawing out more of the story from the storyteller. They were less interested in pursuing the deconstruction of the story, rather leaving that to me, as principal researcher.

### ***Working as a Collective.***

“There will be narratives of female lives only when women no longer live their lives isolated in the houses and the stories of men” (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 47). Modern feminism began as a collective phenomenon and this fuelled my desire to work as a collective too.

I understood from the outset of this study that the collective model required a serious commitment of time and interest from the participants but the actual

commitment was far greater than I had anticipated. Although I had originally estimated a commitment of four to six hours, the actual time we were together stretched to twelve hours, double my estimate. This did not include the many hours needed to plan and write stories, to read transcripts and to consider my interpretations. All the participants are actively engaged in other life activities too, so trying to organize meeting times often required compromises and late evenings.

The collective format restricted the number of participants in the study. The four women involved are white, middle class, and actively engaged in artful expression. I do not suggest that the insights presented here, regarding artful expression, reflect the experience of all women.

Working as a collective, there was no privacy, no confidentiality for our imperfections. When reading the transcripts, participants were embarrassed to see their halting words, the raw tone and messiness of their spoken language as we worked to make sense. Then we found value in the messiness too.

Lily: Yes.. because we don't read stuff that shows that other people do that, we think that/

Ruth: that everyone just comes out with these pearls of wisdom.

Lily: And actually the process of getting to them is really valid

Pacien: And work too/

Eli: and not always that clear.

Lily: We need to model it – people do talk like this, and something still comes out of it.

Ruth: It's true. It's a search for sure.

We laughed a lot together and I witnessed all that rich and vibrant laughter again as I transcribed our conversations. We laughed as we developed titles for this work. 'Beautiful Women Talking' became our working title. "Women laugh together only in freedom, in the recognition of independence and female bonding" (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 129). I believe our laughter signaled our spontaneous recognition of insight, freedom and love.

### **Implications for Women**

Our interpretations in this study resonate with current feminist writings (i.e., in the dominant discourses of our culture, the position of woman as artist is not encouraged or

valued and is, in fact, contradictory to other more 'natural' subject positions associated with caregiving).

The cultural media of the arts reflects and maintains these dominant discourses. The major producers of culture, of artful expression, continue to be men, and women continue to see themselves through the eyes of men. Men speak for us. We have little support in seeing our own experience as valid, worthy or speakable.

It is poststructural feminist theory that offers us hope, by its assertion that our subjectivity is constructed and therefore changeable. As women come to understand that our subjectivity is not natural or the result of free choice, but constituted through discourse that we have actively taken up as our own, we realize that we can actively search out other ways of being. As active subjects we may pursue new storylines and alternate representations of ourselves that break open old structures and discourses. Women, by intentionally taking up the position of artist, can both explore alternative representations of themselves and their experiences and also offer these expressions of their insight to other women.

This way of hope, offered by poststructuralist theory, is by no means easy, as it requires that women acknowledge, call into question and perhaps even reject discourses that have in some ways inscribed on them positions of comfort. Art projects of women that explore new territory need not be of a grand scale or marketable (i.e., those dictates of the dominant discourse of art). By means of the postage stamp art project (Parker, 1986), referred to earlier in this study, women successfully shared images they had produced, expressing their subjective experience of childcare and domestic responsibility. Writing poetry, drawing images, composing songs, or designing with fabric may provide us with concrete evidence of our own experience that we can share with other women as we collectively explore ways to constitute ourselves differently and towards a multiple wholeness.

I have taken some license with the words of Virginia Wolfe (1938), replacing her word "literature" with "art" in order to consider a larger spectrum of expression. Art is no one's private ground. Art is common ground. Let us trespass freely and find a way for ourselves.

## **Implications for Educators**

I believe that the task of generating new representations and storylines for women, that have the power to disrupt and displace old ones, is extremely complex and requires the support and initiatives of our educational institutions. It is important that professional facilitators of learning take time to reflect on, and to acknowledge the ways in which they have been constituted and constitute themselves through discourse, and have taken up as their own, the dominant story lines of women and art.

In classrooms today, published text and teachers are assumed to have formal ownership of knowledge (Davies, 1994). To institute a curriculum that expands the boundaries of acceptable forms and representations of knowing, and that invites students, both male and female, to explore, to call into question, and to express their subjective knowings of their world through various forms, including art, is a radical undertaking and demands courage and imagination, not unlike artful expression itself.

## **A Personal Ending**

Writing this thesis has been a work of art for me. At times I felt I had chosen a canvass that was too large or a technique too unfamiliar. As I revisit the process, I am overtaken by the image of myself, lying on the floor of my thesis room, immobilized, unable to continue, and yet I did continue. The challenges of the work have been extreme. The first bold strokes were energizing and gave me courage but later, when fine detail was required, I worked endlessly, trying it over and over to find the right shade or shape of an idea. As a result of this reworking, I have discarded and painted over parts of the work. The aspects that I have left out or that have been (re)formed also contributed significantly. Although I know that as a reader you can not see the palimpsest nature of this project, it is important to me that I tell you — this is but one version of my work!

