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**VISUAL ARTS AND OLDER ADULT LEARNERS IN RETIREMENT**

A Dissertation in

Adult Education

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of visual arts and its impact on successful aging and older adult learners in retirement. Retirement is one of the most important economic, psychological, and social transitions in most people's lives. Longevity has increased in the last sixty years such that in 2010, the average person can expect to spend anywhere from 15 to 30 plus years in retirement. There are 78 million baby boomers, ranging in age currently from 48 - 65, who have recently started retiring and will continue leaving the workforce over the next decade. They will likely live more of their lives in retirement than the previous generation. In the current struggling economy, the new face of retirement for many may likely be part-time labor and full-time engagement in other activities. So what does retirement mean to older adult learners? Retirement is generally understood as a multidimensional construct that is shaped by biological, educational, social and cultural factors; and, thus, can be defined in many ways. Retirees in this study are creating pieces of visual art - be it sculpture, sewing, knitting, paintings, photographs - they are creating tangible products.

The study was guided by the following research questions: What do older, retired adults perceive as the purpose of engaging in the visual arts? How does evidence of the role of creativity in successful aging inform educators in supporting life-long learning for retirees? And what is the relationship between engagement in the visual arts, generativity and successful aging?

Three theoretical frameworks were utilized: successful aging, generativity and art as a way of knowing. Together, these concepts provide a robust and holistic lens for which to view the experiences of these older adult learners. The first conceptual

framework is successful aging (Rowe & Kahn, 1998), which attempts to explain why some people age better than others. The second theory which is framed by human development and is seen as a positive aspect of healthy psychosocial development and aging is defined by the theory of generativity. This study also drew on the concept of art as a way of knowing which focuses on the ways in which adults learned through viewing and creating art. A legitimate need is further investigation into art as a way of knowing for adult populations. In the adult education literature, multiple ways of knowing have been reviewed and discussed. Creating artwork is a way of nonintellectual knowing, through emotion and body.

This study utilized narrative inquiry, an interpretive methodology which was appropriate for this study because it involved the collection of people's stories to explore their thoughts, feelings and experiences in relation to the research questions. I conducted in-depth face to face semi-structured interviews with 10 older adult learners in the Spring of 2012. I utilized a guided approach and audio recorded and transcribed all interviews.

These retired participants shared how engagement in art helped them both physically and emotionally. Reasons why these older adults are engaged in art is because creativity can help people find joy, camaraderie and meaning and purpose as they move toward and through retirement. Other findings include that the participants felt that art was both a solitary and social activity; the participants were uncertain of their identities as artists based on how they produced their art; that art created a space for new learning and that there are degrees of generativity. The findings have implications for incorporating art in adult development, adult education, and retirement.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

People are living longer. Many factors, such as advances in medication and increased access to health care, have contributed to the longer life span. In 1950, the average person spent three years in retirement. Longevity has increased in the last sixty years such that in 2010, the average person could expect to spend anywhere from 15 to 30 plus years in retirement. A person born in the U.S. has a life expectancy at birth that has increased by nearly thirty years over the past century – from age 47 in 1900 to age 74 in 2000—and it continues to grow (Greenblatt, 2011). According to recent statistical projections from the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, by the year 2050, it is expected one in every five people will be over the age of 65, resulting in the largest number of retired people in U.S. history (U.S. Census, 2006).

The average 65-year-old today can expect to live another 18.4 years (U.S. Census, 2006). The average number of retirement years has grown considerably from 3 in 1950 to almost 20 years today. In 1935, when Social Security was created in the United States, “life expectancy at birth then was just 58 for men and 62 for women” (Greenblatt, 2011, p. 581).

Although a person can stop working at any time, retirement between the ages of 62 to 67 is most common and coincides with the age when Social Security benefits can be drawn. How are people filling their longer lives with meaningful activity after they have ceased work? I wanted to know – based on my current health habits and my family history – how long I might expect to live, and how much of my life will be spent in retirement? What will my future look like?

