

**The Function of Art-Making for Women in
Vancouver's Downtown Eastside:
A Critical Phenomenological Case Study on the
Enterprising Women Making Art (EWMA) Program**

by

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Abstract

This study explores the psychological, sociopolitical and socioeconomic roles of art-making amongst members of the Enterprising Women Making Art (EWMA) program, a community arts-based social enterprise in Vancouver's low-income Downtown Eastside. Each of five participants completed two individual interview sessions which explored their backgrounds, the function of art-making in their lives, their past and present psychological and socioeconomic difficulties, and their impressions of their participation in the interviews. Four participants also completed two individual member check sessions to verify the accuracy of the data transcription and analysis. Interview transcripts were analyzed through a critical phenomenological lens using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Emergent themes included: the promotion of mental health and the expression of personal values through art-making; the enhancement of art-making through adversity; psychological resilience; limitations on art-making resources; opportunities for income generation, with limitations; issues with communication and discourse regarding power inequalities; and generally positive impressions of the study's interview and research topics. This study's findings help to inform strategies to promote engagement between individuals with psychological distress who engage in art-making and mental health researchers.

Keywords: Art-making; psychological distress; socioeconomic; interpretative phenomenological analysis, phenomenology; case study

*This is dedicated to the women and artists of
the Downtown Eastside community. Thank you
for sharing your meaningful stories and art.*

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

Throughout history, the arts have been viewed as a vehicle for the promotion of social change (e.g., Backos & Pagon, 1999), as well as mental health and “well-being” (e.g., Hill, 2013). While visual artists are often viewed as solitary workers with individualistic goals, a variety of cooperative and collaborative practices in artistic production, skill development, and marketing are also widely recognized. These practices are often defined as *community arts*. Madyanningrym and Sonn (2011) describe community art as “a form of cultural practice in which art is produced and used by local people within their communities as an instrument for social change” (pp. 358 – 359). Various forms of artistic initiatives and genres within the community arts movement have supported personal, political, and community expression and development through art-making (Brown, 2002; Hocoy, 2005). Such initiatives and genres have included theatre, dance, music, creative writing, visual art, craft, arts-based therapies, and other forms of artistic creation and interpretation. A key aspect of community arts is education. Community arts education and development programs, galleries, and performance spaces are increasingly incorporated into community development strategies around the globe, with various social and political objectives (e.g., Borrup, 2006; Madyanningrym & Sonn, 2011; Mills & Brown, 2004).

The current study focuses on a group of women who create art in a “safe space” art studio in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES) neighbourhood, as part of a community economic development project known as *Enterprising Women Making Art (EWMA)*. Many of the women in this program have experienced socioeconomic disadvantages, namely unemployment or inadequate employment. The EWMA initiative offers women greater access to art resources, opportunities for skill development, as well as opportunities to generate income through their art-making. This study was aimed towards understanding how various EWMA participants view the function of art-making in

the psychological, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic realms of their lives. The study was also designed to help elucidate understanding of art-making as a topic of discourse that may help to facilitate or enhance engagement between distressed individuals who value art-making and mental health researchers and practitioners.

1.1. The Role of Social Bonding through Art-Making

According to White (2003), there are a growing number of community-based arts initiatives aimed at strengthening *social capital*. Social capital has been defined as “...contacts and group membership which, through the accumulation of exchanges, obligations and shared identities, provide actual or potential support and access to valued resources” (Morrow, 1999, p. 755). Social capital refers to both the notions of *bonding* and *bridging*. According to Stickley and Duncan (2007), bonding refers to the social interactions among a particular social group within a geographic setting, while bridging refers to interactions across social groups or geographic locations. In the current study, social interactions between members of the EWMA program may be understood as social bonding. In contrast, interactions between the EWMA program and other community arts programs or local initiatives may be understood as a form of social bridging. Stickley and Duncan (2007) suggested that bonding and bridging particularly may help to enhance social capital within and between groups faced with poverty and social inequality. Furthermore, social integration increases access to “socially valued activity, adequate income, personal relationships, respect and recognition from others, and a political voice” (Ware et al., 2007, p. 469). Stokrocki, Andrews, and Saemundsdottir (2004) conducted a qualitative study that, similar to the present study, sought to understand the roles of art-making according to women who have experienced homelessness and domestic violence. Stokrocki and colleagues used a combination of a literature review, interviews, and participatory action research methods. The results of their study indicated that the roles of art-making for women who have experienced homelessness and domestic violence were grounded in communication, healing, and social bonding. The group expressed that they shared life experiences and that the art program promoted self-respect and social rewards. They also expressed valuing an open-studio format that was accessible, non-restrictive, and relatively cost-free, much like EWMA. The results from this study help to

define the role of social integration in the function of art-making for individuals who are overcoming abusive experiences.

In regards to the individual psychological processes involved in the social integrative aspect of art-making, Lamb (2009) theorized that creative activity may be used as a tool to encourage “visibility” of the thoughts, emotions, and ideas associated with mental health issues. By encouraging self-expression, creating artwork may arguably help to facilitate social engagement. Furthermore, the social aspect of cooperative and collaborative art-making may furnish psychosocial opportunities that do not present themselves in the context of solitary artistic activities. The presence of inclusive community spaces, whether arts-focused or not, provide social support to women who have likely experienced similar challenges, at least in regards to low-income life in the Downtown Eastside. It appears that such community spaces may help to foster opportunities for the development of trust, openness, and expression, particularly among individuals who have previously experienced psychological alienation and social marginalization.

1.2. Introduction to the Enterprising Women Making Art (EWMA) Program

Atira Women’s Resource Society (commonly known as “Atira”) is a not-for-profit organization that works towards ending violence against women through education and services including housing, advocacy, and support to women and individuals who identify as transgender, two-spirited, and intersex (Atira Women’s Resource Society, 2011a). In 2003, Atira established Enterprising Women Making Art (EWMA), “a community economic development project for women in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside” (Atira Women’s Resource Society, 2011a), including both a studio and store in this neighbourhood. The participants at EWMA produce a broad range of visual art forms within the studio space, including painting, drawing, jewellery, knit garments, paper arts, ceramics, photography, and textiles. Atira Women’s Resource Society (2011b) describes the EWMA program as “a self employment initiative for women impacted by violence who face significant barriers to traditional employment and who seek safe, income-generating opportunities free from exploitation, abuse or other vulnerabilities.” The goals of the EWMA program are to

empower the participating artists, improve their socio-economic conditions, recognize the strengths and capacities of the low-income community of the DTES, promote community cohesion, and increase self-sufficiency. The program also helps to increase the group members' access to lucrative art markets and claims to work from a harm reduction, low threshold, and anti-oppressive framework (Atira Women's Resource Society, 2011b).

At the time in which this study was conducted, art-makers at EWMA had roles as either "core" or "visiting" artists. While both core and visiting artists could access the EWMA studio during opening hours, core artists were responsible for attending the study three days a week and had regular duties to assist with EWMA events such as exhibits and social gatherings. Core artists were granted their own work and storage spaces at the studio. Visiting artists were welcome to attend and work at the studio as desired, but they did not have access to their own personal work spaces or storage spaces at the studio. Also, at the time in which the current study was conducted, visiting artists did not have regular duties to help out with the EWMA studio or store; nevertheless, many visiting artists help voluntarily with the maintenance of the studio and the preparation of events held in the space.

1.3. Vancouver's Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood

The DTES is an ethnically diverse urban neighbourhood of approximately 10,000 residents. This neighbourhood is rich in arts and culture despite being afflicted by high rates of poverty, substance abuse, and homelessness. The paradox between the neighbourhood's rich arts and culture and its disproportionately high rates of poverty and mental illness renders the DTES a unique neighbourhood to Vancouver and Canada. Despite the apparent afflictions of its residents, the DTES is home to thriving artistic communities. These communities are supported and evidenced by artist-run galleries and community art spaces whose mandates are often aimed at providing support to the community, frequently emphasizing the promotion of psychological wellbeing and social justice.

The DTES is made up of approximately 27% visible minorities (compared to 42% in Vancouver and 16% in Canada) (Brethour, 2009). Fourteen percent of the area's

residents are of Aboriginal descent (compared to 3% of Vancouver, 6% of British Columbia, and 5% of Canada) (Brethour, 2009).

The DTES is frequently referenced as one of Canada's "poorest postal code[s]." Based on a data dissemination of the 2006 Canadian census (Brethour, 2009), it was found that single people over the age of 15 living alone in this neighbourhood earned an average annual income of \$14,024, and only \$6,282 once government transfer payments were excluded. Comparatively, it was reported that in 2006, this same demographic group in Canada as a whole earned an average annual income of over \$21,000, at least one third more than DTES inhabitants (Brethour, 2009). In 2006, the labour force participation rate (i.e., the proportion of the population that legally works or is looking for legal work) for individuals 15 years and older in the DTES was 38%, compared to the dramatically and consistently higher participation rates in Vancouver (67%), British Columbia (66%), and Canada (67%) (Brethour, 2009). Moreover, the 2006 unemployment rate in the DTES was 14% (compared to 7% across Canada), and this statistic did not include the aforementioned individuals who are not legally employed and not looking for work, representing over 60% of people living in the DTES. According to a report by the City of Vancouver (Thomson, Woodward, Billows, & Greenwell, 2012), 40% of homeless people in the Downtown Eastside suffer from a mental illness.

Mental health and socioeconomic issues in the DTES must be explored in light of the region's history. To my current knowledge, the DTES was taken into dispossession from the indigenous Coast Salish peoples of the Skwxwu'7mesh (Squamish), Tsliel-Waututh (Burrard), and Xwme'thkwyiem (Musqueam) Nations. Despite centuries of colonization of Canada's First Nations, the original inhabitants of Vancouver never ceded their rights as sovereign First Nations (Masuda & Crabtree, 2010). Arguably, the influences of colonization and public policy decisions have contributed to the displacement of marginalized groups into the concentrated area of the DTES. Recently, it has been argued that the high prevalence of mental illness in the DTES is largely attributable to the mass discharge of patients from Riverview Hospital, a mental health facility in Coquitlam, BC (a suburban city in Metro Vancouver) that was closed in July, 2012 (e.g., Patterson, 2007).

The history of the DTES importantly impacts its current socio-eco-political climate as well as its culture. Support groups, social agencies, social activism, and resistance movements are widespread in this community. Social movements have been aimed at an increase in social housing, a call of attention to the missing and murdered women in the DTES (i.e., the annual Women's Memorial March), resistance of the 2010 Winter Olympics, and other social issues (e.g., Masuda & Crabtree, 2010). Despite social action aimed at an increase in social housing and support toward mental illness in the Downtown Eastside, residents of the DTES with mental illnesses continue to be underserved (e.g., Ambrose, 2009). Furthermore, I would argue that persistent, undiagnosed, and often "sub-clinical," psychological issues, such as mild depression and anxiety, are the most prone to oversight in regards to treatment and prevention, within the Downtown Eastside and beyond.

1.4. Socioeconomic Adversity and Psychological Distress

The co-occurrence of socioeconomic adversity, trauma, and mental illness is well-documented but not well-understood, particularly in regards to how these variables are manifested in, or moderated by, creative activity. *Psychological distress* is a non-specific mental health outcome characterized by psychophysiological and behavioural symptoms such as anxiety, depressive reactions, irritability, declining intellectual capacity, and fatigue (Dohrenwend, Shrout, Egri, & Mendelsohn, 1980; Marchand, Drapeau, & Beaulieu-Prevost, 2011). Meanwhile, the term *poverty* is a complex concept with multiple meanings influenced by context and geographic location, as well as multiple presentations ranging from situational crises to long-term, persistent problems (East & Kenney, 2007). East and Kenney (2007) suggest that poverty may be understood in relation to mental health issues including potentially traumatic events or conditions such as addiction, domestic and community violence, early-childhood abuse, discrimination, and a lack of access to health care, housing, child care, and education. These issues are undoubtedly widespread amongst residents of the DTES.

Epidemiological research suggests a relationship between psychological distress and poverty. A systematic review by Fryers, Melzer, and Jenkins (2003) found that low income, poor education, and unemployment are indicators for increased risk of mental

health problems. These factors are often collectively referred to as *socioeconomic adversity* (Rogers & Pilgrim, 2003). To further elucidate the relationship between socioeconomic adversity and psychological distress, welfare populations are afflicted by a high prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety (Derr, Hill, & Pavetti, 2000). Moreover, rates of childhood victimization, which includes physical and sexual abuse, are relatively higher among low-income women and women on welfare (Ingram, Corning, & Schmidt, 1996). East and Kenney (2007) argue that poverty may be regarded as a form of *social trauma*, defined as “any social condition that perpetuates forms of oppression against vulnerable populations” (p. 217). They suggest that psychological trauma experienced in the context of persistent poverty is likely to manifest itself in the form of disconnection from family, friends, and community, which may have dramatic effects on self-efficacy and psychological functioning.

Mental health practitioners often overlook persistent psychological distress owing to socioeconomic disadvantage, whether or not the individual would meet criteria for clinical diagnosis if assessed. As emphasized by Stickley and Duncan (2007), the relationship between mental health problems and inequality necessitates a *social causation approach* to mental illness, which addresses the influences of socio-economic-political issues on mental health, often overlooked in biomedical approaches. One current policy-based problem lies in the fact that individuals with psychiatric diagnoses may have more access to government-funded services designed to promote mental health (Stickley & Duncan, 2007). However, diagnosis-dependent treatment access also carries the risks of underserving individuals who could benefit from mental health treatment, but have not received, are opposed to, or reject, diagnostic labels (Sayce, 2000). The school of *liberation psychology* responds to this oversight by recognizing and aiming to understand how oppressive sociopolitical structures contribute to mental health problems in impoverished communities. Martin-Baro (1994), a founding figure of liberation psychology, suggests that sociopolitical influences on mental health problems are often masked by models which situate problems or “abnormalities” within the individual, such as the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* classification system.

Unlike the *DSM*, the First Nations perspective on emotional suffering recognizes the traumatic nature of colonization and societal oppression. According to the National Aboriginal Health Organization (2005), indigenous peoples believe that well-being is

based on a balance between four inseparable realms: the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Based on the principle of interconnectedness, sickness wounds the spirit, and thus the mind, emotions, and body. Like sickness, colonization wounds the spirit, and may thus be viewed as one of the contributors to ill health amongst indigenous people (Anishnawbe Health Clinic, 2006). Lavallee and Poole (2010) stress that true healing amongst Indigenous peoples is limited by models of “mental health recovery.” In contrast, the holistic approach to wellbeing seems to be useful in conceptualizing the relationship between the emotional healing process, community integration, and creative expression, in non-clinical community settings such as the DTES. The EWMA program uniquely offers integrative opportunities for low-income women to achieve both personal and economic goals and participate positively in their community through art-making, rendering this program particularly suitable to research that explores the intertwined relationship between socioeconomic adversity and psychological distress.

1.5. Community Arts and Psychosocial Wellbeing

The value of participation in the arts and its potential contribution to mental health is emphasized by Richard Smith's (2002) editorial in the *British Medical Journal*, entitled *Spend (Slightly) Less on Health and More on the Arts*. This editorial highlighted the possibility of treating mental health problems through participation in the arts, as an alternative or adjunct to conventional and dominant clinical treatment models. Moreover, artistic activity provides unique opportunities for critical and emotional reflection and expression.

The context of art-making in a social or community-based setting raises the question of whether, and to what extent, art-making represents the personal and social aspects of an individual's identity. The school of self-psychology helps to inform how identity is formed and maintained, recruiting questions such as “What am I like?” and “Who am I?” (Cote & Levin, 2002, p. 24). Within this framework of identity, *self-knowledge* is comprised of various *cognitive components* which collectively form the basis of *self-concept* (Cote & Levin, 2002). In order to understand the function of art-making in one's life, one must ask: How do the content, frequency, and environmental or social context of artistic activity contribute to the cognitive components of one's self-concept? Additionally,

one's openness to art-making as a resource tool is likely dependent on the degree to which art-making is accepted as a component of one's self-concept. Perhaps individuals who conceptualize themselves as "artists" are more open to utilizing art as a psychological, social, economic, or political tool. The relationship between art-making and identity was addressed and incorporated into the participant interviews in the current study (see 2.9 Interview Procedure below).

Lamb (2009) hypothesized that social change could be elicited simply by nurturing the artistic talents that clients possess and by connecting them with public venues for their artwork. From this perspective, an emphasis on individual strengths would foster self-efficacy, while reducing stigma associated with mental illness (Lamb, 2009). Similar strength-based models are often discussed in the context of clinical therapy, yet are equally pertinent to community mental health-related endeavours. I believe that the current research study adopts a strength-based approach to inquiry by focusing heavily on the topic of art-making across interviews with art-makers. In regards to the *content* of this study, I am curious about the ways in which a strength- or empowerment-based program such as EWMA may promote wellbeing and psychological insight without explicitly taking a psycho-educational approach to mental illness or sociological barriers.

Furthermore, it may be argued that the function of art-making for a particular community is as dependent on the personal and situational needs of the art-makers as it is on the format, structure, or type of delivery or practice. For example, Ornstein (2006) provides an interpretation of the function of creative activity in camps and ghettos during the Holocaust. Although art-making was not carried out in an organized social manner, it seemed to promote emotional resilience, recovery, and *internal resistance* amongst the ghetto community. Art-making also helped to mitigate the effects of degradation and humiliation, particularly through humour. Lastly, art provided a "witness recording" of the events of the Holocaust, eventually serving as memorials for the dead. Ornstein (2006) questioned whether art made in camps served a different function than art made by artists who lived in freedom, under humane conditions. It may similarly be argued that shared or related socioeconomic or psychological stressors in the lives of women living in the Downtown Eastside may contribute to similarities in their purposes for creating art, particularly as a geographically bound group, some of whom may consider themselves disenfranchised or socially marginalized.

1.6. The Sociopolitical Function of Community Arts

Community arts programs may effectively promote learning or change within and by individuals who share particular social identities, in relation to art-making and beyond. From a social cohesion perspective, a social group may be defined by shared characteristics, such as sociopolitical, cultural, or religious motives, goals, or values (Sherif & Sherif, 1956). Community arts programs are often designed to specifically promote sociopolitical education, expression, awareness, and change. Findings from previous qualitative explorations seem to suggest common thematic patterns relating to the outcomes of group participation in *community-based* art programs. For example, Clover and Craig (2009) explored an arts-based adult education and research program in Victoria, British Columbia. The participants used interviews, focus groups, learning journals, arts-based methods and observations to explore the effectiveness of visual art education with homeless and street-involved women. Their program included an 18-month long series of feminist art-based workshops, which incorporated collaborative discussions of several social justice issues including violence, health, stereotyping, patriarchy, and Aboriginal self-governance. The findings revealed the interrelated themes of identity, strengthened social bonds, and sense of belongingness, as well as personal and collective empowerment (Clover & Craig, 2009).

Similarly, Madyanningrum and Sonn (2011) conducted a qualitative study of the individual experiences of participants involved in a community art project called “The Seeming” in Bendigo, Australia. Three main themes emerged, including “giving voice to the silenced” (p. 358), the emergence of social connections, and challenges relating to stereotypes. These themes closely reflect the broader topics of self-esteem, social capital, and social change, each of which seem to emerge as important themes in the larger body of literature exploring community arts and mental health.

While the aforementioned studies have helped to draw attention to the meaning and value of social engagement and self-expression through community arts, the independent psychological motives underlying individual and community art participation may be highly varied across individuals and do not seem to be well understood. An individual may partake in art-making to build skill or technique, convey a message, engage

with the community, or attain emotional or economic reward. As highlighted by Chapple and Jackson (2010):

One kind of artist might seek to represent the voices of a community. Another kind of artist might find community representation to be an impossible project. One kind of artist might seek to provoke 'smiles;' another kind of artist might seek to provoke debate. Another might hope not to have to choose. (pp. 481-482)

Interest in active participation in the arts depends on many variables, and the arts are not meaningful or appropriate to all people at all times (Oliver & Murray, 2007). Furthermore, art initiatives may undeniably serve instrumental purposes, often relating to the environmental circumstances in which art is created. For example, Chapple and Jackson (2010) question to what degree art is “instrumentalized” by changes in the commercial power of a retail district or by the endorsement of values by a social program supporting the artistic activity. Moreover, the “professional” and “amateur” sectors of the community arts are complexly intertwined. A participant in a local community project may concurrently support her work through involvement in the commercial industry (Chapple & Jackson, 2010), demonstrating the dual role of art-making in the individual's personal and professional life. The assumption that art-making is a pure and “uncontaminated” practice is thus ill-informed, highlighting the need for further research into the interconnectedness of the personal and socio-economic-political conditions under which art is created.