As I presented the interpretations of our stories, I used the voices of the women, as much as possible, trying consciously not to inscribe these women, but knowing also that I did. I wish to say to members of the collective: You stand free. I have written about you and this is not you. You are so much more.

The experience of sharing stories of artful expression with the women of the collective has provided me with rich insight to my own struggles in art. I am not alone. We are all caught somewhere within the complex webs of discourses, webs that both shape us and that we use to shape ourselves as women. In coming to an understanding

that there are multiple aspects to my constituted subjectivity that may be contradictory to each other, I feel I can now choose to speak or act from different subject positions. I am the artist, and this aspect of my self contributes to my multiple wholeness.

As I dance, whirling and joyous, happier than I've ever been in my life, another bright-faced dancer joins me. We dance and kiss each other and hold each other through the night. The other dancer has obviously come through all right, as I have done. She is beautiful, whole and free. And she is also me (Walker, 1984, p. 393).

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Appendix A  
**LETTER OF CONSENT**

I have read the letter of introduction and I understand that this research project entitled “Beyond the Palace Arts” is part of Elizabeth Chambers’ Master’s Thesis in the Faculty of Education.

I understand that this research is studying the stories of the artful expression of women. I will work as part of a group of 4-5 women, including Elizabeth Chambers, reading, discussing and writing about our individual and collective experiences with artful expression. The purpose of the research is to describe and explore the stories of women that relate to their creative expression and that they use to define themselves as creative within societal structures.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may refuse to respond to any questions during the group sessions and may request that the recorder be turned off. Further, I may withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, and without explanation. My withdrawal will not have any effect on my academic standing. If I do leave the group, I have the right to have my data destroyed.

I understand that the estimated time commitment for a participant in this study is 5-6 hours. I understand that the group meetings will be taped and transcribed and that Elizabeth Chambers will make the following arrangements to protect my confidentiality.

1. All data collected will be considered confidential and the tapes and transcripts of the meetings will be kept in a locked cabinet.

2. Only the principal researcher will have access to the tapes. Once the tapes are transcribed and analyzed, they will be erased.

3. My name will not be attached to this study. Elizabeth will code the written transcripts with numerical identifiers to identify results obtained from individual participants. Only Elizabeth and the three members of her committee will read the coded written transcripts. The purpose of the committee members’ examination to the transcripts will be to clarify research findings.

4. In any published results (e.g., conferences, articles) my anonymity will be further protected by using a code name to identify spoken or written text.

5. The transcribed data will be destroyed as soon as Elizabeth has received acceptance of her thesis, or within 5 years, whichever occurs first.

I understand that my participation in the group sessions will mean that my name, my stories and my statements will be known to other members of the group. I also understand my commitment to keep the group discussions confidential.

If I have any questions regarding this study, I may contact Elizabeth Chambers at 381-4239 or Dr. Brian Harvey at 721-7856.

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

WITNESS: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

**INVITATION TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS**

Dear

I am currently working on a research project for my Master's Degree in Learning and Development in the Faculty of Education. This study called "Beyond the Palace Arts" is focused on the artful expression of women. The purpose of the research is to describe and explore personal stories of women that relate to their artful expression and that they use to define themselves as creative within society.

I am looking for three or four women willing to join a small group that meets weekly over a four week period, mid-August to mid-September. Participants will be invited to discuss their thoughts, feelings and personal stories about their experience with artful expression. A short story about a significant experience regarding artful expression will be requested from each participant. Although I am asking for a significant experience, participants should choose a story that they feel comfortable in disclosing to other group members.

The total time commitment is expected to be 5-6 hours. These group meetings will be taped and then transcribed. I will make every effort to protect group member's confidentiality outside the group and you will be asked to sign the attached consent form that outlines the details of security and also requests your commitment to confidentiality.

It is my hope that you may be interested in participating in this group study and in recounting and sharing some of your experiences with others. If so, please contact me at 381-4239. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely

Elizabeth Chambers  
Graduate Student  
Educational Psychology – Learning and Development

## Appendix C

### **LOOKING AT STORIES**

Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially lead storied lives. The study of stories is the study of the ways humans experience the world, their ways of making sense of the world, their belief systems.

Poststructural theory brings forward the notion that what has been defined as “natural” is a whole set of constructed meanings that have become taken for granted and commonly defined by what they exclude, by binary opposition (e.g., males or females). Deconstructive reading is a type of reading strategy. It is a way of reading that allows multiple meanings to arise and interpret one another. Meanings have no anchor except one another. They are contingent, moving and unstable. Deconstructive readings may unmask schemes used to stabilize, sort out and make sense of the world.