How people adjust to retirement is an individual process and varies from person to person (Bass & Caro, 1995). To be sure, for most, there is an anticipated longer period of life that will be spent in retirement. Retirement has been called an incomplete rite of passage because it provides no structural or ritualistic way to initiate the retiree into a new status in society and the new roles attached to it (Jarvis, 2001). While some individuals are living healthier and productively well into retirement, others flounder and search for meaning. After leaving work, the retiree is expected to set his or her own goals, priorities and daily routines. This can be a challenge for some people, because retirement does not typically come with a set structure.

Since work is such a central focus of identity for many people, some individuals may feel lost after leaving work. Their occupation, which comprised a major portion of one's self-worth, is no longer fully accessible to them in retirement because their full-time work has ended. Separation from employment can be a source of considerable anxiety due to loss of income, purpose, social network, and identity (Fisher & Simmons, 2007). How will newly retired people fill their leisure time, and what factors will enhance the quality of life for this group of adult learners? Who counts as a retired person? Does working part-time mean semi-retired? These are critical questions with personal, societal, and policy implications.

Part of the answers to these complex and intriguing questions may be found by exploring the experiences of older adult retirees. Older adults are defined in this study as people who are over the age of 60. Some may be members of the *Silent Generation*; the cohort born from 1925 to 1945 (Strauss & Howe, 1991), and some may be baby boomers. Boomers are the cohort born between 1946 and 1964. The silent generation is a group of

older adult learners who in number are already 95% retired in 2012, and who currently range in age from 66 to 86 (Brett, 2009). There are 78 million baby boomers, ranging in age currently from 48 - 65, who have recently started retiring and will continue leaving the workforce over the next decade. They will likely live more of their lives in retirement than the previous generation. A particularly cogent issue is that the age cohort within which one grows and develops can have profound effects on their retirement (Bass & Caro, 2001). Someone growing up in a period of economic prosperity may experience retirement very differently from someone who grew up in a depression-era period. In the current struggling economy, the new face of retirement for many may likely be part-time labor and full-time engagement in other activities. So what does retirement mean for these cohorts?

### **The Meaning of Retirement**

Retirement is generally understood as a multidimensional construct that is shaped by biological, educational, social and cultural factors; and, thus, can be defined in many ways. Some theorists see retirement as both a process and a life stage (Cornman & Kingston, 1996; Atchley, 2000) that has increased in duration and can last for many years. Retirement is sometimes understood as having sub-stages within stages: pre-retirement which is planning for it; the actual day of retirement, which is a definitive day-long event - employees usually are recognized in a ceremony with a luncheon or farewell party; and the final stage is post retirement, which is the period after one has stopped working. Retirement can also be understood as a process. It is a period of life that begins after the cessation of work that has sustained adult life; the receiving of Social Security and pension benefits; and a journey into and through new life stages (Atchley, 1976;

Costa, 1998). There is a variance in the timing and duration of retirement for all individuals.

Society does not make the transition to retirement a smooth one, as Rowe and Kahn (1998) allude: “Old age has been called a ‘roleless role,’ a time when it is no longer clear what is expected of an elderly person, or where he or she can find the resources that will make old age successful” (p. 51). Retirement can be one of the most important personal, economic, psychological, and social periods in most people’s lives. It can be a time of opportunity and new beginnings; but, for some, it can also be a confusing time. Retirement is affected by the individual; by their own uniqueness as well as social and contextual circumstances.

Factors that predict retirement adjustment and satisfaction are valuable to our understanding this transition in later life. Numerous studies have been conducted on factors that predict longevity including: physical activity, not smoking, having good cognitive functioning, higher socioeconomic status, more social activity, and a satisfying sex life (Baltes & Baltes 1990a; Maddox, 2001, Rowe & Kahn, 1998). Another activity that has received little attention in the literature is engagement in creating visual art.

### **Engaging in Art in Retirement**

Engaging in visual art is defined as creating sculpture, drawing, painting a picture or even admiring art. There are many positive effects from engaging in art in retirement (Cohen, 2005). Retirees taking part in any kind of art program, such as visual art or art appreciation, experience improved health, outlook, and ability to fight disease (Cohen, 2006). Because “creativity can help people find meaning and purpose as they move toward and throughout the retirement and aging process” (Dahlberg, n.d., p. 1) the arts

can play a beneficial role for adult learners. Cohen (2006) writes that “societal interest in potential in later life is soaring, and it is in that context that a project studying how cultural programs [such as art] affect older persons could not be more timely” (p. 3).