1.7. Research Caveats Regarding Community Arts

The psychological, social, economic and political values of art-making in the context of both collective and independent initiatives is not clearly understood, partially due to the use of limiting and potentially inappropriate research methodologies. For example, Galloway, Bell, Hamilton, and Scullion (2006) conducted a quantitative review of the variables relating to sports and arts that may contribute to emotional wellness. According to their results, the authors found “no definitive set of indicators which can measure the contribution of culture and sport to quality of life and well-being, regardless of how these terms are defined” (p. 155). Critics such as Oliver and Murray (2007) suggest that scientific knowledge and research is limited by the ambiguity of arts-based

experiences, and that controlled research that attempts to quantitatively identify and measure the social and health outcomes of the arts is highly problematic. While Oliver and Murray (2007) do not disregard the utility of the biomedical model, they suggest that the spectrum of clinically diagnosed illnesses intersect with multiple social, political, and economic complexities that are implicated in public policy interventions. Similarly, Putland (2008) suggests that evidence-based studies may present the risk of “reducing the value and meaning of arts and cultural activities to narrowly defined functions, whereby art is seen as merely instrumental to prescribed social outcomes and public policy agenda” (p. 266).

Unlike traditional clinical measures of psychological change and outcome, the process of art-making (a) represents a voluntary activity that holds personal value or meaning (of at least some sort) to the art-maker; (b) communicates something about the art-maker in a unique and novel way; and (c) works towards a product of personal creation, likely associated with some sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy. These features of visual art-making render this activity uniquely well suited as a tool for enhancing information gathering and therapeutic dialogue with individuals who already accept art-making as a personally salient aspect of their lives and perhaps identities.

1.8. Research Questions

This study was designed to better understand the psychological, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical functions of art-making for the participants at EWMA, based on their individual perspectives. I was interested in gaining an understanding of how the space and context (i.e., geographical, social, political, economic, and cultural) in which art is practised affects the meaning of engaging in this activity from the art-makers' perspectives. Moreover, I was curious about artistic activities in which the artists engaged outside the shared studio space at EWMA, and whether these external or independent endeavours served a different function (i.e., psychological, social, or economic) than their EWMA studio work. Also, I sought to understand whether the art-makers at EWMA shared certain independent or collective sociopolitical worldviews, and to what extent their personal or shared worldviews were intentionally integrated into their art projects. This study secondarily aimed at exploring how the integration of the topic of art-making into

participant-researcher dialogue may help to enhance communication regarding the personal and sensitive topics of participants' psychological and socioeconomic distress and well-being.

Chapter 2.

Methods

2.1. Background and Perspective of the Researcher

I am a white English-speaking Canadian cisgender woman of European Jewish descent and a middle-class socioeconomic background. I recognize the privileges associated with being white, socioeconomically advantaged, Canadian-born, and English-speaking. As a member of these and other dominant social groups, I lack personal familiarity with many disadvantages faced by non-dominant groups, and thus have an inherently limited understanding of the significance of certain situations or experiences discussed by participants in the current study. I was born and raised in Toronto and have resided in East Vancouver since the autumn of 2009. I have never lived in the Downtown Eastside and do not consider myself a community member of this neighbourhood. However, I admire and am inspired by the depth of grassroots artistic and cultural activity in the Downtown Eastside community. I also aspire to act as a social justice ally, and recognize that my process of developing an ally position is both “fluid” and “imperfect” (e.g., Reynolds, 2010). Although I have spent some time in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood both socially and professionally, I identify primarily as an “outsider” researcher, as I have an inherently limited knowledge regarding the sociocultural and economic dynamics of this community. Similarly, I identify as an outsider of the EWMA program. Although I have volunteered at the studio prior to commencing participant interviews (described below), I have not participated in the core activities of the EWMA studio.

I am personally passionate about creative expression through independent visual art-making, as well as arts-based forms of community engagement. Although I wish I had more time to engage in art projects, particularly collaborative ones, I deeply enjoy both the aesthetic and emotional elements of spontaneous art-making and am slowly becoming more involved in community arts endeavours. My personal interest in art-making helps me to relate to the experiences of other individuals who value art-making in their own lives, including the participants of the current study.

Academically, I am a clinical psychology graduate student with broad interests in mental health theory, treatment, and research. I do not particularly subscribe to any one type of mental health treatment orientation, as I believe that mental health treatment is most effective when truly individualized to meet the specific needs of a person experiencing distress in a situated context.

From the autumn of 2009 to the spring of 2012, I was a part-time research assistant on a longitudinal study of the co-occurrence of psychosis, addiction, and infection across single room occupancy (SRO) hotel residents in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. This project was unique in its rigour and breadth of topical coverage regarding physical and mental health issues experienced by residents of the DTES. As a research assistant and volunteer on this study, I learned that many of these individuals living in SRO's had emotionally and socioeconomically revealing narratives that were often shared with the researchers, but would not be included in the publication of the study. This realization served as inspiration for me to conduct a study that would be oriented towards the personal perspectives of particular individuals in the DTES, which are all too often overlooked, particularly in the field of psychology.

I have come to believe that it is the collective responsibility of practicing psychologists to (a) conduct practical research that responds to needs of groups who are underrepresented in research, and (b) avoid the perpetuation of historical and social prejudice through diagnosis and treatment practices. The second of these two obligations is recognized in the American Counselling Association's (2005) *Code of Ethics*, but it seems to be overlooked in the professional ethics of clinical psychology and psychiatry. Moreover, the notion of quantitative evidence as the universal "gold standard," and its relatively narrow professional diagnostic and treatment models, may impose limits on the understanding of an individual's personal psychological experiences.

Maiter et al. (2008) describes reciprocity as "an ongoing process of exchange with the aim of establishing and maintaining equality between parties" (p. 305). I believe that this ethic should be upheld as much as possible in all researcher-participant relationships. In effort to adhere to the principle of reciprocity, I volunteered with the EWMA program for two months prior to data collection (as described in 2.5 Pre-Research Volunteer Phase below). Consistent with the critical theory approach (see 2.2 Theoretical Orientation

below), I believe that researchers are responsible for ensuring the dissemination of practical research findings to the stakeholders of the research, such that these stakeholders can gain and utilize knowledge grounded in their own experiences (e.g., Flicker, Travers, Guta, McDonald, & Meagher, 2007; Jansson, Benoit, Casey, Phillips, & Burns, 2010). The current study was my first research endeavour that melded principles from action-oriented research models and qualitative methodologies. My shifting professional and research values are influenced by the aforementioned liberation psychology framework, as well as the critical phenomenological research approach (described below).

2.2. Theoretical Orientation

I approached the research process through a critical phenomenological lens. In accordance with the critical theory paradigm (Denzin, 1994; Giroux, 1997, 1988), I believe that the socio-cultural context of one's experience is grounded in the shared reality of power relations. As a researcher, I believe I have a duty to aim to challenge the status quo and ultimately support socially critical action (Ponterotto, 2005; Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001). This paradigm is complimented by the previously discussed school of liberation psychology, which speaks more to our philosophical approach to understanding mental illness than to research methodology. Both these frameworks emphasize the notion of liberation from both the status quo and political neutrality.

Phenomenology exists in many different forms. This philosophical movement was founded by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who introduced the notion that knowledge should focus on our empirical understanding of the way in which the world is experienced by people (Langdride, 2008), and the extraction of the essential features of what is experienced. Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and other philosophers criticized Husserl's *transcendental* phenomenology. Heidegger was less concerned with the biological phenomenon of "human nature" than with the existential "ways of life" that inherently take place in the context of the whole world (which Heidegger called "significance"). In this sense, a "way of life" is "shared by the members of some community" (Haugeland, 2005, p. 423), which Heidegger described as *Dasein*, the distinct experience or "mode" of "being" realized by humans, inherently immersed in social, cultural and linguistic practices. This

school of thought became known as *hermeneutic* phenomenology, emphasizing contextual interpretation. Heidegger later highlighted that language does not simply correspond with reality, but changes humanity and our understanding of being itself (Haugeland, 2005). Therefore, our psychology is shaped and constrained by the institutional influences of society and culture as well as the constituent of language. Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) shared Heidegger's notion of phenomenology and argued that discursive and political context is an essential element of any examination of lived experience, integrating critique or "suspicion" into the analytic process (Kaplan, 2003). Ricoeur's (1996) perspective was aimed at understanding and disrupting the status quo in order to explore new possibilities for living (Langdride, 2008), thereby emphasizing the role of critical theory in phenomenological interpretation.

In this study, I hope that my interpretations of the data honoured the individual voice, and addressed appropriately the roles of critical theory and hermeneutics in framing my own interpretations of participants' perspectives and phenomenological experiences. As discussed by Ponterotto (2005), my embodied interactions with the study's art-makers and my interpretations of the data are unavoidably bound by my personal and academic exposures to, and interest in, the topics of psychology and social justice. I believe that the data from this study's in-depth qualitative interviews emerged from the researcher-participant relationship and our co-created reality. In contrast to the positivist research approach that is aimed at establishing norms and generalizations (Davis, 2010), researchers such as Jasper (1994) attest that the goal of hermeneutic phenomenology is to describe the phenomenon from the "accounts of those who experienced it" (p. 312). The reported accounts of the "experiencer" are contextualized by both the participant's as well as the researcher's life positions, worldviews and experiences. I accept the value of this *relational* approach to phenomenology (discussed by Finlay, 2002), as I believe that the researcher's biased and critical formulation of the data is not only inevitable, but useful so long as it has been made transparent to the readers. Such transparency helps to elicit a comprehensive understanding of the whole phenomenon of art-making and its psychological and socioeconomic functions (Sardello, 1971) through methodology that reflects the data "faithfully" (Giorgi, 1971). Moreover, in the context of phenomenology, *validity* is not established on the degree to which research findings respond reasonably to the research questions through hypothetico-deductive approaches (as it is in positivist

quantitative research), but rather, on the extent to which these research findings accurately “capture” the phenomenon of interest (Hycner, 1985). In critical phenomenology, validity is additionally evaluated on the basis of contextual and historical considerations (Giorgi, 2002). The theory and methodology underlying the verification of the data in the current study is addressed in greater detail below (see 2.11 Verification of the Data).

2.3. Research Design

This study employed a multiple case study design. This in-depth qualitative approach supports the exploratory goals of the study, as the particular area of inquiry is largely unexplored. In accordance with the adopted principles of phenomenology, *interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)* was used to examine the participants' psychological worlds at an in-depth level (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This method is aimed at providing insight into the ways in which individuals make sense of a particular phenomenon. In the proposed study, the phenomenon of interest is that of art-making, particularly amongst a group of women who spend a large amount of time in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside community and share an art studio space in this neighbourhood. IPA requires a distinctive commitment to detail, which has been recognized by researchers as grounds for smaller sample sizes (i.e., “five or six” participants) (Smith & Osborn, 2003). From the critical theoretical perspective, I explored and analyzed the participants' statements within the particular contexts of social and psychological theory.

As a qualitative research study, the research design is considered *emergent* in its nature. As common to qualitative research, some of the procedures utilized and the specific topics explored had not been anticipated or identified prior to data collection. In light of this *emergent design*, the data collection and analysis evolved over the course of the research project in light of the researcher's learning. Advice and permission from the Research Ethics Board at Simon Fraser University was sought when procedural changes influenced the level of risk involved in participation (in accordance with guidelines provided by Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2010).

2.4. Cooperation of the EWMA Program in the Current Study

Access to the Enterprising Women Making Art (EWMA) organization was granted following several meetings with EWMA program co-ordinator Jessica Numminem and Atira's executive director of operations Niki Antonopoulou. I was connected with these women through the Community Arts Council of Vancouver, which has a mandate focusing on "creating art projects that engage the community and facilitating, supporting, and advocating for initiatives, facilities, and programs that increase community participation in the arts" (Community Arts Council of Vancouver, n.d.). It is important to note that the current thesis does not necessarily represent the perspectives or goals of the EWMA program members and co-ordinators or of Atira Women's Resource Society. Nevertheless, Numminem and Antonopoulou both provided valuable feedback regarding the implementation of the study during pre-research meetings with these individuals. Also, the goals of the current researcher study were to understand the shared and divergent purposes of art-making for individual participants of the EWMA studio, and not to evaluate or modify the EWMA program.

2.5. Pre-Research Volunteer Phase

Establishing trust between a researcher and participants is essential to obtaining an accurate depiction of participants' experiences, especially when the research involves vulnerable populations or sensitive topics (Hanna, 2000). I volunteered at EWMA for two months prior to conducting the first participant interviews in effort to establish trust with potential research participants, to adhere to the principle of reciprocity, and to learn about the EWMA studio and the lives of the art-makers using the space through direct contact and first-hand program involvement.

During my initial meeting with Jessica Numminem, the program co-ordinator of EWMA, Numminem had expressed her concerns regarding the contentions surrounding short-term research collaborations between researchers and community members in the Downtown Eastside, and the risk of social exploitation and deception (J. Numminem, personal communication, April 26, 2012). Maiter et al. (2008) also emphasize the

importance of building transparent social relationships. Reciprocity goes beyond considerations of the outcomes of research participation, but it also considers what participants expect to obtain from their participation. For this reason, I chose to reveal explicitly my dual role as a volunteer and researcher with EWMA, upon introducing myself to art-makers at the organization. My volunteer-research-based relationship with the EWMA program was established prior to the study's approval from the university ethics board.

2.6. Eligibility Criteria

Due to the labour intensity of data collection and analysis, the current study included five participants. To be eligible for the proposed study, an individual must: (a) identify as a woman and (b) engage in visual art-making at EWMA. Although it was my preference that the participants represented diverse ages and cultural/ethnic identities, eligible participants were recruited on a "first-come-first-serve" basis to preserve inclusivity.

2.7. Participant Demographics

The study consisted of five women (including one self-identifying male-to-female transgender person) ranging from their 20s to 60s in age, with four of the five participants greater than 40 years old. Three of the participants were born and primarily raised in Canada and two of the five participants immigrated to Vancouver from Asian countries (China and a country that will remain undisclosed for participant confidentiality). In contrast to the relatively large proportion of Aboriginal women in the DTES, none of the participants identified as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit.

At the time of the participant interviews, three of the five participants lived in the DTES, while two participants spent much of their time in the DTES but lived in other parts of Vancouver. One participant was formally employed part-time, one participant worked part-time in the informal sector, and three participants were unemployed. Two of the unemployed participants volunteered regularly (outside of the EWMA program), and the

other was a “core artist” at the EWMA studio who attended the studio every weekday. The other four participants were “visiting artists” at the EWMA studio.

2.8. Participant Recruitment

Posters advertising the study were displayed at the EWMA studio and other nearby community spaces in the Downtown Eastside. These posters invited EWMA members who were interested in participating in the current study to contact the researcher.

Upon introducing myself to the studio's art-makers while volunteering, I informed them that I was both volunteering at the EWMA studio and conducting the advertised study. When women had questions about the study, I discussed the study with them. To ensure that participation was indeed voluntary and minimize social coercion, I did not verbally invite women to participate, unless they expressed clear interest and initiated questions about participation themselves. When individuals expressed interest in participating, I ensured that they met the study's eligibility criteria. I met with each interested and eligible individual at the EWMA studio to discuss the study, provide the opportunity to ask questions, and give the individual a copy of the study's Information and Consent form, which we discussed in detail. Participants were not allowed to consent to the study within 24 hours of receiving the consent form, and were encouraged to discuss participation with the co-ordinators at EWMA or myself prior to consent.

It is important to note that the EWMA program consists of a small group of artists who are closely connected to the Downtown Eastside community, posing strong specific risks to confidentiality. Meanwhile, failing to identify certain participants who assert their desire to be named could be deemed unethical (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2010), especially in consideration of the participants' potential self-identified roles as artists and/or activists. The consent form clearly discussed these issues and provided participants with the option to have their information de-identified in effort to protect confidentiality. Requests from participants to have any potentially identifying information withheld or further de-identified in reported results of the study were granted unconditionally.

2.9. Interview Procedure

An *interview guide* was prepared in advance of the qualitative interviews in order to generate insight into the particular areas of interest regarding the lives of the participants (see Appendix A). The interview was structured such that topics were introduced with minimally leading, open-ended questions, followed by more specific questions or prompts that helped to further explore the specific topics of interest (i.e., regarding the relationship between art-making, psychological health, and socioeconomic as well as sociopolitical adversity). The list of topics included in this guide was reviewed with the program co-ordinator of EWMA and executive director of operations at EWMA (J. Numminem & N. Antonopoulou, personal communication, June 20, 2012) who helped to ensure that these issues were addressed with sensitivity and clarity.

In contemporary understandings of qualitative methods, the interview is often conceived as a form of data *formulation* as opposed to collection. This distinction highlights the notion that the interview is co-constructed equally by the researcher and the participant (e.g., Dingwale, 1997; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). All interviews were conducted at the EWMA studio. At the start of each session, the interviewer ensured that verbal and written consent had been obtained. Two interviews were conducted with each participant, including a follow-up. Initial interview sessions ranged from approximately 1.5 to 2.5 hours per participant. The second (follow-up) sessions ranged from about 45 minutes to 1.5 hours in length. Each participant was remunerated a total of \$30 for her participation in the interviews.

All interviews were audio recorded. The *general interview guide approach* was used to allow the researcher to adapt the composition of the interview based on participants' responses to previous questions under the condition that the general topics covered during the sessions were consistent across interviewees (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; Turner, 2010). This particular interview format was selected to involve the participant in the narrative direction of the interview without compromising coverage of the researcher's broader questions. This format was used to encourage free flowing, authentic conversation. All interviews included discussions of the following topics:

1. The individual's demographic information and cultural background;

2. Her identity as an art-maker and her artistic activity both within and outside of the EWMA studio;
3. Personal psychological, financial, and sociopolitical issues that have affected the participant's life in important ways;
4. Her experience as a participant in the interview.

2.10. Data Reduction and Analysis

The procedures of IPA enable the researcher to systematically summarize participants' collective narrative accounts of the phenomena explored and identify the similarities and differences between cases. I essentially view the procedures of IPA as a method for “filtering” the interview data through stages of data synthesis, theme identification and theme clustering. Each of the stages of IPA is influenced by the degree of importance of a participant statement or emergent theme, which I refer to as “salience.” Salience is influenced by the frequency with which data emerges within and across participant interviews, and the researcher's impression of the “potency” and novelty of such data. I use the term “potency” to refer to the degree to which the data appears to resonate with the participant/s and evoke meaning to the researcher. I use the term “novelty” to refer to the degree to which the data represents information that is new or unique to the researcher. The frequency, potency, and novelty of the data to the researcher interact dynamically in forming the researcher's impression of data salience. As such, the factors affecting salience have no absolute hierarchical order of importance, but interact dynamically across each stage of data analysis. The specific procedures of IPA are described below:

Audio recordings of each interview were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Following this transcription, the researcher read each case several times and recorded comments regarding first impressions of the respondents' interview statements. These initial notes made by the researcher helped the researcher to summarize and paraphrase the data, identify emergent themes, and begin to develop interpretations within each participant's interviews transcripts (Smith & Osborn, 2003). For a selected sample of the researcher's analysis of the second interview session with Robin Johnson, see Appendix B.

It is important to note that, beginning from this initial stage of analysis in the current study, only interview statements that (a) related to the research questions, or (b) reflected exceptional salience, as judged by the researcher (based on the aforementioned criteria) were selected for inclusion in subsequent stages of data analysis. This selective approach to this initial analysis contrasts Smith and Osborn's (2003) approach to IPA, in which the entire transcript is analyzed. In the current study, the methodological decision to approach more selectively the initial analysis of data was made on the bases of both feasibility and strategy; I wanted to use this initial analysis as an efficient means of narrowing the scope of the data to topics that were at least partially related to my research questions, or exceptionally salient, so as to not "get lost" in unrelated data that frequently emerged from the interviews.