The discourses through which we are constituted are often in tension with one another and have multiple layers of contradictory meaning. These multiple layers of meaning may only be discovered through multiple and careful examinations of a text from different perspectives, accessed by reading and re-reading on several different occasions.

#### **Some techniques to guide our work**

The analysis will likely evolve in the course of working with the stories. However, in the beginning stages, I have incorporated the suggestions of Daly (1997).

1. Look for “what we take for granted” within a cultural context.
2. Look at the story critically; not just at the surface level.
3. Look at things implied, assumed, but not explicit. What does the writer understand as obvious, not needing to mention.
4. What is excluded? What are the binary oppositions?
5. Identify unspoken expectations of what “should” be happening (vs. what is happening) within the personal and cultural context.
6. What are we caught in, in this story? What beliefs and values lure us in to be caught? As readers, where do we enter the text?

7. Try to make the familiar strange. Be a foreigner in your own context.
8. What does this story reveal about the writer's character, her values, way of life, the social climate of the times?
9. What do we need to know or assume in order for this story to make sense?

## Appendix D

**SAMPLE OF EMBEDDED BELIEFS FROM LILY'S STORY**

song writing has secrets that are known only to professional songwriters  
 folk music is simple  
 jazz is more complicated and so more respected  
 there are rules for a real song, format, acceptable themes  
 truth is important in my life but not necessary to my songs  
 a real songwriter tells the truth  
 women try to fit into a mold  
 a man pushes to new territory  
 women do what is acceptable  
 a man gives permission to tell the truth  
 a man encourages you  
 a song is based on a true story  
 if you don't know the secrets of an art form, if you don't know its sacred rules, you are  
 not allowed into the sanctuary of that art form  
 if you are seen as proficient, you can judge others  
 art skills are a talent – you have them or you don't  
 experts know, defer to experts  
 there are limits to what is considered a song  
 you can't go outside those rules and be successful  
 man is active — brings flowers  
 woman is passive ..... waits for or receives flowers  
 a man knows how to be successful  
 bringing flowers and writing love songs are signs of love  
 bringing flowers is a sign for atonement  
 bringing flowers is a peace offering  
 folk music requires little talent  
 there are limited venues for songs unaccompanied by instruments  
 a song has a constant rhythm when accompanied  
 instruments limit songs  
 need permission to change  
 there are limits to an acceptable song  
 performer is responsible for entertaining the audience  
 performer active, audience passive  
 working at the margins of song writing and being popular are incompatible.  
 success is having a hit song  
 to stretch those margins means the risk of losing the audience  
 audience is to be entertained  
 audience has no responsibility  
 performer entertains in acceptable fashion  
 audience is not risky – accepting of status quo  
 performer is responsible – must engage audience

## Appendix E

**TEMPLATE INTERPRETATIONS****Slappy**Male/Artist

- 1 – goes out into the world, alone
- is active, into the unknown

2 – to better yourself (success) leave home

3 – rebel, risky

Female

- 1 – stays home with family, stays connected
- passive
- safe, contained, known, with limits

2 – caregiver

- no other skills valued
- (don't learn anything from mother)

3 – good, well-mannered, beautiful

## Lily

Male /Artist

1 – goes out into the world, alone  
 – is active, into the unknown

goes to perform at music festival alone  
 working at margins – not popular –  
 alone brings flowers active

2 – to better yourself (success) leave home  
 after festival – excited beginning of being a  
 songwriter

how can you be an artist and live in  
 Canada

I think I need to think of where women  
 songwriters have gone.

3 – rebel, risky

risk of losing audience in order to stretch  
 edges

outside of limits – seen as humorous  
 original work – more valuable whole dif-  
 ferent idea of what a songwriter was  
 kind of growing edge

artistic expression – completely different,  
 going against everything

Female

1 – stays home with family, stays connected  
 – passive

– safe, contained, known, with limits  
 the world of art says – this is the range of  
 what we can consider when we say song.  
 It's pretty defined

Women receive flowers limit myself  
 because of my idea of what a song is

2 – caregiver

– no other skills valued  
 (don't learn anything from mother)

I wonder if I can, well I thought he might  
 be right

my goal to engage my audience

I have an obligation to entertain.