This study examined that relationship.

Art, like retirement, is multidimensional. “In the broadest sense, art embraces all the creative disciplines – literature, poetry, drama, music, dance and the visual arts. However, as most commonly used, the term art means the visual arts, those areas of artistic creativity that communicate primarily through the eye” (Art, 1996, p. 382). Art is a form of expression for things that cannot be expressed in any other way (Eisner, 1998). Art has been defined as both a product and a process (Art, 1998). Older adults are engaging in the process and creating at the same time. Simply put, art is “the use of skill and imagination in the creation of aesthetic objects, environments, or experiences that can be shared with others” (Art, 2011). As Lindauer (2003) states “the term *creativity* is often used synonymously with the term *art*” (p. 238). So the term *creativity* can also be defined in multiple ways; therefore to clarify, for the purposes of this study, the terms *art* and *creativity* will be used interchangeably. Although art can cover so many dimensions, only participation in visual arts which includes drawing and water color, painting and mural painting was explored in this study.

Limited research on the benefits older learners gain from participating in art exists (Price & Nesteruk, 2010; Hanna, 2006; O'Hanlon, 2007; Cohen, 2005). The few studies that have been done show the arts to have a significant positive impact on older adults (Hanna, 2006). Older persons who engage in art report that the engagement provides them with a tremendous means for physical, mental and social stimulation (Campbell,

2005). Retirees who engage in art often find joy, (Price, & Nesteruk, 2010) a sense of purpose (Cohen, 2005), and increased enjoyment from life (OHanlon, 2007). What is not known from previous research is the purpose of engaging in art and how it does or does not contribute to continued learning by older adults. Are they engaging in art to be generative? Are there any drawbacks to engaging in art? What do older adults perceive as the purpose for engaging in art? These gaps will be explored by my research.

To bring understanding to the relationship of art and retirement theory is discussed which helps provide explanations on the way people age, why some people age more gracefully than others, and why some people can transition more easily to retirement. There are also aging theories that can better help us understand retirement.

### **Aging Theories**

There are several aging constructs, concepts and theories that are relevant to understanding successful aging. Multiple theories on aging exist (Bengtson, Gans, Putney, & Silverstein, 2009); some focus on individual agency (Ebner & Freund, 2007), others on age as a lifelong process (Hodkinson, Ford, Hodkinson & Hawthorn, 2008). For the purposes of this study, Rowe and Kahn's (1998) conceptual model of successful aging undergirds the research. They view successful aging as the ability to maintain three key characteristics (a) keeping mental and physical function; (b) continuing active engagement with life; and (c) having a low risk of disease or disease-related disability (p. 38)

Research with centenarians (people who are at least 100 years old) has helped researchers hone in on old-age survival skills; and three main contributing influences to aging have been identified: biological, social structural, and individual (Ryff & Singer,

2009). There are both controllable and uncontrollable factors that affect the potential for successful aging. A major premise of positive or successful aging is that if people take better care of themselves, they will have the propensity to live longer, healthier lives. Individual factors such as obesity and smoking are things that can be influenced by the retiree to keep their health in check. Some biological factors at the molecular and cellular level are less likely to be influenced by the retiree. They are one's genetic make-up and DNA which interact with environmental factors to influence longevity. Some people are genetically predisposed to certain illnesses and cancers by their inherited biological factor. However, sometimes even these factors can be mitigated by lifestyle/environmental choices (Rowe & Kahn, 1998). Social structural factors include race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. These factors come into play as the rates of morbidity, disability, and mortality vary across different social strata and socio-demographic variables (Sowers & Rowe, 2007; Howe & Phillips, 2001).