As per the second step of IPA, the researcher then created a list of the initial emergent themes within individual participant data (i.e., across the two interview sessions) and looked for connections among them (Smith & Osborn, 2003). All verbatim statements and interpretations of the data by the researcher that were relevant to the research questions and other salient topics were conceptualized in terms of new or re-emerging themes. Some themes clustered together, leading to the emergence of "superordinate" themes, which overarched subordinate themes or "subthemes." Once themes were clustered, they were cross-checked with the primary source material (i.e., the transcript) to ensure that the themes remained relevant (Smith & Osborn, 2003). These thematic clusters were progressively revised and refined, both before and after participant member checks of the general data that emerged from their specific case. All themes were given names and listed in the form of a detailed table.

In the third step of IPA, analyses of data from individual participants were re-read in consideration of their similarities and differences, which were noted by the researcher. Initially, I was concerned that I would bias the analysis by focusing overly on previously observed themes, so I intended to analyze the data in each case from scratch, using the same approach employed in the first case and minimizing thematic influences between cases. However, I came to realize that my memory of, and thus attention to, previously identified and clustered themes would unavoidably influence (or "situate") my conceptualization and formulation of the data at hand. The inevitability of this bias represents what hermeneutic philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002; 2000)

referred to as humans' "historically effected consciousness" (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*). In light of my dynamic process of understanding the data, comparing similarities between and among thematic clusters from individual data sets allowed me to attend to places where new data both converged with and distinguished itself from previously analyzed transcripts. This analytic process enhanced my understanding of similarities and differences among cases.

Following the analysis of each transcript, subordinate themes (or "subthemes") across participants were synthesized into a final table, and prioritized in terms of significance based on both prevalence in the transcript and richness of the passages. As Smith and Osborn (2003) warn, some thematic convergences manifest very differently across participants, which can result in the emergence of higher level convergence distinguished by idiosyncrasies of individual cases. Within- and between-participant differences and patterns across themes are discussed in Chapter 3 (Findings of the Study) and Chapter 4 (Discussion) below.

Data analysis continued into the writing stage, during which thematic clusters were refined. The correspondence between narrative accounts and themes were checked during the second phase of the member check (described below). Following this member check phase, themes were once again expanded in the form of explanation, example, and analytic commentary (Smith, 1996; Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Instead of working towards data saturation, Brocki and Wearden (2006) argue that the researcher should "acknowledge limits to the representational nature of their data" (p. 94). Given the multifarious and complex issues under investigation, along with the widely variable particularities of participants, saturation is unlikely in IPA. Moreover, some of the current study's findings reflected rich contingencies and particularities within individual cases, rendering generalization problematic.

2.11. Verification of the Data

Participants were each invited to engage in the optional *member check* procedure to verify that the researcher had transcribed and interpreted the data in accordance with what the participants believed that they had said and their meanings of their statements.

Participants were given the opportunity to respond to the researcher's interpretations and correct any misinterpretations or incongruence. This process consisted of two additional post-interview sessions, each representing a distinct phase of the verification process. Although all participants expressed interest in, and consented to this optional component of the current study, one participant (Una) only partially completed the first of the two phases of the member check procedure. Member check sessions ranged from approximately three to six hours per component (i.e., transcript check and data check). Participants were compensated \$20 for participation in each of these sessions, as they were expected to take only two hours each. All member checks were completed within six months of the participants' initial interview sessions.

During the first phase of the member check, each participant was asked to examine the two transcripts of her individual interviews and correct or comment on any discrepancies. The second phase of the member check was conducted following the researcher's completion of the initial data analysis for the individual case, within six months of the original qualitative interview. During this session, the participant was asked to verify or correct the identified themes identified by the researcher from the data analysis of the individual's interview. The researcher also used this member check session to receive clarification on the meaning of statements that were unclear or ambiguous to the researcher. Themes were modified and refined in accordance with participant's member check feedback.

Although agreement between the researcher and participant does not necessarily verify or confirm the authenticity of the data, member checking provides the opportunity for participants to express disagreement and clarify their previous statements and their underlying meanings. This opportunity for the participant to evaluate the researcher's observations and conclusions is guided by both methodological theory and ethical obligation, consistent with Flinders' (1992) notion of relational ethics. Furthermore, I believe that the researcher has an ethical responsibility to act with care and respect for each of the participants as persons. The member check procedure helps to "confirm" (Flinders, 1992) or support research participants by providing them an opportunity to review, reflect on, and contribute to the way in which they are represented in the report of the research findings. While apathy and overly compliant participation can never be controlled, the researcher observed that all participants generally appeared to be engaged

during the member checks. Participant engagement in the member checks was evidenced by: (a) frequent corrections of the researcher's inaccurate transcriptions of the participants' interview statements; (b) requests for clarification by the researcher on procedural instructions and the meanings of the researcher's analysis notes; and (c) voluntary continued engagement in this procedure well past the estimated task completion time (as observed across member check sessions of three participants).

As emphasized by Todres and Galvin (2006), it is important to note that, in IPA, validity is not about agreement between interpretations, but rather about "whether the embodied interpretation carries forward the general structure in plausible and insightful ways" (p. 52). In this sense, validity is determined by the reader's ability to: (a) comprehend how the researcher arrived at interpretations of the research findings, and (b) to find personal meaning in the researcher's description of the phenomenon of interest. Moreover, validity is never "confirmed" through co-analysis, because all phenomenological interpretations are perspectival and fallible. Agreement among multiple interpreters may not reflect improved validity, but rather the similarities of process or commitment to common cultural conventions between these interpreters. The phenomena under investigation are not simply empirical observations that can be objectively verified. They are interpretations of experience being made subject to interpretive analysis.

2.12. Data Dissemination within the Community

In addition to the publication of this study in the format of a thesis and possible academic articles, it is crucial that stakeholders in this research have access to the study's findings. In collaboration with the study's participants, I intend to present a brief and simplified version of the results to an audience who the participants deem relevant and likely to benefit from an understanding of the current study's findings. For example, the findings may be presented to the members and affiliates of the EWMA studio who did not participate in the current study, to the broader community of art groups in the Downtown Eastside or Vancouver, or to members of the Downtown Eastside community at large. The format in which the findings are presented (e.g., poster, pamphlet, oral presentation, artistic methods, etc.) also will be determined by the participants who consent to participating in this future portion of the research project. All participants of the current

study were given the option of being contacted in the future to partake in the community report/presentation (during the consent process), but no one was obligated. Participants also were given the opportunity to have their personal information de-identified in the community report/presentation, exclusively, due to greater risk of identification within the DTES community. Any potentially identifying information will be modified or omitted according to the requests of each participant who consents to having her case included.

Chapter 3.

Findings of the Study

3.1. Brief Individual Participant Profiles

We can only begin to understand an individual's purpose in art-making if we have some understanding of how art-making is embedded within the context of the individual's life. The following brief participant profiles are intended to help readers understand each of the participants' personal and artistic backgrounds, their worldviews, as well as their unique beliefs and experiences that contribute to their impressions of personal wellbeing or distress. These profiles are intended to enrich the reader's understanding of both the commonalities and differences in the ways in which the study's themes are represented across participants. In order to protect participants' requests for privacy and confidentiality, some information has been withheld intentionally or described only vaguely. Pseudonyms were used to identify all participants except for Robin Johnson (also referred to as Robin), who asked that her identity be revealed. Mae, A.C., and Pearl chose their own pseudonyms. The pseudonym "Una" (representing "unnamed artist") was selected by the researcher. Una originally requested that her actual name be used in publications of this study; however, I chose to use this pseudonym as I was unable to contact her part-way into her member check. No further contact was made by Una after that time.

3.1.1. Una

Background

"Una" (i.e., unnamed artist) was in her late 20s at the time of our interviews. She grew up in a small town in Northern Alberta. She described her childhood and adolescence as very affected by abuse, particularly the effects of her mother's Munchausen-by-Proxy Syndrome, whereby her mother encouraged and reinforced Una's frequent childhood injuries and illnesses, including psychiatric disorders. Una used heroin as a child, but was forced to quit "cold turkey" by her mother at age 12. She denied current drug use, but believed that quitting abruptly during childhood had contributed to physical health

difficulties experienced at the time of the interview. After being kicked out of her mother's house at age 15, Una came out as a male-to-female transgender person. She spent several years living in Edmonton, which included periods of homelessness, involvement in the sex trade, and living in group homes and supportive housing, which she described as "abusive." She moved to Vancouver in 2010, and had since been living in the Downtown Eastside. Una lived in a supportive housing unit for women since late 2012. She did not consider herself active enough in the DTES community to qualify as a "community member" of this neighbourhood; nevertheless, she expressed support toward social activist movements in the DTES.

Psychological and Socioeconomic Functioning

Overall, Una considered her life to have been significantly influenced by distress and personal challenges, largely relating to: (a) growing up in an "abusive environment"; (b) the implications of her transgender identity (both while in the "closet" and after coming out), including discrimination both at home and in the labour force; (c) multiple interpersonal conflicts with co-residents of past supportive housing residents; and (d) discrimination as a resident of the DTES, which reportedly influenced false allegations regarding the use of illicit substances (such as crystal meth and heroin), sexual assault, and ulterior motives regarding her sexual attraction to women. Throughout our interviews, Una described intense feelings of anger and rage. She stated that she had a "large spectrum on anger" and diverse means of expressing different forms of this emotion.

Una stated that she was diagnosed with a variety of mental illnesses during her adolescence and youth. She was first diagnosed through the school system (i.e., not by a psychiatrist or psychologist) with ADHD. Una was formally diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome (at age 11), Bipolar Disorder (at age 13), and Schizoaffective Disorder (at age 21). Una attributed her diagnosis of Schizoaffective Disorder to her history of overmedication of psychiatric drugs. In addition, she stated that most of her psychiatric diagnoses (i.e., "labels") have been greatly influenced by her mother's pathological motive to have Una labelled as ill. Una also briefly described having an eating disorder, but did not discuss whether this was formally diagnosed.

Una viewed herself as "somewhat of an outsider" in regards to cultural and social group identification, largely related to the aforementioned false beliefs about her held by

others. She also believed that certain labour markets were inaccessible to her as a result of gender discrimination. For example, Una described herself as “very skilled in computer programming,” but endorsed the belief that this industry is sexist and exclusionary toward women who are both skilled and physically attractive.

Art-Making and Participation at EWMA Studio

Una identified as an artist and considered this an important part of her identity. In particular, she somewhat viewed herself as a third generation surrealist, and was influenced by the creative approach to life of her father and grandfather. She also considered absurd comics (particularly Bill Waterson’s *Calvin and Hobbs* and Gary Larson’s *Farside*) to have major influences on her approach to humour and creativity. Una believed that, similar to Stephen King’s career as a novelist, Una had a few successful art pieces amongst her many creations. She often used a digital sketch pad to paint. Una described much of her digital artwork as “sequential art,” which involved storytelling through sequences of images, much like cartoons. She also creates single-image pieces. During our interviews, Una stated that she planned to create a memoir in graphic novel format, similar to a comic book. She stated that she has started this project, but had made little progress by the time in which she was interviewed for the current study. Una also stated that she sometimes produced sculptures and practiced drawing with her left (non-dominant) hand in a sketchbook.

3.1.2. Mae.

Background

Mae was in her 40s to 50s at the time of our interviews. She grew up in three different cities and towns in a Canadian prairie province. She completed two years of university, followed by the completion of a registered nursing program. She practiced as a nurse in three health facilities. Mae is Caucasian, but feels largely influenced by Aboriginal beliefs and worldviews to which she was exposed by First Nations friends during childhood.

Mae moved to Vancouver in 1992. Soon after moving, her mother became very ill which was very stressful for her, as she was concurrently working as a nurse, providing

emotional support for her father, and “taking care of a dysfunctional marriage.” Her father quickly became ill as well and died soon after the death of Mae’s mother. Mae moved to the Downtown Eastside between 2006 and 2007.

Mae stated that she strongly identified as a member of the DTES community, largely due to the fact that her and other members of this community shared similar experiences involving emotional traumas and “borderline poverty.” Mae expressed a great deal of respect for other residents of the DTES. She shared her belief that community members of the DTES generally care about and protect one another, despite the pain that they individually experience and inflict on one another.

Psychological and Socioeconomic Functioning

Following the death of her parents, Mae was formally diagnosed with severe clinical depression and anxiety (potentially including the specific diagnoses of generalized anxiety disorder, agoraphobia, and claustrophobia). From this period onward, Mae’s job as a nurse was interrupted. Mae also believed that she was experiencing symptoms of PTSD during the period in which the interviews were conducted.

Mae was hospitalized on several occasions for suicide attempts and depression, with the longest admission lasting six weeks. While hospitalized, Mae underwent electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) and attended a CBT-based therapy group, both of which she found to be effective in improving her mental health. Mae has tried various psychiatric medications (including amitriptyline, fluoxetine, lithium, and lorazepam) since the period in which she was hospitalized for clinical depression. At the time of our interview sessions, Mae was treated for depression with venlafaxine, citalopram, and quetiapine, which she believed to be effective.

Art-Making and Participation at EWMA Studio

At the time of our interviews, Mae often practiced needlework crafts including knitting and crocheting. She had previously engaged in other forms of art-making including painting and the creation of wind chimes. For each wind chime, Mae created a “wind catcher” upon which she designed and painted sacred geometry-based Tibetan mandalas. Prior to moving to the DTES, Mae had also taken painting classes.

Mae joined EWMA between 2007 and 2008. She was originally a “core artist,” but stepped back from this role to become a “visiting artist” when responsibilities increased at a local not-for-profit organization. Nevertheless, she has remained consistently involved with EWMA over the past five to six years. Mae stated that she practiced art-making on her own, and was not involved in any additional community art groups at the time of our interviews.

3.1.3. A.C.

Background

A.C. was in her 50s to 60s at the time of our interviews. She was born in China, but identified as “an international” due to her extensive work-related travels to Britain, Switzerland, and several African countries. A.C. studied English in university in her 20s and received a Master’s degree in journalism during her 40s. Before moving to Canada, she worked as a journalist, broadcaster, and translator. She also previously worked in China as a rural medical worker, distributing medical tablets and traditional Chinese herbs to farmers and other rural people. A.C. moved to Canada “a number of years” prior to our research interviews. At the time of these interviews, A.C. had been living in the DTES for approximately 10 years and identified as a “new resident” of this community. She had developed a commitment to, and sense of connection with, the DTES community through involvement in local community groups both inside and outside the realm of the creative arts. She expressed the view that most people in the DTES are “poor people,” but they are not “bad people.” Since 2007, A.C. had been living in a very small bachelor apartment with a shared bathroom, where she reportedly felt “very safe.” A.C. stated that she had never used drugs or been involved in the sex trade.

Psychological and Socioeconomic Functioning

At the time of our interviews, A.C. had never been diagnosed with mental health issues. She viewed herself as psychologically resilient and describes herself as a “very positive person” with an optimistic attitude. Nevertheless, she stated that one of her main personal struggles was her adjustment as a “newcomer” to Vancouver and Canada. While A.C. shared her belief that many Canadian immigrants become de-motivated and depressed due to employment difficulties, she clarified that her own experience as a

newcomer had been “difficult” but not depressing. She shared that she has not faced significant difficulties in her life before immigrating to Canada. However, the inability to find regular employment after moving to Canada was unexpected and “completely changed” her life. A.C. regarded the lack of employment opportunities in Canada as a major problem, particularly for new immigrants, women in her age group, and people living in the Downtown Eastside. A.C.’s experience as a newcomer involved developing new skills in an effort to gain employment opportunities and also studying her new local culture “like a baby”: “No one supports you anymore. You must depend on yourself. So when you depend on yourself, in a new place, you must study everything. You cannot imagine.”

At the time of our interview sessions, A.C. was employed part-time in a position that involved shopping, borrowing books, and computer work [position unspecified for confidentiality]. Nevertheless, A.C. considered herself to be underemployed. She described her increasing socioeconomic difficulties in regards to her inability to improve her living condition and her limitations on luxuries such as dining out. Meanwhile, A.C. stated that she had accepted her lack of income and employment in Canada; she stated that it was her decision to move to Canada, so she could not complain about this decision.

Art-Making and Participation at EWMA Studio

A.C.’s grandmother taught her to sew, knit, and crochet at age four, as this was part of women’s education in traditional Chinese families. However, A.C. did not use these art-making skills until she moved to Canada.

A.C. recognized that her opportunity for sales through EWMA had been limited, as she sometimes only made approximately \$2.00 per hour through EWMA sales. Thus A.C. did not depend on income solely from art-making. Nevertheless, she stated that it is part of her nature to put in her “best efforts” into anything in which she engages, including her art-making. A.C. joined the EWMA studio around 2010. Her artistic activities, both inside and outside of the studio, included knitting, sewing, and jewellery making. During the period in which our interviews were conducting, A.C. sometimes used the EWMA studio to create art (paintings, sewing, knitting, and jewellery), but seldom attended EWMA meetings and gatherings due to her limited free time. At the time of our interviews, A.C. had recently withdrawn from the EWMA studio some of her arts and crafts that did not sell.

A.C. stated that she does not consider herself an artist because she is unable to depend on art-making for financial security. However, A.C. stated that art-making brings her happiness. She described her creative approach to life, which helped to satisfy her needs while limiting her financial expenses.

3.1.4. Pearl

Background

Pearl was in her 40s at the time of our interviews. She was raised overseas [country undisclosed for confidentiality reasons]. She moved to Vancouver in 1976. At the time of our interviews, Pearl resided in East Vancouver, outside of the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. Nevertheless, she considered herself a community member of the DTES because she spent a large portion of her time volunteering and participating in community activities, including art-making, in this neighbourhood. At the time in which Pearl was interviewed, she was unemployed. She volunteered at a few places in the DTES, including a homeless shelter and at a community space. Pearl stated that she enjoyed volunteering and was generally satisfied with her financial situation, though she expressed a desire to get a job to “save more money.”

During our interviews, Pearl indicated that she identified as a devout Christian during childhood: “Heavenly Father Jesus Christ was always in my brain.” Pearl believed that she was less religious at the time of the interview than she was during childhood, but still considered Christianity to influence her life. Importantly, Pearl revealed that she concealed information about herself during our interviews in effort to be “humble” and avoid sounding “arrogant.” The researcher believes that this guarded communication may have influenced the way in which Pearl discussed her personal beliefs, impressions and life events during the interviews for the current study.

Psychological and Socioeconomic Functioning

During the period in which she was interviewed, Pearl had limited contact with her siblings, which contributed to psychological distress. Pearl stated that she was diagnosed with depression and schizophrenia by her psychiatrist when she was in high school. During our interview, she also discussed issues relating to anxiety and insomnia. Pearl

stated that she has been prescribed many different types of psychiatric medications, both oral and intravenous, over the past 31 years. During the period in which she was interviewed, she was taking clozapine, olanzapine, quetiapine, and loxapine. Pearl believed that her psychotropic medications were not helpful to her. She believes that these medications produced negative side effects including memory difficulties, discomfort, and anxiety. She stated that her only purpose for taking her psychiatric medications was to receive welfare money.

Art-Making and Participation at EWMA Studio

During the period in which interviews were conducted for the current study, Pearl identified as an artist. During this period, she was involved in sewing, drawing, painting, jewellery-making, and pottery. Pearl's father, who is a visual artist, encouraged her to learn to draw and paint and inspired her work. At the time of our participant interviews, Pearl's boyfriend also enjoyed art-making and taught a watercolour painting classes. Pearl considered him a source of inspiration to Pearl as she believed in the importance of having the same interests and career as her boyfriend.

Pearl practiced art-making primarily in community art spaces including EWMA. She joined EWMA in about 2008, and had since remained a "visiting artist." Since joining, Pearl took drawing, painting, and jewellery workshops at the EWMA studio. She also uses the studio to collect food and clothing donations. At the time of our interview sessions, Pearl estimated that she used the studio space typically one or two times per week. Pearl viewed the EWMA studio as a "very calm, very peaceful, very quiet" place to work. However, Pearl's schedule was usually poorly matched with the studio and workshop hours. In addition to her involvement at EWMA, Pearl also participated in an art studio for people who had been diagnosed with mental illnesses, a drawing and painting classes at a community education centre, and a "self-esteem pottery class." Pearl received her first and only community art grant in 2011, for a project in which she sewed purses.