We can't be making people uncomfortable  
 all the time

3 – good, well-mannered, beautiful

write a song that sounds like a real song  
 from the 1930s

women do what is expected of them, be an  
 artist but do things approved of and  
 known

given permission to change (by man), per-  
 mission to do what feels right

will not be taken seriously if material is  
 positive and life affirming

few acceptable moments for woman to  
 have ugly thoughts, ugly behaviour,  
 ugliness

## Pacien

Male/Artist

1 – *goes out into the world, alone*  
 – *is active, into the unknown*

creative process...starting with  
 nothing...not knowing

I am going to purposefully pass on this  
 skill

2 – *to better yourself (success) leave home*  
 machine work more valuable  
 if anyone teased me, I could say no and  
 show them the tag  
 you wanted to sew things so they looked  
 like they had been made by machine.

3 – *rebel, risky*

it is part of the creative struggle ... taking a  
 risk

I just do fun things, that give me pleasure  
 and I feel guilty

Female

1 – *stays home with family, stays connected*  
 – *passive*

– *safe, contained, known, with limits*

children were finding their own blocks,  
 finding each others and complimenting  
 each other

2 – *caregiver*

– *no other skills valued*

*(don't learn anything from mother)*

Promised I would bring completed quilt,  
 greeting each child

She would sew into the night.... ready in  
 the morning

mother's skills only practical

Mamere unknowingly passed to me, moth-  
 er unwittingly passed on more

I realized my mother never taught me any-  
 thing, she didn't think it was worthy of  
 teaching me.

Why am I doing this? Did any of us learn  
 from this?

Difficult for you to believe that you have  
 value

our craft/art skills not valued in the job  
 market – don't put on resume

this is just for me (selfish)

3 – *good, well-mannered, beautiful*

only question – why did I leave this so late,  
 not – I am frustrated, angry hide failure

Only because it was a positive experience

OK to bring out negative feelings

doesn't mention all the work she has done  
 to children

## Ruth

Male/Artist

1 – *goes out into the world, alone*  
 – *is active, into the unknown*  
 Spain and mystery that had drawn me at  
 24 alone in Malaga  
 you can only do it if you are single  
 Seville – completely magical. It was very  
 easy to get inspired... it was very diffi-  
 cult to see my way through it.  
 searching after mystery, dark secrets  
 attracted because it is exotic

2 – *to better yourself (success) leave home*  
 a successful artist would be in Europe  
 being away enlivened the senses

3 – *rebel, risky*  
 I had to get off that protected place I think  
 I went there with Letting go of some  
 safety, personal walls, protection and  
 control wanting to strip off layers of  
 protection

Female

1 – *stays home with family, stays connected*  
 – *passive*  
 – *safe, contained, known, with limits*  
 I didn't want to get involved with people's  
 lives and taken away from my work  
 It's going to put my personal relationships  
 in jeopardy  
 experienced from a distance

2 – *caregiver*  
 – *no other skills valued*  
 (*don't learn anything from mother*)  
 I felt I could give something back  
 A young woman who though she had  
 something authentic to express seen as  
 ridiculous  
 It used to anger me when people didn't  
 take me seriously in conversation  
 because I was a woman. It can be like a  
 brick wall

3 – *good, well-mannered, beautiful*  
 Some protection for the sake of respecting  
 what I was getting there  
 not comfortable knowing I was being  
 judged  
 I didn't want to go invading anything but  
 somehow I had to do some of that  
 anyway

## Appendix F

**TRANSCRIPT NOTATION**

- ( ) author's comment to add clarity
- / interruption by another voice
- self interruption, a break in the flow of speech
- ... material deleted by author
- ? interrogative intonation
- ! or YOU exclamatory intonation, raised voice
- (fs) quoted from story

## Appendix G

**OTHER COMMUNITY VOICES**

Many of the casual utterances of women that I collected during this research project resonate with the stories and conversations of the collective. In the dominant discourse, women are positioned as caregivers. This position is not compatible with the position of artist. In fact, one woman leaves her family in order to write. Artful endeavours are seen as valuable only when they attract a monetary return. Women's skilled knowing in art is secondary to academic and professional knowledge. However, a man's education in art is encouraged by his family. These utterances are congruent with the collective's research and previous literature that women are not spoken into existence, nor speak themselves into existence as artists easily.

**Collected Utterances**

- Now that I have finished my degree, I think I'll start on some art projects.
- We don't do any art, but we are avid collectors of art.
- I want to do some art, any art, anything – fabric, pastels, but I have no time to even think about what to do. I am so very busy raising my children and working.
- My brother's art education was encouraged by not mine.
- I have good art skills but I am looking for a job and I can't put my art skills on my resume.
- This is exciting, art is what I do. I want to read your work when it is finished.
- Artful, is that like the artful dodger? It looks like we are escaping from something.
- It makes me so mad that Martha Stewart is making a million dollars. When we used to do that stuff, no one thought it was worth anything.
- I don't do any art. My family and my job take up all my time. Where would I find energy for that?
- I try to spend one weekend a month away from my family so that I can write.
- It's just a hobby.
- I'm not a writer, I've never been published.

## VITA

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