Yet, no matter a person's demographic; aging in our society has been viewed as something that is not desirable. Television often portrays older people as "ugly, toothless, sexless, incontinent, senile, confused and helpless" (O'Hallaren, 1997, p. 21). In a society where youth is valued and aging is marginalized it is no surprise that an anti-aging industry has emerged. Some individuals do not want to accept aging as a natural process. For many, aging is associated with frailty and nursing homes. People are spending billions of dollars trying to turn back the clock of aging. Creams, pills, and books all aimed at stopping or reversing the aging process has become a billion dollar industry and it is growing at a rapid pace.

Because longevity has increased a great deal, people are, and likely will continue to be, searching for meaning and ways to benefit their lives in retirement. Many of them are not simply looking for things to fill their time. Jarvis (2001) states in “later life they [older adults] do have more freedom to be selective...they can chose what they want to learn...disjuncture, as always, is at the start of new learning” (p. 77). Most are not interested in degree programs or starting a new career from scratch. Baby boomers have been trailblazers their entire lives, and they are beginning to revolutionize retirement. Many of them are active and looking for ways to improve, not just their lives, but the lives of others (Atchley, 2000). Many of them may rediscover creativity and visual arts in retirement as a way to maintain quality of life.

### **Problem Statement**

Because the graying of the population continues, older adults receive much research attention from gerontologists, economists, psychologists, social scientists, historians and health specialists. However there is little research from an adult learning perspective on the role of creativity in aging. More specifically, the gap in the research is on how older adults who engage in creative [art] activity can be beneficial in older adulthood (Cohen, 2005). Furthermore, not much is known about engaging in visual art and its role in helping facilitate successful aging. Previous research (Lehman, 1953) suggests that creativity declines with age, but a more recent study (Cohen, 2005) has shown that creativity does not necessarily decline in older adulthood.

As millions of people begin to retire over the next decade, they will likely be healthier and better educated than previous groups. Adult education offerings for late-life learning are “not taken seriously by influential figures in the fields of higher education or

gerontology. This remains true despite...evidence that it can contribute to productive roles” (Moody, 1993). In adult education, when Knowles (1984) wrote *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, an addendum could be included today titled: Older Adult Learners: still neglected. Although more has been written and is known about how to educate older adult learners, not much is known about the role of visual arts in the learning process.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to explore the role of visual arts and its impact on successful aging and older adult learners in retirement.

### **Research Questions**

This study of the role of visual arts and older adult learners in retirement was guided by the following questions:

1. What do older, retired adults perceive as the purpose of engaging in the visual arts?
2. How does evidence of the role of creativity in successful aging inform educators in supporting life-long learning for retirees?
3. What is the relationship between engagement in the visual arts, generativity and successful aging?

### **Overview of Research Kind Conceptual Framework**

To be able to explore the role of visual arts classes where retirees are engaged in learning, three conceptual frameworks were employed. The reason for using three was because each one taken separately only explained part of what was occurring. Together, these concepts provide a robust and holistic lens for which to view the experiences of

these older adult learners. The three frameworks utilized for this research are: successful aging, generativity, and art as a way of knowing.

The first conceptual framework is successful aging (Rowe & Kahn, 1998), which attempts to explain why some people age better than others. Successful aging includes many components for older learners to function independently in all the activities of daily living. With life expectancy increasing, older learners have no set guidelines or criteria of how to age successfully (Flood & Scharer, 2006). People do age unsuccessfully and die at younger ages from cardiovascular disease, hypertension, cancer, and other diseases (CDC, 2005; National Institutes of Health, 2005).

The second theory which is framed by human development and is seen as a positive aspect of healthy psychosocial development and aging is defined by the theory of generativity. Generativity is investment in the following generations; it is giving back to society. An older person has a profound desire for “legacy,” the desire “to leave something behind when they die. This desire can include intellectual and spiritual knowledge, memories, and lasting works of art” (Butler, 2008, p. 415). This study also drew on the concept of art as a way of knowing which focuses on the ways in which adults learned through viewing and creating art.