3.1.5. Robin

Background

Robin Johnson is in her sixties. She was raised in Vancouver until the age of eight, and then spent substantial time residing in a suburb of Vancouver, as well as three different cities across the United States. At the time of our interviews, Robin was living in the West End neighbourhood of Vancouver, but actively participated in art-making in the DTES neighbourhood. Robin described mistreatment by her Grades 1 and 2 teacher, who corporally punished Robin for not paying attention, and intensely embarrassed her by putting a dunce hat on her head. This teacher failed Robin in Grade 1 and tried to hold her back again in Grade 2. Robin believed that this early experience with mistreatment by her teacher caused her a lack of academic motivation throughout her school years. In addition to being a victim of “subtle abuse” by a previous counsellor, Robin believed that she had experienced “subtle abuse” in a previous “on and off” romantic relationship in adulthood. However, Robin clarified that she was not emotionally affected by this subtle abuse because she was “hip to” the abuser’s attempts at verbal manipulation. She believed that her experience in a subtly abusive relationship made her attuned to similar patterns of the abusive cycle in other relationships, allowing her to recognize characteristics of the abuser and protect herself. Robin expressed some uncertainty regarding whether people, including past spouses, had been more attracted to Robin’s appearance than her personality. For this reason, Robin has been celibate for about 15 years.

Robin stated that she considered herself an “artist of the Downtown Eastside,” although she does not live in this neighbourhood:

I don’t know if I’m part of [the community], but I’m passionate enough to write about it, to stand up for it, to enjoy it, you know?

Robin shared her view that, at the time of our interviews, artistic opportunities in the DTES did not exist in “uptown” Vancouver. Robin stated that she felt “much more at home” in the Downtown Eastside community than she does “uptown” because people in this neighbourhood “say hello to you; they’re kind; they’re compassionate.”

Psychological and Socioeconomic Functioning

In regards to her views on mental health, Robin shared her belief that *all* individuals, including “the upper echelons,” deal with emotional issues and are “screwed up” in some way. She views herself as generally mentally stable and psychologically resilient, which she attributes largely with the demands of being a single mother. Nevertheless, Robin identified temporary life situations that have caused her to endure heightened psychological distress that impacted various areas of her life. These periods included the death of a son (in a house fire), her diagnosis of Hepatitis C while concurrently trying to quit smoking, becoming an “empty nester,” and a negative experience with a previous counsellor which resulted in the termination of therapy and lack of access to subsequent counselling. Robin also described discord in her relationships with her two middle sons, which was particularly distressing for her around the period in which our interviews were conducted. Despite going through these difficult experiences, Robin emphasized their temporary influences on her life, largely attributable to her psychological resilience:

I'm telling you about one little part of my life where because I found out that I had that, because I quit smoking that I know that my mental health was strained at that moment. But the rest of the time, I was totally together, you know? And there's certain times in your life where—Like, one time I had a nervous breakdown when I found out that my kids' dad was gonna leave me. Right? Stuff like that. But I would say that out of all the things that I have gone through in my entire lifetime, it's, it's amazing that my mental health has stayed as intact as it has, right?

The statements below help to characterize Robin's understanding of her own experiences of heightened distress:

And so, you know, there's some times in your life when you're more strained or stretched than others, right? And if you stay in that kind of pattern too long then you have to really try to hold your mental health together, you know? And it's an uncomfortable place. You want to sort of go along with your day-to-day stuff and your gardening and stuff like that, and not have to experience any emotional stress or something.

And I think a lot of mental health with other people from my experiences, that if you go through something traumatic or something extremely frightening, it can change how your brain waves or chemistry in your brain or something like that, and the fear is really a bad thing.

And I mean, my conscious brain was totally conscious of everything, but the fear was making me act ill-rational, maybe not at first, but it contributed to me being ill-rational.

During our interviews, Robin stated that she had recently been receptive to opportunities to improve her emotional health because she wants to be happy and get rid of the “baggage” in her life. She found that expelling her so-called baggage through art therapy was very interesting and useful in developing personal insights. Robin has also engaged in other therapeutic activities including counselling, a women’s advocacy group and a grief walking group. Despite her importantly distressing issues with her most recent counsellor, Robin had found other counselling experiences to be very helpful for the most part.

Art-Making and Participation at EWMA Studio

After childhood, Robin did not re-engage in art-making until 2005, when she began volunteering in the pottery room of a community space in downtown Vancouver. Soon after, Robin became a member of another community space in the Downtown Eastside along with the EWMA studio. She started as a “core artist” at EWMA, but then became a “visiting artist” due to the interference of other commitments such as gardening. From 2005 to 2013 (when our interviews were conducted), Robin continuously engaged in pottery, sculpture, carving, photography and painting. During one of our interviews, Robin stated that art-making was central to her identity. When asked if art-making played an important role in her life, Robin replied, “Extremely. It’s what I am.” Robin identified as an artist, and conceptualizes her role as a gardener as a component of her artist identity. Robin also described her Grade 3 teacher as an important influence in her art-making and her self-esteem as an art-maker. She described herself as destined to emotionally express herself through art-making:

I was meant to be humbled. And I was meant to sense and feel in a deep way...

...[S]o art to me would be as natural as the feathers on me. It’s who I am, right? There’s no way in hell I would have ended up not being an artist. And I think that most artists feel that way.

3.2. Introduction to Themes across Participants

Prior to describing participants' purposes for engaging in art-making, it is necessary to distinguish differences in the ways in which art-making was conceptualized across participants during the study's interviews and member checks (see Table 1). The researcher's understandings of the participants' conceptualizations of art-making were based on their endorsements of particular meanings of the terms "art," "art-making," and "artist." Most participants (four of five) described art-making as a form of creative expression. Notably, four of five participants stated explicitly that "art-making" includes activities beyond traditional visual arts. Definitions of art-making endorsed by participants included creative writing (Mae), gardening (Robin), "trouble-mak[ing]" (Una), and approaching everyday life in creative ways (A.C. & Robin). Nevertheless, all interviews focused primarily on the topic of visual art-making. In the current thesis, the term "art-making" is used in reference to visual art forms, unless otherwise specified.

Overall, all participants' purposes for engaging in (visual) art-making were multi-layered. Across participants, the purposes for art-making were grounded on a series of emotional, financial and sociopolitical benefits to the art-makers, seemingly perceived largely as independent from one another. Psychological insight, self-monitoring, affective processing, and creative fulfillment seem to be attained through the artistic process and reflections on the aesthetic product. Meanwhile, financial reward (even if only minor) served as a common incentive for art-making, and also seemed to contribute to the psychological outcome of self-esteem enhancement among participants. Two participants (A.C. and Robin) also emphasized the inherent value of art itself as an underlying reason for engaging personally in art-making.

Table 1 summarizes the definitions of art-making and the overall purposes of art-making across participants.

Table 3.1. Summary of Definitions and Purposes of Art-Making Endorsed Across Participants

Category Dimensions	Una	Mae	A.C.	Pearl	Robin
Definition of Art-Making					
Expression of personal beliefs, emotions and experiences		X			X

Category Dimensions	Una	Mae	A.C.	Pearl	Robin
Expression of skill / talent / effort					X
Creative expression	X	X	X		X
Spiritual expression		X			
Aesthetic creation				X	
Extension to activities beyond traditional visual arts	X	X	X		X
Purpose of Art-Making					
Mental Health	X	X		X	X
Pleasure			X	X	X
Sense of accomplishment (both psychological and financial)	X	X	X	X	X
Skill development	X		X	X	
Sociopolitical / cultural fulfillment	X				X
Spiritual fulfillment		X			
Creative fulfillment		X			X
Aesthetic fulfillment			X	X	
Financial opportunity	X	X	X	X	
Contribution to inherent value of art			X		X
Healing others		X			

Table 2 shows the frequency with which superordinate themes and subthemes were endorsed across participants. Table 2 also displays the specific constellation of themes endorsed by each participant individually. As discussed in Chapter 2 (Methods), the frequency with which a theme was endorsed across participants does not alone characterize theme salience. There are several other factors that contribute interactively to the salience of a theme, such as: the frequency of theme-relevant statements across a single participant's interviews; the degree of "potency" with which a theme is endorsed; and, the degree of novelty of a theme to the researcher. It is not possible to quantitatively rank themes and subthemes in hierarchical order of overall importance. Nevertheless, Table 2 summarizes which themes were endorsed by whom.

Table 3.2. Summary of Endorsement of Themes Across Participants

Superordinate Theme Sub Theme	Una	Mae	A.C.	Pearl	Robin
Art-Making for promotion of mental health					
Emotional expression and release		X	X		X
Attentional deployment as stress relief			X	X	

Superordinate Theme Sub Theme	Una	Mae	A.C.	Pearl	Robin
Immersion in creative “flow” and heightened awareness of self and others		X			X
Increased insight into emotions and symptoms of distress	X	X			X
Self-esteem, skill-building and accomplishment	X	X	X	X	X
Goal-oriented activity as means of resilience	X				
Enhancement of art through understanding of hardship	X				X
Socio-economic aspect of psychological distress and art-making					
Psychological resilience in the face of poverty	X	X	X		X
Limitations on art-making resources (see Table 3)	X	X	X	X	X
Opportunity for income generation, with limitations	X	X	X	X	
Art-making as expression and clarification of values and beliefs					
Mental health in society					X
Environmentalism					X
Feminism					X
Other sociopolitical perspectives	X				
Culture			X		
Spirituality		X			
Religion				X	
Communication and discourse regarding social and economic power inequality					
Feeling unsupported in previous disclosures regarding psychological difficulties	X			X	
Overcoming stigma regarding mental illness		X			X
Sensitivity regarding use of social justice-oriented language			X		X
Impressions of the current study and interview					
Overall positive impressions	X	X	X	X	X
Intellectual interest and engagement in the research		X	X		X
Feeling “heard”	X	X	X	X	X
Support of scholarly recognition of topics explored in current study	X	X	X		
Expectations of social and political (but not personal) outcomes	X	X	X		

Note. ‘X’ indicates that theme or sub-themes was endorsed by participant personally in self-reference (i.e., generalized endorsement of themes in reference to others or general population are excluded from table).

3.3. Superordinate Theme 1: Psychological Purpose of Art-Making

3.3.1. Promotion of Mental Health through Art-Making

Four of five participants (Robin, Mae, Una, and Pearl) discussed the psychological benefits of their artistic activities in their lives. These psychological benefits were judged by the researcher to be a notably salient aspect of art-making for three of these participants. While Robin purposefully engages in art therapy, both Mae and Una also create art as a conscious means of coping with emotional distress and consider their art-making to be “healing.” In fact, Mae described art-making as an *inherent* means of managing her depression and anxiety: “It isn’t really a choice.” Pearl did not specifically address art-making as “therapeutic” or “healing,” but she stated that drawing and painting is “fun” and “feel[s] good,” and that these activities make her feel “very relaxed.” She particularly enjoys working with “bright and gorgeous” colours and “shiny” art mediums.

A.C. was the only participant who did not identify personal psychological benefits from art making (outside the realm of self-esteem enhancement), which she related to her belief that she does not suffer psychological or financial distress. Nevertheless, A.C. stated that art-making promotes a “positive life attitude” and is healthy for all individuals, regardless of mental health or socioeconomic status.

Expression and Release of Negative Emotions

Three participants (Una, Mae, and Robin) described art-making as a means of emotional expression, while the other participants did not discuss the role of emotional expression itself in the art-making process. This theme was particularly salient for Robin and Una. Both participants described emotional expression of negative emotions through art-making as a healthy and adaptive process that contributes to overall psychological well-being. Both Robin and Una also described the influence of distressing life events on “dark” and “disturbing” artistic content, which contributed to positive emotional outcomes. Robin described “dark” and “really ugly paintings” which she created during art therapy, uncharacteristic of her artistic style outside of the art therapy context.

Robin's description of the process of emotional release through art-making was rich in detail. Two weeks prior to the first research interview session, Robin began art therapy as an attempt to access a form of emotional relief voided by her lack of access to counselling. Robin stated that she used art therapy to help her process her negative counselling experience, her "estranged" relationships with two of her sons, and the "losses" she has experienced in her life, as a whole. Robin repeatedly used the terms "compressed" and "condensed" to describe the bottled-up state of her emotions during a recent period in which she did not have sufficient access to counselling:

And I'm sure, I'm sure that whatever stuff I'm experiencing emotionally, like from my children and losses and stuff like that, should be something that should be concentrated to get it the hell out of me.

Robin also described the benefits of expressing intensely negative emotions through art-making:

...So [my emotions] come out more angrier, right? And that's why I'm saying that painting would be good for people that do have a lot of rage and do have a lot of anger.....

So if you get to do it in art, and you get to let that leak it out slowly over a long period of time, then maybe it won't be coming out in a bad way.

Engagement in the release of "suppressed" negative emotions through art-therapy also seemed to allow Robin to progress towards increased awareness and expression of positive emotions:

But I do know that if, when I go to the fifth class, I'm going to struggle with finding something else that is bothering me. And I might have to succumb to painting a nice picture, right? Because I might run out of bad things that are bugging me, right?

Una described how she translates her own experiences into visual art using abstraction, surrealism, humour and mockery: "... [art-making] also allows me to vent my frustrations out onto the thing. It's like, if I'm gonna be irritated or ticked off at something I'm probably gonna be mocking it in the images somewhat." Her artwork sometimes depicts her nightmares, the tones of which she described as "passive-aggressive," "paranoid," and "dystopian" tones, reminiscent of the science fiction writing of Philip K.

Dick. She stated that trauma and PTSD have particularly influenced her “psyche,” which inherently influences the themes underlying her art, such as violence (particularly depicted through sexual fetishism), war, and rape (particularly “tentacle rape”). For example, Una has had nightmares about “Bad Head,” a reported twin which Una believes she had eaten in-utero, who appears in her nightmares as a partially human figure with tendrils: “And it’s usually just a bunch of flesh plant vines trying to digest things when they touch them.” Una believes these nightmares represent “pent up” anger and frustration, particularly relating to sibling rivalry and her lesbian transgender identity. Una reported that art-making helps her to cope, in a general sense, with trauma and the above underlying psychological themes. For example, Una believes that her artistic depictions of “Bad Head” helps her to process the belief that she ate her twin in-utero and to cope with her “painful” and “scary” nightmares in which “Bad Head” appears. However, I was unclear about *how* or *why* Una’s artistic representations of these psychological themes were helpful, as Una did not further elaborate.

Attentional Deployment as Stress Relief

While two of five participants (A.C. and Mae) discussed psychological benefits relating to directing attention to art-making, A.C.’s account was based on her impressions of benefits to others as opposed to herself. Participant accounts of the process of shifting focus to the activity of art-making seemed to closely relate to accounts of stress relief associated with art-making, as suggested by Mae:

...[A]rt-making is my solace. That's where, that's where I get back to my equilibrium. That's where I can, you know, everything's, the playing field becomes level again. See, for me, when I'm knitting, it's a meditation. The clipping of the needle, it's very soothing to the soul kind of thing...

Mae considered knitting to be meditative partly because it enables prolonged focus on visual qualities (e.g., colour, patterns), tactile sensation (e.g., textures of the fabric) and the movement of her hands. A.C. provided a similar account of the role of attention in art-making, suggesting that this is a “positive” activity for individuals with mental illnesses because it gives both their hands and their minds something on which to focus. It is interesting to note that Mae also likened art-making to meditation, as described by Robin in the thematic description of creative “flow” (below). Attention to these sensations helps

to distract Mae from stressors and elevate her mood when feeling anxious, stressed, or unhappy. During the interview, Mae came to the realization that knitting sometimes serves the role of an avoidance behaviour, which can sometimes isolate her during relationship conflicts. While Mae seemed to emphasize this predominantly positive function of attentional shifting, it was unclear whether Mae appraised the function of this particular avoidance behaviour as positive, neutral or negative.

According to the researcher's understanding of participants' accounts, sustained attention to art-making also seemed to facilitate a sense of calmness and relief from stress. Both Mae and Pearl specifically referred to the relaxing effects of art-making that involve the repetition of a particular motor technique (i.e., needlecraft work, and outlining a shape in continuous spiral, respectively). Of the participants interviewed, only Mae and Pearl discussed art-making as a form of relaxation. Interestingly, both these participants seemed to suggest a relationship between the use of repetition in artistic technique and the "relaxing" or "soothing" effects that they described. Other participants seemed to suggest that they use art-making as a form of coping by intentionally engage with personal emotions and emotionally stimulating experiences as a means of coping (described by Robin as "not fun"), as opposed to a means of relaxation. In other words, some participants do not expect immediate stress relief from their artistic endeavours. Rather, these participants seem to re-experience negative affect portrayed through art-making in order to help mitigate these negative emotions over time.

Immersion in Creative "Flow" and Heightened Awareness of Self and Others

Both Robin and Mae (two of five participants) somewhat abstrusely describe the process of art-making as deep and partially unconscious absorption that transcends the creative aspect of the process, the subject matter, and the final artistic product. Robin stated her belief that there is a "magical" component of the healing process of art-making, which she related to the ways in which art-making promotes personal expression and comfort:

Yeah. I'm thinking it's [art-making is] magical 'cause it transcends the person into—They get away from themselves, even though they might be putting themselves into the art, like a self-portrait or something, right? At the moment they don't have to think about other things. In the

moment they're just taken over by this nice, fuzzy, healthy place, you know?

Art [therapy] is almost like meditation. Because how much time do we have in our lives to ever sit down and do something like that?... Like, how many times do we get to be, like, aware of ourselves and into whatever we're doing? Not too often, right? I think that's one of the reasons that people like driving; 'cause they're sort of half-aware of who they are at the time.

Mae depicted a similar notion of deep immersion in the art-making process such that, in her view, the art-maker, spiritual energy, the creative process and the artwork become synergistic in their promotion of health and wellness. This was evident in Mae's description of both her processes of creating wind chimes for particular recipients who were ill as well as her creation of a knitted scarf with the colours of the chakras for a Reiki teacher, described respectively in the quotes below:

...so when I started making the wind chimes for her, the colors and pattern to use flowed from her essence into the process.

As I was knitting that particular section, I would envision a specific symbol that would be sort of the energy imbued into that.

On certain art projects, Mae specifically integrated meditation into her practice:

When the wind chimes are happening, when I create the wind-catcher part, which is a mandala, you know, the Tibetan mandalas that they use as a centre point, for focusing for meditation? What I do before I even start to draw the design, I do a meditation, and then I start to work. And it's like, I'll start in the centre and then I'll work outwards. And the design itself, I'll use elements of sacred geometry. And then, the colours I'll use to paint it, it's like, I'll just let my mind go blank and I'll start to paint.

Mae described how her spiritual worldview fits into her creative process. This is depicted through her definition of art-making as "anything creative that is not of, that springs from the imagination or is from your spirit. It's very metaphysical." When describing her creative process, Mae stated, "...[A] lot of it is this feeling of, you know, it's guided from a, from a higher power you might say." She also endorsed the belief that "[w]e're all energy. And everything vibrates at a certain level." Mae described her use of the term "higher power" as "internal connection to the Divine Spark we all share as human beings."

She views her art-making as one manifestation of her salient belief that “[w]e are all spiritual beings having a human experience.”

Increased Insight into Emotions and Symptoms of Distress

Three participants (Mae, Robin, and Una) discussed reflection of their artworks and art-based self-monitoring as means of increasing awareness and understanding of their emotions and their symptoms related to their psychological difficulties (described below).

Via Reflection following Project Completion

Two of the five participants (Mae and Robin) discussed the therapeutic value of reflection of their artistic creations following its completion. Both participants shared that their reflective processes often results in increased insights into themes in their work that were not consciously intended or recognized during early stages of the creative process. For example, Robin created a nude painting called “Circus Girl.” After completing this piece, Robin recognized that her creation was, in fact, a “self-portrait” that depicted her impression of her “past sexuality.” Robin shared her belief that in her past, people were more attracted to her physical qualities than they were to her “soul” and “the person [she is],” which “irked” her. Robin believes that this unconscious introspection is a common phenomenon:

... I think a lot of artists paint self-portraits or make self-portraits without realizing it. It may even be something abstract, right?

Similarly, Mae described that she often “look[s] back at [her art] and see[s] what it was that [she] was creating.” For example, she coloured geometric patterns (mandalas) in an “adult colouring book” over the course of her mother’s illness. Following completion, her review of her colour selection helped her to gain “conscious” insight into her emotional transition over the course of her mother’s hospitalization, as well as the “profound” emotional process of supporting her mother and what they were “sharing together” during this period. Upon reflection of her colouring, Mae also developed the insight that she was unconsciously processing the “terrible ordeal” of her mother’s illness through this very artistic activity.