### **Successful Aging**

Many researchers have defined what constitutes healthy, productive and successful aging (Bengtson, Silverstein, Gans & Putney, 2009; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Ryff & Singer, 2009; Rowe & Kahn, 1998). There are similarities and nuances between these terms. For the purposes of this study, the structure of successful aging as defined by Rowe and Kahn (1998) who define successful aging as the “ability to maintain

three key behaviors or characteristics: low risk of disease and disease-related disability; high mental and physical function; and active engagement with life” (p. 38) was employed. Each of these three factors is important in and of itself and to some degree is independent of the others.

Successful aging also included the “individual acting on resources available to her or him to optimize the aging experience” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 12). This type of aging makes the process of growing old a worthwhile experience. The concept of successful aging had an emphasis on resilience and health coupled with the decline or absence of disease (Bengtson, Silverstein, Gans & Putney, 2009). Successful aging can be accomplished in numerous ways, yet there is no set structure or guidelines established as how to achieve this (Flood & Scharer, 2006). Because this study focuses on retirement and individuals that are age 60 and older, the locus is not just based on longevity per se; but rather on the quality of those remaining years. Participants in the study met the criteria as set out by Rowe and Kahn.

To gain an understanding of successful aging, the Georgia Centenarian study (Poon, Sweaney, Clayton, & Merriam, 1992) examined successful adaptation of centenarians, octogenarians, and septuagenarians. The key factor of their success is resilience, defined by Masten (2001) as “a class of phenomena characterized as good outcome in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (p. 227). These centenarians tended not to be neurotic, they were not overly nervous, nor were they easily upset. They did not let things fester; they did not hold grudges or harbor unpleasant feelings (Martin, Maruice, Margrett, & Poon, 2010).

What other behaviors are experienced with age and how people react? In contemporary culture, “age is only coveted when compared to the alternative” (Fisher & Simmons, 2007, p. 13). The sample in this study was not an inert group of adult learners; they were active and many considered themselves lifelong learners. Some are continually looking for new ways to develop themselves. For the purposes of this study the participants were enrolling freely in an art course, used their own income to pay for it, and had access to transportation to attend class at an art center. The framework of successful aging helped bring an understanding of the experiences that older adulthood brings; and it brought an understanding to the purpose of my study in several ways.

### **Generativity**

Generativity for the refers to the seventh stage of development in Erik Erikson’s human development life cycle, but views by many other theroists are incorporated and expanded upon in this study. Generativity means giving back to society as a part of maintaining identity in aging (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2011). It includes the strength that results from caring for others and the production of something that contributes to the betterment of society. In Erikson’s (1963) words generativity is, “concern in establishing and guiding the next generation” (p. 267). Erikson presents stages as having a tension between binaries. The binary opposite of generativity is stagnation. People living within this stage fear meaninglessness or inactivity. Successful development is achieved with a balance between stagnation and generativity. It is a balance between contributing to the following generation and inactivity. If the challenge of generativity is accepted, the development of trust in the next generation is

facilitated, and the psychosocial strength of care is obtained (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2011).

Generativity can be demonstrated in many ways: doing volunteer work in the community; being satisfied with one's career and with life and acting on the desire to give back; and learning from children or the generation coming up after you. For example, one could even be single, with no family and still leave a legacy and give back. One could also give back through teaching, through giving of oneself by volunteering, quilting, building furniture, writing life stories, leaving something of one's history. One can be generative by leaving a legacy to the next generation, by making things and by giving them away (Cohen, 2002; Kotre, 1984, 1999; McAdams, 1998; Vaillant, 2002).

Because of longevity, generativity may be extending into older adulthood. Generativity could inform the reason older adults are engaging in art. This study explored the rationale for engaging in visual arts and if generativity was a factor in successful aging for this group of individuals. Generativity is a theory that has been linked with midlife, but some theorists claim that generativity can occur across the lifespan, and even well into older adulthood.