Via Continual Self-Monitoring

In addition to its role in personal reflection, art-making may also serve as a tool in psychological self-monitoring, as endorsed by two of five participants (Mae and Una). Mae stated that she has always used art-making as a means of unconsciously monitoring her mental health, but only began to use it *consciously* as a monitoring tool following her recognition of her need to address actively her mental health issues. Both the content of her visual art as well as the frequency of her artistic activity serve as measures of her mental health. For example, periods of inactivity in her art-making (as well as her creative writing) signal her to “check in” with herself and explore her mental health state. She stated that these “check-ins” usually help her to identify emotions that she has “bottled up from the past” and has been avoiding: “When I’m not creating, I know I’m in trouble.”

Una uses art-making to monitor and manage her visual and auditory hallucinations. Her description of this process is provided below, but she did not elaborate further:

...I had a sketchbook that I drew in and headphones that I listened to for the simple reason that I could tell what was a hallucination on the sketchbook page fairly quickly. I did fairly reasonable—what was there; what wasn't there.

Self-Esteem, Skill-Building, and Accomplishment

Based on the researcher’s understanding of the interview data, all participants in the current study endorsed a sense of accomplishment and self-esteem from their art-making. All of the participants shared positive impressions of praise and recognition of their artwork and artistic skills, suggesting that positive appraisal from others serves as an important source of accomplishment for the art-makers. Other sources of accomplishment varied across participants and included the aesthetic quality of their artistic creations (i.e., the beauty and uniqueness of their works), the personal sense of skill development, and the ability to generate income from art-making, even if only minor. In fact, three of five participants (Pearl, A.C., Mae) suggested that the relationship between art-making and self-esteem is partially mediated by the saleability of their artworks.

Robin described the pressure to achieve financial reward and develop her reputation as an artist, outside the context of art therapy. She consciously redirects her

effort and motivation towards the goal of appreciation and admiration for the *artwork* rather than the artist:

...I was only on this mini-treadmill for a little while; I thought, 'I gotta get there'. And then I thought: Wait a minute... Stop being on this treadmill—Somebody one day will own this piece of work and maybe it will be passed on, but they will really enjoy it. And that's the whole purpose of making art...

Nevertheless, Robin went on to describe the dynamic interaction between her motivations to creating art that *she* wants to create, to create art that will be admired by others, and to create art that will develop her reputation as an artist. The researcher interpreted Robin's statements to reflect Robin's need for achievement and its ineluctable influence on her art-making.

Goal-Oriented Activity as Resilience

Related to the above theme of art-making as a source of accomplishment, one of five participants (Una) described art-making in terms of its ability to increase goal-oriented activity and meaning to her day-to-day life. She described her effort routinely to practice art-making as a means of counteracting her enmeshed physical and psychological adversities associated with her traumatic history. This theme seemed to be a particularly salient aspect of Una's overall psychological purpose of creating art. Una's goals include improvements in her range of physical motion, her left-handed dexterity, and her artistic skills in general:

So I refuse to allow it [participant's body] to break down. I'm gonna keep trying and going; I'm gonna keep trying to do stuff; I'm gonna keep trying to get out there... So, yes, I've got a lot of old, old stuff that my body still has not figured out how to function or process—that I'm still trying to fight, and that's part of what art-doing is.

...I mentally died a year ago...I was mentally gone for a bit...and coming down here [to the EWMA studio] is like, kay. I'm doing something for the entire f*cking day. I'm gonna use this to sort of at least get out there and actually do something. Like, even if you struggle, you're still making distance...

Right now, I've got a long list of impossible goals, and I know that they're f*cking impossible, but that's the point. I'm going to keep going at it, and I'm going to keep measuring my progress, as I go trying to do

the impossible, and seeing how close I can get to doing the impossible.
So that's what my main thing right now is.

3.3.2. Enhancement of Art through Understanding of Hardship

Two of the participants (Una and Robin) suggested that experiencing life stressors inspire and enhance the quality of their visual artwork. Robin described her *appreciation* of her distressing life experiences, such as the estrangement from two of her sons, the death of another son in a house fire, and her negative experience with a counsellor. She stated that these experiences allowed her to experience “deep,” “strong” emotions which, in turn, enabled her to create “fabulous, disturbing paintings,” particularly in the context of art therapy. Robin also shared that her life stressors had served as a catalyst for art-making in the past. For example, Robin’s dissatisfaction with her most recent previous counselling experience ignited “creative anger passion” which led her to seek an activity that would help her to process her emotions in the absence of counselling. Robin stated that her negative counselling experience let her to be particularly receptive to her opportunity to participate in art therapy.

Una reported that her first-hand traumatic life experiences seem to enhance her viewers’ interest in her artwork: “A lot of people consider my art really neat and kind of interesting to look at because the trauma I've been through influences what I’m drawing, what I'm depicting, and what I am generally showing...”

3.4 Superordinate Theme 2: Socioeconomic Aspect of Psychological Distress and Art-Making

3.3.3. Relationship between Socioeconomic Adversity and Psychological Distress: Resilience in the Face of Poverty

While four of the participants discussed current issues relating to financial strain and underemployment, only two of these participants (Una and Mae) suggested that they consider their lives to be significantly affected by financial distress. Robin identified as “poor and proud of it” and denied distress relating to financial difficulties. The fact that three participants did not identify as financially distressed may suggest that financial

distress simply does not significantly contribute to psychological distress in their lives. In support of this view, four of five participants (Una, Mae, Robin and A.C.) described the salient role of psychological resilience in their lives. Perhaps one of the mechanisms for maintaining resilience includes coping adaptively with low income or welfare dependency. For example, A.C. describes her use of “creative” solutions to manage her tight budgets, such as sewing her own underwear. Mae, who admitted to the role of financial distress in her life, described her efforts to accept the financial limitations in her life in order to counteract negative emotions. She aims to be more “[w]illing to live with less. And like it.”

3.3.4. Role of Socioeconomic Distress in Art-Making: Socioeconomic Limitations on Art-Making Resources

None of the participants identified a role of financial distress in the content of their artwork. Nevertheless, all participants identified limitations in art-making resources (including time and space) that interfered with their capacity to, or extent to which they, engage in art-making (see Table 3 below). All five participants identified financial strain as a factor contributing to various practical limitations on art-making. This ranged from lack of access to a studio or work space of sufficient size to making do with inexpensive or studio-provided materials and tools, such as sewing machines. As Una identified, poverty-related issues that threaten quality of life, such as homelessness and lack of food, also bear on the individual’s ability to engage in art-making. In sum, the content of participant artwork sometimes expressed psychological issues, but none of the participants in the current study suggested the influence of financially-driven distress on the content of their works. Nevertheless, all participants in the current study identified limitations on the art-making process, driven by either financial or psychological set-backs.

Table 3.3. Art-Making Needs and Extent to Which Needs Have Been Satisfied Across Participants

Art-Making Needs	Una	Mae	A.C.	Pearl	Robin
Reasonably sized work space	X; Y	X; L	X; L	—	X; L
Reasonable personal time availability	X; Y	—	—	X; L	X; N/A
Reasonable studio hours	X; Y	—	X; L	X; L	X; L
Sufficient access to materials	X; L	X; L	X; L	—	—
Comfortable working conditions (i.e., quiet, safe, peaceful, etc.)	—	X; Y	X; Y	X; Y	X; L
Access to basic survival needs (i.e., food)	X; L	—	—	—	—

Access to skill-based support	X; N	—	—	—	—
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Note.

Y = Need was overall satisfied, according to researcher’s understanding of participant’s account.

L = Important limitation on extent to which need is satisfied, according to researcher’s understanding of participant’s account.

N = Need was not satisfied, according to researcher’s understanding of participant’s account.

N/A = Satisfaction of need not discussed by participant.

— = Need was not clearly endorsed by participant.

3.3.5. Socioeconomic Purpose of Art-Making: Opportunity for Income Generation, with Limitations

The researcher’s interpretation of participant interviews revealed that four of the five participants (A.C., Pearl, Mae and Una) (a) considered themselves underemployed, based on their levels of skill or their financial needs, and (b) considered financial opportunities and incentives to contribute to the purpose of at least some of their artistic endeavours. Participants primarily discussed these issues in light of the saleability of their work. For example, one of the major reasons A.C. creates artwork is to generate some money to support small improvements in her quality of life (such as the purchase of healthy food) through an activity that she enjoys. A.C. only began to consider art making a means of financial support when she first experienced major difficulty finding employment, after immigrating to Canada.

For Una, the goal to increase commission contributes to her motivation to improve the quality of her works. Notably, two of the participants who view the financial purpose of art-making as central to their work discussed disappointment in their inability to sell their artwork through EWMA over the past few years.

Robin did not indicate explicitly that her art-making is influenced by financial incentive. However, as discussed previously in regards to self-esteem and accomplishment, Robin recognized her past tendency to overvalue commercial recognition and as a result, she makes an intentional effort to overcome this motive by focusing her attention on the art piece rather than her reputation as an artist.

3.3.6. Socioeconomic and Psychological Purposes of Art-Making as Predominantly Independent

Based on the researcher's synthesis of the interview data and attention to salient statements made by participants, the psychological purposes of art-making had equal, if not greater, value to participants, as compared to financial motives. With the exception of the interplay between financial and psychological purposes of art-making within the realm of self-esteem and skill development, no direct relations between the psychological and socioeconomic functions of art-making were described by participants in the current study.

3.4. Superordinate Theme 3: Sociopolitical Aspect of Art-Making: Expression and Clarification of Sociopolitical, Cultural and Spiritual Values and Beliefs

Four of the five participants (Robin, Una, A.C., and Mae) discussed personal artistic projects (including one idea for a community-based initiative) that represent social, political and cultural expression and action. Two of these participants discussed artworks that explicitly served as a vehicle for responding to social, political and environmental injustices. Robin described several self-made art pieces representing sociopolitical themes. She described herself as "passionate" about both social and environmental topics "that really bother [her]." She believes that passion about societal change is common across artists in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. For example, Robin created a surreal painting that depicted her views on the fragility of substance abusers in Vancouver. This painting portrayed a "cookie man leaning against the building" of a community art space in downtown Vancouver, with coins over his eyes, representing death:

...because you've got to be very careful with how you handle them [substance abusers] because they're fragile and they can break. Which is a very beautiful thing to say about someone that's strung out on drugs. You know? And not necessarily a bad person; they've been damaged somehow so be careful with them.

Robin has also created and participated in a "one woman" protest in which she stood at a major intersection (Burrard St. & Nelson St.) in downtown Vancouver, displaying

a sign that read “Your car is f-ck-ng the planet,” with photocopied photographs of “oil-soaked birds.” She had a one-hour footage of this demonstration documented on videotape, which was exhibited in a community art space in the Downtown Eastside.

A salient theme that emerged across Robin’s interviews was her belief that every woman is inherently powerful regardless of her personal struggles. This feminist theme was depicted in parallel to the struggle and strength of Native peoples in a painting which she made at the EWMA studio. The painting depicted a black eagle “going towards the sun,” which represents women and their struggle. The sun represents the women’s “objective.” The eagle and sun are framed between two totems which represent the struggle that Native people have endured throughout history. Robin stated that the colours red and black were used to represent “the war that we go through” and “a transitional period,” respectively. She also included a text border which she described during our discussion of the concept of “empowerment.” The text read:

I don’t like the words ‘empower women’. We may get lost along life’s path. But we have never been un-powerful. Women are one of the most powerful things on earth.

Una reported that political motifs are frequently depicted in her artwork. In one piece, Una alludes to political propaganda through the depiction of a crocodile wearing a trench coat, a fedora and a Richard Nixon mask:

...and he's talking about how he's a completely trustable human or what-not, walking around, just as though he's one of the rest of the humans, or whatever, and like, it's kind of a humorous thing. Like, he's obviously there to eat people. He's obviously a predator...But at the same time, it's like, how he's talking is, like, completely removing of the view that he's not. And you get a lot of people that do try to do that sort of thing.

In another art piece, Una satirized the concept of “equal opportunity” by depicting a fictitious tanning salon restaurant that does not discriminate between chicken versus human meat sources. In this piece, the wealthy tanning salon customers who are tanned to death are fed to the restaurant customers.

Pearl and A.C. seemed to express their religious and cultural values, respectively, through art-making. While Pearl depicts Christian figures (such as Jesus and Mother

Mary) and symbols (such as the Holy Bible) in her artwork, A.C. often includes Chinese zodiacs as well as Chinese characters in her works. For instance, A.C. discussed her large and colourful painting of the Chinese character for “home.” This piece was donated to a local park which hosts many community cultural events. A.C. did not describe the meaning of this piece during the interview. However, the title of this piece, its content, and its installation at a community landmark in the DTES seem to correspond with A.C.’s detailed account of her cultural adjustment to life in Vancouver. With this connection in mind, the researcher speculated that this work may relate to the participant’s experience of adjusting to, integrating, and identifying with the local community, language, and culture following immigration.

It is important to note that despite intentional representations of social or political views in participants’ artworks, none of the participants in the current study identified specific social or political goals or observed sociopolitical outcomes of their artworks. However, one participant (Mae) endorsed the belief that engagement in community art itself may promote social change. As a means of responding to the lack of supportive resources available to abused men (addressed by two participants interviewed; Una and Mae), Mae discussed her hope for the development of a program similar to EWMA for *male* art-makers. Una addressed the issue that, “there are no battered men shelters.” Mae discussed, in greater depth, the need to address the issue of abuse and violence against men, as women tend to receive more support for violence and abuse in the DTES and beyond.

3.5. Superordinate Theme 4: Communication and Discourse Regarding Social and Economic Power Inequality

This superordinate theme comprises three secondary themes that were not anticipated in the current study, but each theme was expressed strongly by multiple participants. All five participants provided salient accounts that contributed to at least one of the three subthemes regarding communication and discourse related to social and economic power inequalities, described in the subsections below.

3.5.1. Feeling Unsupported in Previous Disclosure Regarding Psychological Difficulties

Two participants (Mae and Una) expressed concern for the lack of support and attention to individual accounts of psychological difficulties, particularly in the Downtown Eastside. For example, Mae stated that many people are able to learn “dark stories” regarding the DTES community as a single blended composite of personal experiences, but many have difficulty listening to an *individual’s* struggle and pain “whether self-inflicted or not.”

Two participants (Una and Pearl) shared *personal* experiences in which their past disclosures regarding psychological distress (and art-making) were met by a lack of support from others, including mental health professionals. Pearl reported that she tried to discuss her art-making with her psychiatrist, both in relation to her mental health and her financial situation. Her psychiatrist reportedly responded by suggesting that she was attending too many community activities and emphasized the need for Pearl to continue taking medications (despite the patient’s impression that these medications were unhelpful).

Una shared that she has made frequent past attempts to discuss her art-making in relation to her mental health, but few individuals have been willing to listen to her, understand her, and “follow [her disclosure] for long enough.” Una believes that the few individuals who are able to listen to her stories and perspective are “horrified” as a result, which inhibits Una from further disclosures:

I don't want to sort of be a scary thing. I don't want to have people hurt, just by hearing stuff I say. 'Cause it's not so much the stuff I say, but it hurts because it happened. Like your own empathy part of your brains activates. I—I don't like hurting people like that.

Mae shared a similar perspective regarding the listener’s difficulties hearing personal descriptions of psychological issues, but did not discuss this issue in relation to *personal* experience. Mae shared that many people are able to learn “dark stories” regarding the DTES community as a single blended amalgamation of personal experiences, but many have difficulty listening to, and absorbing, an *individual’s* struggle and pain (“whether self-inflicted or not”):

...[T]here's so many dark stories down here. Everyone's got one. And they do. They all begin to blend into one. And it's hard to see the—beyond all that...

The theme of feeling unsupported in previous disclosures regarding psychological difficulties contrasted with the theme of feeling “heard” during interviews in the current study (see 3.7 Participants' Impressions of the Interview and Current Study below).

3.5.2. Overcoming Stigma Regarding Mental Illness

Two of five participants (Mae and Robin) challenged societal impressions and treatments of mental illness. During the interview, Mae discussed misconceptions of the etymology of depression and other mental illnesses. In response to criticism from others regarding the belief that mental illness is “all in your head,” Mae responds:

Yeah, it is all in my head. It's a chemical imbalance in the brain and I take medication everyday just like a diabetic does, just to stay, you know, okay.

Meanwhile, Robin suggested that the labelling of individuals by others should be challenged with humour to prevent labels from “demoralizing” them, demonstrated in the examples below:

Well, I'm mentally ill and I'm proud of it...I'm dysfunctional and I'm proud of it! I'm dyslexic and I'm proud of it! You know, I'm illegitimate and I'm proud of it. Anything, you know, that someone would put you down for, you know?

In support of her belief that labels are unhelpful, Robin stated that she may have had fetal alcohol syndrome, but because she was never diagnosed or labelled as such, she was able to function both academically (i.e., she was a “B” student) and occupationally (i.e., she was able to work in many different jobs). While Robin was clearly inferring that a mental health label was not necessary for her, it was unclear whether she was further inferring that a label would have in fact interfered with her abilities and accomplishments. Interestingly, none of the three participants diagnosed with severe mental illnesses expressed wishes to abandon their psychiatric labels.

Mae's aforementioned belief that are "[w]e are all spiritual beings having a human experience" plays an important role in her understanding of the interconnectedness of spirituality, mental health and healing. During her interview, she described experiences in which she had been stigmatized for both her mental illness and her psychic experiences, which others have sometimes conflated. In the past, this has interfered with her openness in discussing her personal experiences with mental health and spirituality. However, Mae stated that she is becoming more accepting and less ashamed of her mental health diagnoses.

3.5.3. Sensitivity Regarding Use of Social Justice-Oriented Language

The term "marginalized" was originally used in the provisional title of the thesis in reference to the study's participants. Two participants (Robin and A.C.) expressed unprompted discontent towards the term "marginalization" when used in reference to the current study, and in other particular contexts. Robin also expressed dislike towards the term "empowerment." Robin believes that the term "marginalized" is often used by community programs in order to receive funding. She described both these terms as "demoralizing," "depressing," and "insulting." A.C. specifically disapproved of the use of the term "marginalized" in the original title of the current thesis, as she stated that this term is only appropriate when referencing a large population. She did not elaborate on this perspective. On the flipside, Robin believes that it is inappropriate to use the term "to describe a whole bunch of people," but condones its use in reference to individuals who personally identify with this label. She expressed that the terms "marginalize" and "empower" undermine the strength of the individual being referenced and oversimplify diverse personal experiences, which is both offensive and psychologically damaging to the individuals who are labelled by others in the process:

...Because I think when you just throw out these words because it's the best word for you, and the fastest word, not for you personally, but for people to say to try to cover a whole bunch of people, that it's offensive, and um, and I know they'll—They'll have like a million excuses why they only had this one time to use this word. But, but the damage that labelling does to people—all types of labelling—anything from mental health to anything else—really does corrode the human spirit...

Though Robin believes that most people would resent being labelled as “marginalized,” she recognizes that some individuals may get “caught in” situations that may result in *temporary* forms of marginalization. She proposed that the term “marginalized situation” be used to describe the difficult *experiences* that strong individuals endure, without referring to the human being as a “marginalized person.”

Upon consideration of Robin’s and A.C.’s discontent with the term “marginalized,” this word was removed from the original, provisional title of this thesis. Reflections on the need for sensitivity regarding the use of social justice-oriented language in academic writing are considered in Chapter 4 (Discussion) below.

3.6. Superordinate Theme 5: Participants’ Impressions of the Interviews and Current Study

3.6.1. Overall Positive Impressions of the Interview

When queried, all five of the participants expressed satisfaction with the overall interview process. Two participants (Mae and Una) expressed satisfaction with the “flow” of the interview. One participant (Robin) stated that she enjoyed participating in the interview and “had fun.” Una shared that, overall, the interview worked “fairly decently.”

Nevertheless, participants shared various minor criticisms regarding the annoyance of the interviewer’s repetitive questions and interruptions (Una), not being offered a break during the interview (Mae), and the researcher’s failure to begin one of the participant’s interviews on time (Robin).

3.6.2. Intellectual Interest and Engagement in the Research

The researcher observed that four of the five participants were evidently very interested and actively engaged throughout the interview sessions. All participants who completed the member check (and the participant who partially completed the member check of the transcript) were observed to be sufficiently engaged during this verification process as well. Three participants (A.C., Mae and Robin) expressed interest and curiosity

about the method and content of the current study. A.C. reported that the current study had informed her about the research process, and expressed particular interest in both the research data and its accuracy. Both Mae and Robin stated that they were “intrigued” by the current study. Mae expressed particular interest in reading the results of the study. Robin stated that she felt “starved for intellectual stimulation” and appreciated the opportunity to participate in intellectually stimulating activity.

3.6.3. Feeling “Heard”

Each of the five participants communicated satisfaction with the opportunity to have their perspectives heard during the interview. For example, Mae reported that it felt “like someone was interested in hearing [her] story.” She also shared that she was able to discuss mental health issues without being stigmatized in the process. The researcher noted the contrast between Mae’s sense of feeling “heard” during the interview and her impression that individuals’ adversities are often overlooked in favour of a depersonalized account of issues in the DTES. In addition, Robin expressed satisfaction with the opportunity to “voice [her] opinion,” particularly regarding her dislike towards the use of the terms “empowerment” and “marginalization.” A.C. conveyed that the “chance to speak” and share her knowledge gave her a sense of pride. Una remarked that the interview gave her an opportunity to talk about “the positive things about [her]self” or “those spiralling-upward things,” rather than solely discussing negative aspects of her identity and experiences.

3.6.4. Support of Scholarly Recognition of Topics Explored in Current Study

Three participants (A.C., Mae, and Una) expressed support for the researcher’s interest in exploring the topics of art-making, psychological distress, and socioeconomic adversity among art-makers in the Downtown Eastside. No participants expressed negative impressions of, or objections to, the researcher’s inquiries and personal explorations. Una expressed particular support of an increasing number of academic papers attending to topics relating to psychological distress. She shared her salient belief that publications ought to focus on personal experiences, as opposed to generalized statistics, in order to effectively draw empathy and compassion from readers:

...And yeah, having my face on some of these things is an important way to do it because a thousand is just a number. Most people, you don't care about people; you care about, you need to have faces for a lot of these things, for anybody to take it seriously....

A.C. expressed her belief that the library's inventory of the current thesis would itself be beneficial, as other scholars will have access to the thesis and may be influenced to explore further issues in the DTES based on this particular study on the EWMA program. Each of these participant accounts were communicated with a sense of hope for change in the Downtown Eastside community (i.e., see subtheme below).

3.6.5. Expectations of Positive Social and Political (but Not Personal) Outcomes

Three participants (Mae, A.C., and Una) expressed hopes and expectations that their participation in the current study and its publication will lead to social or political change, particularly within the Downtown Eastside community. Mae broadly suggested that the study could influence policy-makers. A.C. shared her belief and hope that the current thesis may encourage future empirical exploration of issues in the DTES, potentially leading to further support of the DTES community. A.C. expressed her sense of pride in her ability to contribute to the sharing of knowledge regarding issues in the DTES, especially as a new citizen of Canada. Una discussed the importance of communicating her *personal* experiences, and recognized that the current study provided the opportunity to do so. She believes that her resilience to negative life experiences renders her a suitable public advocate for "anti-violence," which in turn could contribute to social change.

Nevertheless, only Una reported that she herself may benefit psychologically from participating in the current study. Mae said that her discussions during the interview prompted sudden psychological insights regarding her coping style, but she did not identify psychological benefits relating to these insights. Robin shared that she had not yet had the chance to observe whether participation in the current study would benefit her, given the immediacy of the researcher's query following Robin's completion of the interview.

Chapter 4.

Discussion

4.1. Superordinate Theme 1: Psychological Purpose of Art-Making

Four of five participants in the current study discussed psychological benefits of art-making in their lives, with art-making serving as a means of coping and healing through various processes including the expression and release of negative emotions, attentional deployment, heightened awareness of oneself and others, increased insight into one's emotions and symptoms of distress, and the development of increased self-esteem and psychological resilience. In contrast, some participants suggested that their artworks themselves were enhanced through the art-makers' experiences of hardship and distress.

4.1.1. Promotion of Mental Health through Art-Making

The current study was intended to address the following question: Do art-makers who interpret themselves as having endured substantial distress or trauma use art-making in a different way than those who consciously or unconsciously deny or minimize the presence of hardship in their lives? Findings from the current study indeed seemed to support a distinction in the meaning of art-making between individuals who do and do not perceive themselves as psychologically distressed. Each of the three participants who saliently discussed the psychological benefits of art-making also openly discussed the hardships they had endured in their lives. Two of these participants openly discussed their psychiatric diagnoses. Of the two participants who did *not* emphasize the psychological role of art-making in their own lives, one did not consider her life to be affected significantly by psychological or socioeconomic distress.

As discussed in the Introduction, McEllingnott (2010) argues that, in addition to personal distress, one must have self-awareness and a willingness to engage in the healing process in order for healing to occur. In regards to the psychological aspect of the current study, art-making was indeed only interpreted as a form of healing by participants

who identified psychological stressors and recognized the need to cope with (or recover from) their chronic or acute states of heightened distress.

Expression and Release of Negative Emotions

Three participants described art-making as a form of emotional expression. Two of these participants specifically described the expression of negative emotions through art-making as a healthy and adaptive process, suggesting experiences of emotional catharses. The positive outcomes of emotional expression through art-making endorsed by participants in the current study converge with a large portion of research from clinical cases (e.g., Kramer, 2000), experimental studies of art therapy in clinical samples (e.g., Grodner et al., 1982; Puig et al., 2006; Thyme et al., 2007), and studies with non-clinical populations who engage in art-making (e.g., Stevenson-Taylor & Mansell, 2012). In particular, researchers have proposed that disclosure of emotional information releases unwanted thoughts (i.e., disinhibition), helps the individual to process upsetting events (i.e., cognitive processing), and helps the individual to regulate and habituate to negative emotions (i.e., emotional regulation) (e.g., Frattaroli, 2006; Rime, 1995). These functions of verbal or written disclosure seem to parallel the psychological purpose of creating art that portrays the art-maker's difficult lived experiences, based on the two participant accounts provided in the current study. This parallel suggests that art-making may serve as a successful alternative communicative pathway, discussed below in the context of "visual literacy."

In regards to the release of unwanted thoughts, or disinhibition, the psychological effectiveness of emotional expression or "venting" is debatable. A body of literature suggests that excessive ruminating has negative outcomes (e.g., Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000). In regards to art-based emotional coping, Dalebroux, Goldstein, and Winner (2008) conducted a controlled study demonstrating that following the viewing of a negative mood-inducing film, positive emotional expression through art-making was more effective in repairing negative mood in the short-term than venting negative emotions through art-making. Nevertheless, both conditions resulted in improved mood. Dalebroux and colleagues' (2008) study represents one of the few, if not only, systematic comparisons of the relative mood effects of venting versus positive emotional expression through art-making. While these researchers have suggested a functional comparison between visual

art-based “venting” and ruminating (e.g., Dalebroux, Goldstein, & Winner, 2008; De Petrillo & Winner, 2005), participant accounts in the present study seem to counter-indicate this comparison, as their descriptions seem to suggest that artistic depictions of emotional distress result in the mitigation of negative emotions and a sense of relief. For example, in Robin’s art therapy, negative depictions seem to “free up” emotional space for her to draw and paint emotionally positive images.

In addition to its role in emotional release or “venting,” Una suggested that visual art representations help her to process her traumatic experiences, often through the use of humour or “mockery.” There is some evidence that supports the positive psychological impact of revisiting painful emotions (e.g., Littrel, 1998). While one perspective views re-experiencing painful emotions as unconditionally positive, another view posits that positive outcomes are specifically attributable to the restructuring of emotional memories. Though Una did not provide a detailed account of the use of humour in her artwork, its use in representing trauma and life stressors may be conceptualized as a form of emotional restructuring. Moreover, it may be hypothesized that humour is used in the artistic depiction of traumatic events—and specifically by Una—as a conscious or unconscious means to build new cognitive associations between the stressor and the humorous imagery itself.

Cognitive processing of artwork, and the resultant cognitive change or reappraisal, may also serve as one manifestation of emotional regulatory behaviours (Cisler, Olatunji, Feldner, & Forsyth, 2010). Emotional regulation refers to a set of actions aimed at influencing “which emotions we have, when we have them, and how we experience and express them” (Gross, 2002, p. 282). The artistic depiction of a stressor may represent the art-maker’s developing or changing account of a particular situational stressor. As proposed by Harvey, Orbuch, and Weber (1990), engaging in account-making may operate as a process in the stress reaction sequence (Horowitz, 1986), influencing the individual’s personal account of self-perception and identity. Similarly, prolonged exposure to trauma-related stimuli may support the acceptance of these personal events (e.g, Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011). Johnson (2009) likens the representation of a trauma scene in artwork to imaginal exposure, which may be especially helpful in counteracting avoidance behaviours in response to trauma. The understanding of artistic depictions of trauma scenes as a variation of prolonged or imaginal exposure lends an explanation of the

psychological benefits of Una's and Robin's artistic depictions of their distressing, or even traumatic, life experiences. Moreover, exposure through the process of visual representations of trauma or other personal stressors may also be viewed as an attempt to decrease the intensity of the negative emotions associated with this affective trigger. In this light, art-making may be viewed as a form of desensitizing or decentering from negative thoughts and feelings, one of the main components of mindfulness-based therapies.

Stuckey and Nobel (2010, p. 256) stated, "Art helps people express experiences that are too difficult to put into words, such as a diagnosis of cancer." *Visual literacy* refers to the ability to understand and express meaning through visual representation. The creation of images for the purpose of communication has been viewed as an alternative pathway to verbal or written language (e.g., Lu, 2010). To the researcher's knowledge, no experimental studies to date have investigated the long-term emotional outcomes of representing trauma or psychological distress through visual art-making. However, long-term positive effects of emotional expression through writing about trauma have been demonstrated by Pennebaker and his colleagues (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker et al., 1988). Artistic depictions of the art-maker's psychologically difficult lived experiences, such as those depicted in Una's graphic novel memoir, seem to promote both visual literacy and positive health outcomes, through similar means as verbal or written disclosures of such experiences. Consistent with the the current study's participant accounts, the results of a meta-analysis (Frattaroli, 2006) confirm that experimentally-induced disclosure has beneficial effects for participants (including decreased distress, depression, anger and anxiety, and increased subjective well-being), with greater effects in studies in which participants have histories of trauma or stressors and physical health problems.

Attentional Deployment as Stress Relief

Goal-setting and goal fulfillment through art-making depend on initiating and sustaining attention to the artistic endeavour. The current study's results support the notion that art-making contributes to overall psychological health by demanding the focus and concentration of the art-maker while minimizing distraction relating to previous life stressors. Prolonged attention to sensory experience during the art-making process has

itself been associated with reduced psychological distress, as revealed in previous qualitative studies with participants ranging from creative undergraduate students (Stevenson-Taylor & Mansell, 2012) to art-makers with self-reported chronic and fluctuating depression (Reynolds, 2000). Of the 39 female participants in Reynolds's (2000) study, 32 referred to the positive emotional effects of needlecraft, specifically derived from either distractions from stressors through intense concentration, or from a sense of escape into an enjoyable and new set of experiences. Graham Pole (2000) suggests that gentle physical activity offered by the arts can provide distraction from pain and anxiety. Beyond the particular activity of art-making, Oatley (1998) conducted a study in which participants identified their emotional state and concurrent activity at random intervals throughout the day. The study revealed a strong association between self-ratings of happiness and deep immersion in an activity.

Art-making as an attentional shift away from distressing affective stimuli may be conceptualized as a "lower-level" cognitive process underlying the overarching emotional coping strategies of distraction and denial. The denial of distress is often negatively regarded if prolonged. However, brief periods of denial may serve as an adaptive response to temporary stressors, perhaps including those attributable to systemic issues beyond the individual's locus of control, such as financial limitations.

The particular attentional mechanisms that contribute to therapeutic benefits in art-making have been identified also in relation to evidence-based psychotherapy interventions. Sarid and Huss (2010) compared the structural components of cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) interventions and art therapy in the specific treatment of Acute Stress Disorder (ASD). They noted that both cognitive behavioural interventions and art-making utilize sensory triggers. In the treatment of ASD, CBT uses imaginal exposure (Harmon-Jones & Winkielman, 2007; Hass-Cohen, 2003), while art-making engages physical, tangible stimulations that enable attentional and emotional regulation. CBT is also aimed at modifying excessive arousal through regulatory processes such as breathing exercises and autogenic training, which involves visualization techniques to induce relaxation (Norris & Fahrion, 1993; Sarid & Huss, 2010). Additionally, Sarid & Huss speculated that attention is shifted during art-making as a result of the prolonged attention to limited non-anxiety-provoking sensory stimuli. In the current study, putative evidence for this attentional shift was supported in artistic activity involving structured art-making

activities which require the maintenance of attention to sensory stimuli (such as knitting, copying a design, or colouring in a design).

Moreover, the current study's findings may potentially support the conceptualization of attentional deployment through art making as a form of non-pathological or "typical" dissociation (Edge, 2004). Typical dissociation refers to the attentional exclusion of distracting or threatening material to "enhance focus on the task at hand or prevent disturbance to a familiar sense of self" (p. 158). For example, Mae recognized her tendency to engage in art making to avoid interpersonal conflict through knitting. It is important to note that this conceptualization of art-making as a form of typical dissociation was not endorsed by participants in the current study, above and beyond the characteristics of emotional deployment. Moreover, participants who endorsed this theme did not specify whether distressing stimuli were excluded from their awareness, or whether the participants *voluntarily* ignored these distressing stimuli once awareness was initiated. Nevertheless, the consideration of the role for dissociation in attentional deployment helps to clarify the potential cognitive processes underlying sustained attention to art-making, particularly in the face of heightened external stressors.

Immersion in Creative "Flow" and Heightened Awareness of Self and Others

Deep absorption in art-making and its role in the enigmatical experience of creative "flow", as well as the transcendence of energy from the process into the art piece, were described by two of the art-makers in the current study, particularly in regards to the unconscious element of the creative process and the awareness of self and others. Previous scholarly works have regarded the "flow" of ideas and progress in the creative process as the realization of the art-maker's needs, the achievement of the art-maker's goals, effortless attention, and intrinsic motivation to engage in creative activity (previously discussed in regards to the theme of goal-oriented activity) (e.g., Carl III, 1994; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Intrinsic motivation to engage in creative activity seems to help to facilitate goal fulfillment, as well as deep engagement in the art-making process.

Deep immersion in the creative process was likened to meditation by both Mae and Robin. Meditation is practiced in various forms, each of which involves intentional change in one's state of mind or mode of consciousness (Lutz, Slagter, Dunne, & Davidson, 2008). This practice can, somewhat paradoxically, be conceptualized in terms

of self-regulation and voluntary disengagement from preservative cognitive activity (Cahn & Polich, 2006), or in terms of the intentional cultivation of a mental response (such as compassion or forgiveness) (Feuerstein, 2006). This seeming paradox can also be applied to the current study's participants' accounts of artistic activity, in regards to the previously discussed theme of attentional deployment and the currently discussed theme of immersion in creative "flow." For Mae and Robin, the immersive aspect of art-making seems to recruit a sense of transcendence, warranting the comparison between art-making and meditation. For Mae, the process of art-making is inherently spiritual, and for Robin, it is "magical."

Mae's personal integration of mediation and visualization techniques into her art practices may also be conceptualized as forms of "directed dissociation," which Edge (2004) describes as an intentional shift of awareness "beyond the mind-body unit," towards "specific information, wisdom, or guidance" (p. 159). According to Edge (2001), directed dissociation involves the expression of "creative impulses of life, healing energies from the physical world..." (p. 59). Mae seemed to describe art-making as a means of cultivating energy towards the healing of *others*, namely friends and loved ones, during periods in which they have been ill. Edge's (2004) account of directed dissociation compliments the aforementioned comparison between meditation and art-making, mutually shedding light onto the immersive, "magical," and "spiritual" elements of creative "flow."

Robin also described how, through art-making, people "get away from themselves, even though they might be putting themselves into the art, like a self-portrait or something," suggesting a unique mode of self-reflection through art-making. Robin's and Mae's accounts of the intensity and ease of their artistic immersions seems to help to facilitate an altered form of personal or interpersonal contemplation that elicits an understanding of the self and others.

Increased Insight into Emotions and Symptoms of Distress

Three participants in the current study endorsed the processes of reflection and self-monitoring in gaining self-awareness and insight into changes in their psychological states. Two participants in the current study discussed the therapeutic value of reflecting on the outcome of their artistic endeavours following its completion. Similarly, two

participants endorsed the use of art-making as a tool to monitor their mental well-being, and the presence of symptoms indicative of psychological distress.

Mae and Robin discussed their sense of sudden insight into the personal relevance of their works, typically revealed to them during the reflective stage of the creative process (classified as “Stage 3” by Stevenson-Taylor & Mansell, 2012). During the process of art therapy, however, Robin’s visual representations of particularly distressing issues are generally premeditated (i.e., Stage 1 of the creative process; Stevenson-Taylor & Mansell, 2012), leading to progressive emotional release and psychological insight through the implementation and reflection of the artwork (i.e., Stages 2 and 3).

Researchers have posited that such insights emerge from the act of free expression (e.g., Bournelli, Makri, & Mylonas, 2009; Doyle, 1998), suggesting that the state of creative “flow” may help to arouse “sudden insight.” Consistent with the results from the current study and Stevenson-Taylor and Mansell’s (2012) qualitative study on the role of art-making for “everyday creative people,” it seems that the “duality” between the act of creating and “internalizing” the act of creating results in sudden insight and change, primarily near the end of the creative process (Brown, 2008; Dewey, 1934).

Self-Esteem, Skill-Building and Accomplishment

Skill development, or mastery, has an important influence on one’s sense of accomplishment, ultimately contributing to self-esteem and positive self-concept (e.g., Friedland & Price, 2003). A recent meta-analysis by Karsten and Moser (2009) found significant differences between employed and unemployed individuals in self-esteem, among other mental health indicators. A study of a large Canadian sample demonstrated that unemployment is associated with both psychological distress and lower levels of self-esteem (Marchand, et al., 2011). As previously discussed, at least three of five participants interviews (Pearl, A.C., Mae, Una) suggested that they consider themselves underemployed in relation to their skill levels and financial desires. Researchers such as Dooley, Prause, and Ham-Rowbottom (2000) have proposed the concept of employment as a continuum ranging from economically adequate employment to economically inadequate employment to unemployment. Inadequate employment, or “underemployment,” has been investigated empirically in regards to both inadequate hours of labour and inadequate income. Several studies have shown lower levels of self-

esteem in hours- or income- underemployed workers than those populations with adequate employment (e.g., Dooley & Prause, 1995; Johnson, 1986; Prause & Dooley, 1997), comparable to the negative effects of unemployment on self-esteem. Their perceived lack of employment may contribute to a heightened dependence on art-making for a sense of economic purpose, identity, and income, despite some reported limitations on financial opportunities offered by the EWMA studio.

Of the few quantitative research studies that have investigated the effects of art-making on self-esteem in unemployed or underemployed populations, one quasi-experimental study revealed an increase in global self-worth among female juvenile offenders following 10-session interventions of either the integration of art into psychotherapy or art therapy itself (Hartz, Adrian, & Thick, 2005). The mechanisms and processes by which art-making enhances self-esteem have been illuminated through qualitative research. For example, a study on depression and needlework (Reynolds, 2000) suggested that art-making commonly enhances self-esteem by providing the art-maker a voluntary means of independent self-expression, as well as evidence of mastery and accomplishment. Reynolds's (2000) findings suggested that both the act of teaching artistic skills to others and the receipt of acknowledgement and praise for one's skills and artistic accomplishments contribute to an art-maker's sense of mastery (Reynolds, 2000). Nevertheless, to the researcher's knowledge, no quantitative or qualitative research has focused on understanding the role of community art-making initiatives or individualistic art-based therapeutic interventions on self-esteem among non-incarcerated groups who identify as unemployed or underemployed.