### **Art as a Way of Knowing**

A legitimate need is further investigation into art as a way of knowing for adult populations. In the adult education literature, multiple ways of knowing have been reviewed and discussed (Dirkx, 2001; English & Gillen, 2000; Lawrence, 2005; Tisdell, 2003). Creating artwork is "a way of nonintellectual knowing, through emotion and body. It evokes in the soul an intuition of selfhood-at home in the mysteries of existence, renewable through change" (Richards, 1995, p. vii). When art as a way of knowing is

discussed, fundamental questions should first be answered: How do we know what we know? And how do we know through art? While we can explain what we know via multiple dimensions, emotional, spiritual, etc. discussion of the artistic dimension is still fairly new with limited literature on this topic. Exploring artistic and creative ways opens up possibilities for older, retired adults in knowing how they come to learn, feel and experience retirement.

Art as a way of knowing “is what we actually believe...it is our imagination...the most important faculty we possess” (Allen, 1995, p. 4). People can use their imaginations to create whatever they want; it is wide open. Making art, the process of giving the imagination a shape and/ or form, allows individuals to learn to be more flexible and have more options in their lives (Allen, 1995). Art as a way of knowing allows people to get in touch with their inner-selves and become more alive in the process (Greene, 1995) bringing an understanding to the learning and meaning making of older retired adults.

Successful aging, generativity and art as a way of knowing taken together were central to the study of older learners engaged in art, and it was essential that an integrated approach of these concepts be utilized. When these three are taken together, the research produced a richer, deeper study. Components of each of these has been examined separately, but not together. An investigation was made combining successful aging, generativity and art as a way of knowing to further the research as to how an integrated approach benefited adults in retirement.

### **Significance of the Study**

At no point in our history have so many people been this old. Globally, in 2050, “the number of person 60 and older is expected to rise to almost 2 billion” (Takamura,

2007, p. 546). In the United States, by 2050, over 85 million people will be over the age of 65 (Frieland & Summer, 2005). These facts alone justify the need for serious attention to be paid to this matter. In May of 2005, the combined forces of the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP), the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Center for Creative Aging held a mini Conference on Creativity and Aging in Washington D.C. The conference resulted in the following statement:

Active participation in arts promotes mental and physical health among older adults living independently in the community, improves the quality of life for those who are ill and reduces the risk factors in older adults that drive the need for long-term care. Despite these findings, the report said, the arts are not considered part of the solution to the broader societal questions of how to promote health and extend life. (Hanna, 2006, p. 48)

Adult educators need to know more about how arts can be considered part of the solution. To advance learning for older adults the field of adult education must better understand the processes of aging; and ways to foster successful aging. In particular, what are the effects of engaging in art on that process? No two people age in the same way or at the same rate. Aging individuals face failing health, diseases, economic hardships, problems that must be addressed if society is to benefit from the added years of life in this population. If participating in art can promote health, would it not be prudent to explore its effect on the reduction of health care costs? Findings from this and other studies can help contribute to the discussion over reducing health care costs in these difficult economic times. This study could be significant to government policy makers interested in reducing health care costs. It could also have long-term implications beyond

the scope of today's economic times. Due to longevity and the growing numbers of retirees, it is predicted that 2017 will be the year that Medicare and Social Security will expand beyond payable limits. Looking at ways to reduce health care costs for retirees is imperative, not just for today, but well into the future. So the "observed phenomenon that positively impacts adults with access to the arts or the ability to express themselves through a form of creative expression" (Hoggan, Simpson, & Stuckey, 2009, p. 79) is very real and should be explored.

In the field of adult education, it is important for us to understand how older adults learn through art. For example, "painting allows the individual access to his or her inner wisdom by tapping into a level of consciousness that may not be accessible through more rational means" (Lawrence, 2005, p. 9). In art, the focus should be inclusive of the entire process of creating, i.e., learning, not solely the end product. When adults create things they are connecting to other ways of knowing. We know that individuals can learn through emotions, the body, symbols, imagination; -these multiple ways of knowing; yet there is little research on how older adults learn through art. The process of creating art can often "assist the adult learner in adopting a new view of the world- one where the world will never appear the same again" (Hoggan, Simpson, & Stuckey, 2009, p. 79).