Goal-Oriented Activity as Resilience

As revealed through Una's account of art-making, it seems that the therapeutic value of art-making partially lies in its value as one manifestation of an activity that promotes goal-setting, planning, and a sense of routine and achievement, each of which are often compromised by acute or prolonged stress. A very similar theme, labelled "the process of creating as a goal-oriented focus" was revealed in Stevenson-Taylor and Mansell's (2012) phenomenological exploration of the psychological meaning of art-making in "everyday creative people." Their study revealed that goal-oriented artistic activity supported participants' sense of control and purpose to creating their work. Una's

account of art-making seemed to suggest that this activity promotes sense of direction in her artistic repertoire, and more importantly, a sense of purpose to her life. Nevertheless, Una described her art-making, her creativity and her “trouble-making” behaviour as paramount aspects of her life and her identity since childhood. Una’s (and other art-makers’) intrinsic desire for creative fulfillment (discussed by Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) may have a central role in her motivation to attain long-term artistic goals as well as shorter term accomplishments, such as daily artistic practice. In this sense, the intrinsic ability to immerse oneself in creative “flow” (as discussed above) may render an individual more apt to coping through art-making. Moreover, the inherent effortlessness of engaging in goal-oriented art-making for some particularly creative and artistic individuals may facilitate or enhance resilience against psychological distress.

While the concept of art-making as a meaningful and goal-oriented activity was very salient in regards to Una’s account of art-making, it did not emerge thematically from the commentaries of other participants in the current study. Nevertheless, consistent with other empirical literature, this theme represents an important facet of the meaning of art-making for certain individuals with psychological symptoms of distress, particularly depression, as evidenced in previous qualitative literature. For example, in Reynolds’s (2000) aforementioned qualitative study on depression and needlework, 17 of 39 participants engaged in needlework as a form of meaningful activity to “energize thoughts” and counteract the lack of energy and motivation associated with dysphoria. Una, like many of the women in Reynolds’s (2000) study, viewed art-making as a means of organizing and structuring daily life. Among individuals with depressive symptoms, art making can counteract amotivation and enhance pleasure and a sense of achievement, thereby enhancing mood. This function of art-making fits with the treatment strategy of *behavioural activation*, an evidence-supported CBT-based therapy for depression (e.g., Addis & Martell, 2004). Behavioural activation is based on the principle that increased activities lead to increasing environmental reinforcements.

Reynolds’s (2000) findings also revealed that needlecrafts represented a means of preserving and enhancing a sense of identity, particularly as an “able” individual, regardless of pain, fatigue and mobility limitations. This notion of counteracting physical and psychological pain was similarly described by Una as an important motive for art-making, further supporting art-making as a physical and psychological form of resilience.

4.1.2. Enhancement of Art through Understanding of Hardship

Some empirical evidence suggests that trauma may in fact motivate or even enhance creative activity. For example, Miller and Johnson (2010) conducted a study that compared acted-out portrayals of imaginal scenes by 56 Vietnam combat veterans and 14 veterans who were not exposed to combat. These researchers found that PTSD correlates with an increased capacity for symbolic representation, a facet of creativity in both the artistic and scientific realms. Some of the art-makers in the current study discussed the functionality of trauma or past stressors in enhancing art-making. In this sense, distressing or even traumatic experiences may play a role in enhancing skill development and sense of accomplishment, two secondary positive outcomes of art-making for some individuals. For example, Una stated that artistic depictions of her traumas were well-received by viewers of her works, potentially validating Una's difficult experiences and her ability to persevere in their aftermaths. In this sense, the ability to utilize negative experiences to inspire and improve the quality of art-making may largely contribute to an art-maker's sense of resilience. Beyond resilience, two art-makers in the current study endorsed *benefit finding* (see review by Helgeson, Reynolds, & Tomich, 2006) through their perspectives that difficult life experiences and traumatic events have led to personal artistic growth and the enhancement of their artworks.

4.2. Superordinate Theme 2: Socioeconomic Aspect of Psychological Distress and Art-Making

4.2.1. Relationship between Socioeconomic Adversity and Psychological Distress: Resilience in the Face of Poverty

Quantitative research demonstrates that psychological distress is associated with employment status (but not occupation type). The estimated prevalence of psychological distress is 1.8 to 3.1 times higher in the unemployed than the employed population (e.g., Brown et al., 2003; Honkonen et al., 2007). Meta-analyses by Karsten and Moser (2009) found significant differences between employed and unemployed individuals in various mental health indicators including mixed symptoms of distress, depression, anxiety,

psychosomatic symptoms, subjective well-being and self esteem. This difference may reflect the positive outcomes associated with stable employment, including a sense of control, use of skills, socialization, financial resources and time structure (McKee-Ryn, Kinicki, Song, & Wanberg, 2005). A study of a large sample of the Canadian population demonstrates that specific reasons for unemployment, such as seeking a job, health-related incapacity, and family obligations, correlated with clear differences in levels of psychological distress (Marchand et al., 2011). Disability, particularly temporary disability, was associated with critical levels of stress. Meanwhile, unemployment due to family responsibilities and other reasons were similar to levels of distress associated with job seeking.

Contrary to evidence from quantitative research, three of five participants in the current study suggested that their lives were not significantly affected by financial distress, despite acknowledging financial limitations during each of their interviews. This finding was admittedly surprising to the researcher, particularly in consideration of the finding that the majority of the current study's participants endorsed the belief that they were underemployed. Reported absences of financially-related distress, shared by the majority of the participants, may reflect adaptive coping with financial limitations and overall psychological resilience. Perhaps it may be the case that for some individuals, poverty inevitably impinges on quality of life and psychological wellbeing, even if its specific impact is unidentified by the individual (whether or not conscious or unconscious forms of denial and emotional repression are operative). The findings from the current study highlight the need to account for the possibility that unemployment or underemployment may affect psychological distress in covert ways that have not been demonstrated through quantitative research (e.g., McKee-Ryn et al., 2005; Marchand et al., 2011). Nevertheless, whether the current study's participants indeed experience covert forms of distress relating to their socioeconomic situations, or alternatively demonstrate resilience to typical financial stressors, remains unclear.

4.2.2. Role of Socioeconomic Distress in Art-Making: Socioeconomic Limitations on Art-Making Resources

Maslow's *hierarchy of needs* proposes that there is a hierarchical arrangement regarding an individual's motivation to fulfill individual needs. This hierarchy progresses

from the most basic needs (physiological and safety needs) to the psychological needs for love and belonging, a sense of self-respect (esteem) and finally, the achievement of one's full potential (self-actualization). Research examining the validity of this theory demonstrates that the importance and satisfaction of needs varies depending on age (Goebel & Brown, 1981), cultural factors, and political stability (i.e., wartime versus peacetime) (Tang & West, 1997; Tang & Ibrahim, 1998; Tang, Ibrahim, & West, 2002). While the relationship between personal needs and the function of art-making was discussed in Chapter 1 (Introduction; e.g., Ornstein, 2006), this relationship was not explicitly identified or discussed by participants during the current study's interviews. However, differences in the identified purposes of art-making across participants may reflect differences in their perceived needs, consistent with Maslow's hierarchy. The content and style of art varied both within and across participants, ranging from artwork created solely as a means of personal expression and well-being (e.g., Robin's paintings created during art therapy sessions; Mae's colouring of outlined designs in her "adult colouring book") to products that were deemed practical and attractive to consumers (e.g., A.C.'s legwarmers, Pearl's "bright and gorgeous" drawings and paintings). Across the participants, descriptions of select individual works were also described as having both personal and commercial-financial functions (e.g., Mae's needlework; Una's representations of personal traumas through "sequential art").

Akin to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Marx postulated that "...people on the whole cannot be liberated so long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, shelter and clothing in adequate quality and quantity" (as cited in Easton & Guddat, 1967, p. 437). In addition to the influence of personal needs on the content and nature of an art-maker's creations, a lack of personal needs may enhance, or even necessitate, one's artistic production. For example, in the hope of financial reward, A.C. only started to create crafts after moving to Canada and experiencing long-term unemployment for the first time in her life. Conversely, a deprivation of personal necessities may interfere with one's artistic endeavours. This issue was addressed by Una, who recognized that lack of adequate food interferes with her ability to produce artwork.

On another level, data from the current study seems to suggest that, consistent with historical accounts, economic stressors play a peripheral role, if any, in the content of participant artworks. Kavolis (1965) examined evidence of the relationship between

economic conditions and the content of art, revealing that emotional involvement with one's economic condition is the main determinant of art content reflecting economic condition. While economic content is seldom directly reflected in artwork, historical trends in art content seem to reflect economic circumstances. For example, Home (as cited in Kavolis, 1965) observed that in the later half of the eighteenth century, the appearance of seascapes in British art (particularly in the British Isles) coincided with the sharp increase in economic dependency on overseas trade.

According to Kavolis (1965), the artistic representation of economic issues is dependent on emotional interest, driven by external pressure. This perspective may help to shed light on the economic function of art-making for women in the present study. For example, Robin's one-woman protest was intended to draw attention to the relationship between motor vehicles and environmental devastation. However, Robin did not explicitly adopt an economic or political lens in her presentation of her social-environmental criticism. Nevertheless, her call for change depends on the viewers of her protest to challenge the status quo of car dependency, an issue perhaps influenced by socioeconomic factors such as household income (e.g., Handy, Cao, & Mokhtarian, 2005). This linkage supports Kavolis's (1965) notion of "humanistic" or "radical" ideology, as evidenced by the very presence of "an attitude of protest against the suffering produced by economic (or other) developments" (p. 327), particularly during economic crisis. While some of the current study's participants' artwork seemed to portray economic undertones, sociopolitical overtones were more prominently expressed (see 4.2.3 Sociopolitical Aspect of Art-Making below).

4.2.3. Socioeconomic Purpose of Art-Making: Opportunity for Income Generation, with Limitations

Despite the personal and commercial goals of art-making supported by participation at the EWMA studio, results from the current study did not reflect interferences with the psychological benefits of art-making due to financial limitations. This finding offers preliminary support to the practical and psychological utility of multi-purpose community arts spaces. The EWMA studio serves as a social gathering space and a hub for individual and group art-making, artist promotion, sales, and general socioeconomic and social support (i.e., information sharing regarding grants and small loans, food and

clothing bank, etc.). Visits to the art studio to support one's welfare in one personal domain (e.g., mental health, financial, artistic or business skill development) may support personal development in another, by the very fact that supportive resources intersect in this shared physical space.

From a critical standpoint, the participants' participation in the local art market counteracts their roles in the margins of the labour force. As addressed by A.C., members of the EWMA program are seizing alternative labour opportunities supported by involvement in community organizations. Although the systemic implications of this activity were not highlighted by participants in the current study, EWMA art-makers may be viewed as challenging the status quo of unemployment by investing in human capital through skill development and individual art or craft production. In our market societies, such activity may be considered equally important, if not more crucial, to market participation than income.

Nevertheless, one participant (A.C.) questioned the viability of depending on continued support from the local community to purchase the EWMA artists' crafts. She described this market as unsustainable and noted that the EWMA initiative is limited in its ability to counteract the "root" problems of unemployment and poverty. This statement suggests that she views the socioeconomic issues faced by the participants as a systemic dilemma. A.C. suggested that support from a market researcher would help the EWMA artists to expand their consumer market and retail effectiveness.

4.2.4. Socioeconomic and Psychological Purposes of Art-Making as Predominantly Independent

Because the participants in this study are members of an enterprise designed to support women's art-making endeavours and help them to generate income for their works, the personal and commercial aspects of their art-making are uniquely enmeshed. Nevertheless, the commercial and financial aspects of their art-making did not seem to influence importantly, or interfere with, the psychological purposes and outcomes of their art-making, according to the researcher's interpretation of the participants' personal accounts.

4.3. Superordinate Theme 3: Sociopolitical Aspect of Art-Making: Expression and Clarification of Sociopolitical, Cultural and Spiritual Values and Beliefs

Sociologist Eyerman (2006) suggests that art represents:

...a form of social activity through which new kinds of identities and practices emerge... as a cognitive praxis, art is a space for individual and collective creation that can provide society with ideas, identities, and ideals...like a social movement, art opens space for experimentation, social and political as well as aesthetic (p. 19).

Four of the five participants revealed the use of social, political and cultural expression and action through particular artworks. While two participants explicitly discussed artworks that serve as personal responses to sociopolitical issues, these participants did not identify any particular sociopolitical goals with regards to the creation or public display of their works. Campana (2011) defines activism as “work toward social and political consciousness, empowerment, and change” (p. 281), in which the process of change is ongoing and can be subtle. The current study’s participants who created and publically displayed social and political perspectives through their artwork were contributing to activism, in accordance with Campana’s (2011) perspective. These participants used art-making to communicate their worldviews, thereby contributing to social or political consciousness and a *readiness* to change (Campana, 2011) in the local communities in which their artworks were displayed.

4.4. Superordinate Theme 4: Communication and Discourse Regarding Social and Economic Power Inequality

4.4.1. Feeling Unsupported in Previous Disclosure Regarding Psychological Difficulties

As previously mentioned, three participants discussed issues regarding others’ ability to understand and listen to personal accounts of psychological issues. In particular,

one participant described a lack of support by her psychiatrist following her disclosure of her art-making and her psychological distress, which she attributed to her psychiatric medication. Participants' accounts of negative feedback to personal disclosure of psychological issues may shed light on the reasons why many patients refrain from disclosure to their health professionals. A New Zealand study examining issues regarding disclosure of psychological problems to general practice physicians (GPs) revealed that 36.9% of patients with current formally assessed psychological symptoms reported that they did not disclose their perceived psychological problems to their GPs (Bushnell et al., 2005). The reasons for non-disclosure included the belief that mental problems should not be discussed at all (27.6%). Non-disclosure was more likely among individuals with greater psychiatric disabilities and those who consulted more frequently with GPs about psychological issues (Bushnell et al., 2005). In the current study, the persistence or chronic nature of psychological issues may contribute to participants' sense of a lack of support regarding disclosure of psychological issues to others. Insight into the theme of feeling unsupported in previous disclosures regarding psychological distress may be attained when viewed in relation to the subtheme of feeling "heard" during the current research interviews (as discussed in Section 4.5 below).

4.4.2. Overcoming Stigma Regarding Mental Illness

Another major reported reason why individuals do not disclose psychiatric problems to health professionals is concern about stigma (Prior, Wood, Lewis, & Pill, 2003). If the acceptance of social labels perpetuates the risk of exclusion, devaluation and poverty, then it is both economically and socially adaptive to either (a) take action to challenge societal misconceptions and stigma, or (b) abandon these labels entirely.

Mae's belief that "[w]e are all spiritual beings having a human experience" is cardinal to her holistic understanding of mental health and her personal healing process. Researchers are beginning to address the growing prevalence of modern spiritual beliefs in society and its impact in individuals' understandings about their own illnesses (Farias, Underwood, & Claridge, 2013; Heelas & Woodhead, 2005). Hopefully clinicians will learn to explore sensitively the positive function of modern spiritual beliefs rather than perpetuating the magnified stigmatization of spiritual individuals with mental health issues

through inaccurate or untherapeutic pathologization (e.g., British Psychological Society, 2011).

4.4.3. Sensitivity Towards Use of Social Justice-Oriented Language

Standpoint theory helps to inform how our position in society effects our understanding of ourselves and others, and our communication with members inside their own groups and in other groups (e.g., Hartsock, 1998). This theory may be a helpful framework for understanding discontent and objection towards certain uses of the terms “marginalization” (shared by Robin and A.C.) and “empowerment” (expressed only by Robin).

To the researcher’s knowledge, few if any academic writings have critically analyzed the terms “marginalization” or “empowerment.” I agree with the perspective expressed in a comment by “Richard Bellamy” (perhaps the political science author and professor with this very namesake), in response to a blog (Bellamy, 2006). Bellamy proposed that the negative connotations of “words that refer to ‘disempowered’ people” develop when “the Empowered” use these terms “to do disempowering things to the so-named group,” while the so-named group does *not* have the power to influence the connotations of these terms in the broader culture. Upon personal reflection and further investigation, I came to realize that, in the word “marginalized” or “marginalization,” the suffix “-ized” or “ization” denotes the act of positioning the so-named individual or group (the grammatical object) in a particular social or political location. Unless this term is used in self-reference, the position is imposed upon the so-called group, without their consent or agreement that they themselves exist at the “margins” of a group or society at large. Furthermore, any negative meanings or connotations that this word may have for the individual are now forced upon her or him, potentially further subjugating the individual to inequality through this very discourse. Likewise, the prefix “em” in the term “empower” denotes “putting in” or “going into.” To a similar effect as the term “marginalize,” the term “empower” threatens to *disempower* of the individual or group being discussed, unless the term is used in reference to oneself (e.g., “I feel empowered...” or “I am empowering myself by...”).

Statements made by participants in the current study highlight the dangers of assuming that an individual identifies with a social label, even one aimed at the promotion of social justice, *particularly* in the context of phenomenological research. The imposition of such labels by the researcher onto the participant poses the risks of: (1) biasing the participant's statements by influencing them to conform with the term imposed on them and potentially inhibiting their communication of any disagreement, (2) activating or perpetuating the power struggle of the participant as a result of having their perspective covertly undermined by the researcher, and (3) activating or perpetuating self-identification with the label, including any negative connotations previously held by the participant.

4.5. Superordinate Theme 5: Participants' Impressions of the Interview

As previously mentioned, participants overall were satisfied with the way in which the interviews were conducted. Based on the researcher's impressions, four of five participants were undoubtedly engaged throughout the interview sessions, while three participants expressed intellectual interest in the current study. In light of these salient themes regarding participants' impressions of their interviews, the researcher was somewhat surprised that participants did not suggest a salient belief that their participation in the study would be beneficial to *them* personally. The process of engaging in dialogue during participant interviews involves an exchange of the participant's disclosure of personal information and the interviewer's listening, validation, and assistance in the participant's efforts to communicate thoughts and feelings (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Maiter, Simich, Jacobsen & Wise, 2008). Maiter and colleagues (2008) also consider the potential for the practice of reciprocity to affect engagement in the research process itself, as well as create healthy outcomes, potentially promoting healing. Although participants did not report a sense of healing through participation in the interviews, they did communicate the salient theme of feeling "heard," which the researcher views as a potentially positive health outcome; at the very least, it reflects personal expression, social engagement, and at most, it may reflect a sense of emotional validation. However, participants may not have discussed feeling "heard" as "helpful" to them because the interviews only represented short "blips" in the participants' lives, with no long-term follow-up. Furthermore, the

particular experience of “feeling heard” may only help to satisfy a small proportion of the participants’ quality-of-life and psychological needs.

The particularly salient theme for the participants was the feeling of being “heard” by the researcher, or being given the “chance to speak” during the current interview, expressed (without the researcher’s prompting) by four of the five participants. The salience of this theme suggests that participants felt comfortable during the interview, perhaps enough to disclose authentic accounts and impressions of their personal experiences and their art-making. From a qualitative research perspective, the particular theme of “feeling heard” may support “validity” regarding the authenticity of the data provided in the current study.

When contrasted with the theme of feeling unsupported in previous disclosures regarding psychological difficulties, the theme of feeling “heard” in the current research interviews reflects favourably on the quality of communication between the researcher and participants. Participants did not discuss what aspects of the current research study made them feel “heard.” However, I would hypothesize that the researcher-participant relationship and rapport, the structure and foci of the interview, and the selected topics and questions each contributed to a sense of comfort in sharing participant perspectives on the topics explored in the current study, including those which represented sensitive and personal issues such as psychiatric diagnoses. In regards to the structure of the interview, Una noted that participants were given opportunities to discuss their “positive qualities” or strengths. This opportunity was promoted through discussions of participants’ art-making, an activity which they enjoy, and from which they attain a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Few mental health care researchers and practitioners seem to recognize or utilize genuine discussions of the “artistic lives” of their research participants or patients as a valuable communicative tool. According to the premises of *arts-based inquiry*, the arts may benefit research by offering new awareness and perspective (Estrella & Forinash, 2007). According to Cole and McIntyre (2003), the arts represent an alternative form of knowledge mobilization that is uniquely engaging and accessible to the reader or audience due to its special ability “to evoke relational, emotional, cultural, social and political complexities” (p. 18). This argument was supported by participants’ statements in the

current study, particularly in regards to personal experiences and perspectives relating to psychological functioning. Perhaps health care practitioners could merge topics of participant strengths and productive or therapeutic activities with mental health issues in their communications to illuminate a more balanced perspective on the patient, offering an opportunity for the patient to be heard as a distinct and whole individual with positive goals and values, in addition to mental health issues.

Three participants expressed strong support for the current research exploration and its “method,” as well as interest in its results, emphasizing the importance of understanding and attending to the relationship between art-making, psychological distress and socioeconomic distress in the Downtown Eastside. This interest in empirical examination of the benefits of their art-making and its community resources may reflect the stakeholders cry for greater funding towards community arts that are accessible to low-income individuals.

Consistent with participants’ general support of the social science exploration of important issues for art-makers in the Downtown Eastside, three participants also expressed a common hope and expectation that the current study would influence policy-makers and lead to changes that support individuals in the Downtown Eastside. Participant statements addressing these issues influenced the researcher’s recommendations for future directions in research, policy, and social change (see 4.9 Future Directions below). Based on the participants’ impressions of the interviews, it seems that the discussion topic of art-making serves as an effective means of opening communicative avenues for research participants who engage in this activity, while concurrently helping to build rapport and mitigate the inherent power struggle or inequalities associated with research participation.

Arts-informed research approaches, like the present one, ultimately could enhance engagement between the participant and researcher, thereby enriching the data itself. The use of a critical phenomenological approach in the format of a multiple case study is particularly fitting with the proposed research topic, as traditional data sources cannot answer largely unexplored and contextual research questions, which rely on (a) the details of participants’ experiential accounts and (b) the acknowledgement that perspective is always situated in socio-cultural-historical context.

4.6. Summary

Critical phenomenological research is aimed at capturing how participants make meaning of their “lived experiences” of the phenomena of interest, in light of the researcher’s orientation to the topic of interest and its social, political, cultural, and historical contexts. In the current study, I aimed to capture the function of art-making for women in the DTES who are members of the EWMA studio. This exploration was particularly focused on the psychological, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic aspects of, and influences on, art-making for this group of women. Data was collected and formulated through a series of interviews and member checks of interview transcripts, representing a co-constructive process between the researcher and participants. The method of interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to systematically synthesize the data and identify emergent themes. This process of analysis required the researcher’s reflexivity and self-awareness. Meanwhile, from a critical theory standpoint, data analysis also required a careful consideration of, and sensitivity towards, the role of systemic and interpersonal power relations on the researcher’s and participants’ worldviews and relational locations in society.

Research findings revealed themes relating to: the promotion of mental health through art-making (including several previously discussed subthemes); enhancement of artwork itself through the art-maker’s lived hardships; socioeconomic limitations on art-making resources; practical but limited opportunities for income generation through the EWMA program; the expression and clarification of values and beliefs through art-making; and issues regarding communication and discourse related to social and economic power inequality. All participants described generally positive impressions of the interview itself. To the researcher’s surprise, participants did not endorse a relationship between socioeconomic adversity and psychological distress. Also, participants did not endorse the notion of social capital when describing the function of art-making at the EWMA studio. These issues regarding socioeconomic adversity and social capital are addressed below (see 4.7 Practical Implications and Recommendations and 4.8 Future Directions, respectively).

While the content of the participants’ artworks did not represent personal socioeconomic adversities, participants’ art-making was generally influenced by the desire

to appeal to potential consumers, financial reward, and recognition. In this sense, motivations and values relating to financial opportunity from art-making may be enhanced by the participants' sense of underemployment and desire to make money or validate their role in the labour market. Additionally, expression of sociocultural and sociopolitical perspectives through art-making was common across participants, with varying degrees of emotional engagement in, and commitment toward, these endeavours. Participants in the current study expressed hope for future social change, including increased support for community arts, mental health issues and employment issues in the DTES. At least two of five participants attempted to demythologize impressions of the low-income DTES community as a place of "bad people" due to its high prevalence of poverty and substance abuse. Three of five participants shared salient personal impressions of the DTES as a strong, respectful, and caring community that provides a sense of personal safety.

While the first broad research question of the proposed study was aimed at comprehending the role that art-making plays in the lives of individuals with socioeconomic and psychological adversities, the study's secondary research question was aimed at understanding the role of art-focused discourse in communicating psychologically and socioeconomically relevant individual experiences. Prior to conducting the current study, it was expected that discussions focused on participants' artwork and artistic activities would strengthen the participant-researcher relationship itself by promoting rapport. It seemed that the current study's interviews were successful in conversationally weaving together the topics of art-making with the sensitive topics of psychological functioning and socioeconomic adversity. Participants generally viewed themselves as psychologically resilient, and thus relatively unaffected psychologically by their financial shortcomings.

Overall, the current study's findings overlap significantly with the results of similar qualitative investigations examining the meaning of art-making across other distinct clinical populations (e.g., cancer patients), other individuals who identify as experiencing mental health issues (e.g., depression) within the community, as well as studies examining the role of art-making in "everyday creative people." While minding the limitations of generalizations from qualitative methodology, it is interesting to note the commonalities regarding the psychological function of art-making across studies with different methodologies and populations. Moreover, the current participants' accounts of emotional expression or release through art-making support the largely overlapping empirical

frameworks of emotional regulation and disinhibition, cognitive-affective processing, and communicative enhancement (i.e., visual literacy).

4.7. Practical Implications and Recommendations

The findings of the current study suggest that the creative process is not uniform across participants, or across an individual's various modalities of creative endeavours. For example, in regards to the psychological function of art-making, accounts of attentional deployment were not provided by any participants in the current study in discussions of works involving emotionally salient autobiographical or interpersonal content. However, participants who endorsed attentional deployment during repetitive artistic processes also endorsed contrasting themes such as emotional expression and release, or immersion in creative "flow," through art-making. This experience was demonstrated by Mae, whose art-making practices were associated with both the processes of disengagement (or even dissociation) as well as increased emotional engagement (or contemplation of others). Discrepancies in the psychological function of art-making seem to depend on the particular art project and individual differences, possibly including the art-makers' life situations and emotional states during their artistic pursuits. In general, statements across participants supported the notion that relatively structured arts and "free-form" endeavours promote differently adaptive processes and outcomes. Namely, structured art forms seem to offer distraction from stressful stimuli, while "free-form" works offer opportunities for disinhibited self-expression in the emotional, cultural, spiritual, social, socioeconomic and political realms. From an idiographic standpoint, the current study shed light on the degree of depth and variety of the functions of art-making within and across participants.

In regards to the enhancement in communication through the integration of the interview topics (i.e., art-making, psychological distress, socioeconomic adversity), discussions about psychological functioning and art-making were mutually informative to the researcher. Moreover, the participants appeared comfortable and at ease when discussing sensitive and personal topics relating to psychological functioning and psychiatric histories. The successful integration of these topics in the interviews was likely partially attributable to the inherent saliency of the relationship between art-making and psychological functioning, clearly articulated and emphasized by three of the five

participants. More specifically, discussions of individuals' creative interests and endeavours seem to enrich descriptions of their life experiences, mental states, attitudes, and well-being. Discussions of their mental states and emotionally challenging experiences also seemed to cue discussions of relevant artworks which participants created during these situational challenges. Consistent with the goals of the study, participants seemed to interpret the interview as an invitation to draw relationships between their life experiences and feelings and their artistic activities (e.g., content and personal meaning of artwork, frequency of artistic practice, feelings and thoughts while creating art, etc.). This observation may evidence the benefits of integrating discourse regarding art-making into the topics of psychological and socioeconomic distress in the research setting, and perhaps in the clinical setting as well.

One of the major themes that emerged across previous qualitative studies on the purpose of art-making was that of social capital, discussed in Chapter 1 (Introduction). In consideration of these previous accounts of the role of art-making in improving social capital, the researcher was surprised that the theme of social capital was not salient in the current study, particularly in regards to artistic endeavours within the EWMA program, which will be elaborated below.

4.8. Limitations of the Current Study

While I hope that this study will contribute to the development of similar research and community endeavours alike, the project is not expected to immediately or directly influence community arts program development or implementation. Nevertheless, the methodology employed in this exploration uniquely recognizes the distinction between the participants' life experiences and the conceptual frameworks adopted by the researcher in an effort to understand the phenomena of interest.

An important limitation of the current study is that its participants did not represent the cultural diversity of the DTES, or the EWMA studio itself. In particular, Aboriginal women did not participate in the current study, despite their strong representation within the EWMA studio and their important contributions to community arts in the Downtown Eastside. It would have been extremely valuable to attain an understanding of individual

Aboriginal womens' perspectives on the meaning of art-making within and beyond the realm of community arts.

In addition, contrary to previous qualitative findings, social capital did not contribute to the participants' accounts of the psychological benefits of art-making. The absence of this theme in the formulation of the data may be attributable to some evidence of lack of cohesion and perhaps conflict between certain members of the EWMA studio, alluded to by four of the five participants. On the flipside, the researcher did not specifically query about the social dynamics within the EWMA studio, and thus, the theme of social capital may have been overlooked in the current interview due to the selected focal topics and format of the interview itself.

4.9. Future Directions

While the participants in the current study are members of a community arts program, the various functions of art-making identified by these participants do not seem to be specific to *community* arts engagement. In order to more clearly identify the function of community arts and the role of social capital in art-making, future studies should directly explore the experience of engagement in the social aspects of art-making, as well as the relationships between the purpose of art-making and the setting in which it occurs. It would also be helpful to gain an in-depth understanding of how the characteristics of the local community affect the individual's art-making experience. For instance, a comparative qualitative analysis would help to identify and describe the similarities and differences between the functions of community arts programs, art therapy groups, informal artistic collaborations, and solitary art practices, particularly with respect to the psychological, sociopolitical and economic aspects of these various contexts in which art is practiced.

Furthermore, the findings from the current study suggested relationships among financial success through art-making, positive appraisal, self-esteem, and a sense of accomplishment. To the researcher's knowledge, the relationships between community arts or art-based therapeutic interventions, employment status, and self-esteem has not yet been empirically explored. It would be helpful to understand whether employment

status mediates the relationships between positive external reward and self-esteem through various self-esteem-promoting activities, including art-making.

Lastly, the current study offers in-depth descriptions of various psychological and sociopolitical functions of art-making which could be used to inform possible participatory action research in the future. For example, researchers could collaborate with members and organizers of community art programs similar to EWMA in order to: (a) evaluate the relevance of the current study's findings to their particular programs; and (b) work towards the development of new programs or the modification of already-existing programs, such that the relevant psychological, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic benefits of community art-making would be enhanced.

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Appendix A.

Interview Guide

INTRODUCTION:

Purpose of Interview:

The purpose of the interview is to explore the role that art-making plays in the psychological and socioeconomic lives of women who make art at the Enterprising Women Making Art (EWMA) program in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. As a secondary exploration, the interview is interested in the role of art-focused discourse in communicating subjective experiences relating to mental health and psychological distress.

Structure of Interview:

The interview will include discussions on the following four topics:

1. BACKGROUND: *The individual's demographic information and cultural background*
2. ART-MAKING: *Her artistic activity both within and outside of the EWMA studio and its personal relevance to other areas in her life*
3. PERSONAL DISTRESS: *Her past and present issues of distress (including psychological and socioeconomic issues) that are relevant to her current life*
4. PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS OF THE INTERVIEW ITSELF: *Her experience as a participant in the interview*

In order to promote a free-flowing and authentic conversation, the exact wording and sequencing of the questions may vary according to participants' responses.

While all aforementioned topics must be included in each interview, the interviewer may select questions from the guide that best fit the respondent's previous answers, add additional questions when useful to the inquiry, and exclude questions listed in the guide if the participant's statements within the given topic are sufficiently informative.

Outline of Interview Questions:

PART 1: Background:

1. How old are you?
2. Where were you born? Where did you grow up?
3. a) Where are you currently living?
b) *[If relevant:]* How long have you been living (or integrated) in the Downtown Eastside?
4. Do you consider yourself a community member of the Downtown Eastside? Why or why not?
5. Do you identify with any particular cultural group, ethnic group or heritage? *[If yes:]* How so?
6. What sorts of things are important to you in your life?

PART 2: Art-making:

I'd like to ask you some questions about your art-making, both within and outside the EWMA studio.

'Artist' Identity:

1. a) Do you consider art-making an important part of who you are?
b) So, are you an artist?

Contexts of Art-Making:

2. How did you get involved with EWMA?
3. Tell me about your experience as a member of this EWMA program. What do you do here? What do you make?
4. Do you make any art-work outside of the EWMA studio?
5. Are you part of any other projects or initiatives related to art-making or other forms of creative expression?

Purpose of Art-Making:

- 6.a) Is creating art at EWMA helpful or useful to you in any way? How so?
b) Is creating art at EWMA related to any difficulties that you experience in your life? How so?
7. a) Is creating art independently (i.e., own your own / outside of EWMA, based on the context described by the participant) helpful or useful to you in any way? How so?
b) Is creating art independently (i.e., own your own / outside of EWMA, based on the context described by the participant) related to any difficulties that you experience in your life? How so?

PART 3: Personal Distress (including psychological and socioeconomic distress):

I'd like to know about any challenges that you may have faced, or are currently facing, in your life. Some of the questions I ask you will relate to sensitive topics such as financial issues and mental health. Like the rest of the interview, if you do not want to answer a question, you are free to refuse.

1. a) During your lifetime, have you experienced any times of significant distress, or any personal challenges, that have affected your life in important ways?
b) Are you currently facing any significant distress or personal challenges that is affecting your life in important ways?
2. a) Have you ever experienced any [*if relevant: other*] emotional or psychological distress that have affected your life in important ways? Any current emotional or psychological distress?
b) Are these emotional/psychological issues related in your art-making in any way? Why / why not / how so?
3. a) Have you experienced any specific mental health issues?
b) [*If yes, and relevant*]: Has this been diagnosed? [*If yes*]: When? By whom (i.e., doctor, psychologist, not formally diagnosed)?
c) How have you coped with this/these issue(s)?
d) Have you even sought out or received treatment (or medication) for this/ any of these issue(s)?
e) Are these [*state specifically described mental health issues*] related to your art-making in any way? Why / why not / how so?
4. a) Have you experienced any [*if relevant: other*] issues relating to financial distress (i.e., issues relating to money) that have affected your life in important ways? Any current distress relating to financial issues?
b) Are these financial issues related to your art-making in any way? Why / why not / how so?
5. a) Have you experienced any [*if relevant: other*] issues relating to power relations, inequality or injustice that have affected your life in important ways? Any current distress relating to power relations, inequality or injustice?
or power?
b) Are these power relation/inequality/injustice issues related to your art-making in any way?
Why / why not / how so?

PART 4: Personal Impressions of the Interview Itself:

To wrap up this discussion, I'm interested in hearing your feelings on this particular research study and your experience as a participant.

1. a) How did participating in this interview make you feel? Why / how so?
b) Is there anything about the interview that you would have preferred to be done differently? Why / how so?
2. Has participating in this interview been helpful to you in any way?
3. a) Before this study, have you ever discussed your art in relation to your mental health?
b) Before this study, have you ever discussed your art in relation to your financial situation?
c) Before this study, have you ever discussed your art in relation to issues of inequality or injustice?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experience as a participant in this interview?

~ fin ~

Appendix B.

Sample Analysis of Individual Participant Transcript

Participant: Robin Johnson, Interview Session 2 of 2, Interview Date: April 3, 2013

Transcript	Analysis
<p>Robin: Mmkay. Oh and also, when you were asking me and I didn't know how to answer that question, and I just thought of something else that art is, right?</p> <p>Interviewer: The question, "What is art"?</p>	<p>Participant put thought into how she defines art.</p>
<p>Robin: Yeah. Art is almost like meditation. Because how much time do we have in our lives to ever sit down and do something like that?</p> <p>Interviewer: Like what?</p> <p>Robin: Art. Like, how many times do we get to be, like, unaware of ourselves and into whatever we're doing? Not too often, right? I think that's one of the reasons that people like driving; 'cause they're sort of half-aware of who they are at the time.</p>	<p>Salient: Participant defines art as a meditation and means of increasing self-awareness:</p> <p>Salient statements: <i>"Art is almost like meditation..."</i> <i>"Like, how many times do we get to be, like, unaware of ourselves..."</i></p> <p>Participant suggests relationships between art-making, meditation, and driving. [Researcher's thought: state of "automatic pilot" relates to normal dissociation; contradictory to art-making as enhanced self-awareness?]</p>
<p>Interviewer: Is that how you view art therapy as well? That kind of thing?</p> <p>Robin: (overlap) No. Art therapy is different. Completely the other spectrum. Nothing to do, as far as I'm concerned, with art.</p> <p>Interviewer: Interesting.</p>	<p>Participant clarifies that above definition describes art, but not art therapy, as she views art therapy as completely different activities (Researcher's interpretation: with different purposes?)</p>
<p>Robin: You have to (missed word? 1:24:45) with emotional release, right?</p>	<p>(could not make out audio, but think she is drawing distinction: art-making as "meditation" vs. art therapy as "emotional release")</p>

<p>Interviewer: Okay.</p>	
<p>Robin: And a lot of (art is? artists are?; ~1:24:49) like that too, but for me—</p>	<p>Art-making is not just emotional release for participant.</p>
<p>Interviewer: Can you—</p> <p>Robin: (overlap) I wrote down—</p> <p>Interviewer: You said “but for me”...Can you finish that, ‘cause that’s an important piece. You said a lot of art is like that for people, but for me...Is it not like that?</p>	
<p>Robin: To me it’s joyful, right?</p> <p>I don’t...I would say a lot of artists use, express things because they need to get stuff out of them, more abstract, right? I don’t—I usually do the way I see something type of art— Realistically. I don’t know-- There is a word for it, but I can’t remember what it is.</p>	<p>Participants art-making (non-therapy) as a joyful experience.</p> <p>Describes her style as “realistic” as opposed to abstract, but can’t remember a particular word to describe her style [Researcher’s question: realism?]</p>
<p>But anyways, I wrote down really fast when you asked me that question, and it doesn’t really make much sense, but I wrote down “A-R-T” [in the form of an acrostic] and I wrote down what words came to my mind. And “A” stood for “ability, availability.” And “R” started, came with “readiness.” And T started with “time that’s free.” So it’s almost like meditation because that’s what art is, right? For I think everybody, right? Regardless—It could be in the context of therapy or not therapy, right?</p> <p>Researcher: (Mhmm.)</p>	<p>When researcher asked participant to define art, she created an acrostic (arts-informed response).</p> <p>Emergent themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ability (regarding talent or resources?) - availability: referring to resources needed to create art? - readiness (may refer to having the needed resources or to feeling ready) <p>[Researcher’s question: Is participant referring to emotional readiness?]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “time that’s free”: likened art therapy or recreational art to meditation (as in, allocating time for directed activity?; implies that this purpose of art is universal) <p>Researcher’s question: secondary, repeated, reference to theme of resources/ availability?)</p>

	<p>Salient statement: <i>"... I wrote down "A-R-T" [in the form of an acrostic] and I wrote down what words came to my mind...Regardless—It could be in the context of therapy or not therapy, right?"</i></p>
<p>Robin: But there's something magical about art.</p> <p>Interviewer: So you're saying that no matter if it's art therapy or art, both are meditations.</p> <p>Robin: Yeah. I'm thinking it's magical—</p> <p>Interviewer: (Huh.)</p> <p>Robin: —'cause it transcends the person into—They get away from themselves, even though they might be putting themselves into the art, like a self-portrait or something, right? At the moment they don't have to think about other things. In the moment they're just taken over by this nice, fuzzy, healthy place, you know?</p>	<p>Salient: Believes that there is a "magical" component of art (re: transcendence?), which she relates to the ways in which art-making promotes personal expression and comfort.</p> <p>Salient statement: "cause it transcends the person into—They get away from...In the moment they're just taken over by this nice, fuzzy, healthy place, you know?"</p>
<p>And I guess that's what I mean by the part of the brain that releases endorphins or something, that you're just, and you're also accomplishing something and it's fun. But we just do not have the time where we can just sit down in this busy world and create something and be at peace, right? And that's what art does.</p> <p>Interviewer: Thanks, Robin.</p>	<p>Participant believes that art-making always represents both accomplishment and fun (relates briefly to neurochemical perspective).</p> <p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - art-making as fun / pleasure - art-making as accomplishment
<p>Robin: It's necessary.</p> <p>Interviewer: Mmhmm.</p> <p>Robin: Otherwise, there wouldn't be cavemen painting on cave walls.</p>	<p>Participant views art as "necessary" [and meaning intrinsic in humanity? Or not?], which is justified by the presence of art through history/evolution (cavemen paintings).</p> <p>Theme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - art as necessary (re: coping?)
<p>~ fin ~</p>	

*Interview ends. Recording device turned off at
1:27:08.*