This study helps fill a conceptual void because it combines art and older adult learners with a combined theoretical and conceptual framework of generativity and successful aging. When combining successful aging and art as a way of knowing, this study fills a gap that exists in the literature. Several studies have been conducted on retirement, aging, and art separately, but there is a gap with regard to studies that link these topics together (Sherman, 2006). While much is known about successful aging,

not much is known about engagement in art and its effect on successful aging. The study could be significant to baby boomers who are exploring possible modes of successful aging. Moreover, it could serve to aid newly retired individuals into activities that will be beneficial to them.

This study also offers significance to other fields of study- art education and human development. In art education, the insights gained from this study could lead to programming changes at senior centers, art centers, universities and colleges across the United States. In human development, as Lawrence (2005) states “the greater potential for awakening consciousness lies in the sharing of artwork with others” (p. 135). For some older adults this may help them to become more generative which is related to the concept of generativity and older adults producing art.

Many talented artists have disproved the widespread belief that creative abilities and “expression automatically wane in the second half of life, or that the desire—or the need to create disappears” (Milner, 2006, p. 54). We can look to the examples of Renoir, Picasso, Michelangelo, Degas, Goya, and Grandma Moses...all of whom created works of art in late adulthood. How were these masters able to achieve and thrive in late adulthood? Previous studies (Lehman, 1953) have shown that creativity declines with age, but a more recent study (Cohen, 2005) found that creativity does not necessarily decline in older adulthood. More research is needed to explore these conflicting findings.

This study is also of personal significance. My interest in this area is threefold: First, as a teacher of adults, second as a participant in retirement, and third as someone who may aid in the funding process. As an adult educator, I can see myself engaged in ways to aid older generations as well as members of my own generation, Gen X, to

become more artistic and creative. Based on the sheer numbers – the scale of demographics of aging in America – I want to be on the forefront working with and teaching older adult learners. In addition, both of my parents lived in retirement for about 15 years, and although they enjoyed retirement, their lives were cut short by poor lifestyle choices. I have developed a healthier lifestyle for myself and my family – so that we may benefit from longevity and enjoy good health well into older adulthood. What options will be available to me in the arts when I retire? Currently, there are private art centers, public senior centers, Elderhostel and colleges and universities that have offerings. “What kinds of learning centers will we create, and how will older-adult learning through the arts and lifelong education be integrated instead of marginalized within the society?” (Sherman, 2006, p. 45). And finally, as a business educator, I often neglect the creative side of life. So I want to engage in art, but also utilize my business background so that I can help facilitate funding for art/artist programs in communities.

### **Overview of Design and Methodology**

This study used the qualitative research design to gain an understanding of how the visual arts impacted the lives of retired individuals engaging in art. The literature revealed a gap with regard to older adult learners and creativity. Qualitative research aided in bringing an understanding of this phenomena because it produced “descriptive data: people’s own written or spoken works and observable behavior” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 5). I sought to understand and interpret the data of how people make meaning from their experience, and qualitative research allowed for a belief in multiple realities. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research allows a researcher to get to know the participants in their study personally, yet maintains a commitment to the participant’s

point of view (Patton, 2002). A researcher will get to know the experiences of daily life and learn concepts of “beauty, pain, faith, suffering, frustration, and love whose essence is lost through other research approaches....we learn about the inner life of a person...both successes and failures...” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 7).

A major focus of qualitative research is on meaning making. This means that these narrative interviews with older adults were used to develop an understanding of the unique nature of art. It is the creativity of the mind that provided a deeper understanding, which could serve as examples for others to build upon. It is because of this complexity that qualitative research best addresses the purpose and questions raised in this study. The thick, rich descriptions typical of qualitative research will better facilitate a better understanding of older adults learning through art and its meaning.

Qualitative research also allows a researcher to look at people holistically (Merriam & Simpson, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), both in the context of their past and in the situations in which they currently find themselves. The goal of qualitative research is to “achieve an understanding of how people make sense of their lives, to delineate the process of meaning making, and to describe how people interpret what they experience” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 98) In contrast, a quantitative approach requires an idiosyncratic language that would be too rigid and ill-suited for this study.

There are multiple research approaches and types of research within the qualitative paradigm. A researcher could employ phenomenology, ethnography, case study research, grounded theory, historical research, basic interpretive, action research and narrative. Situating a study within a specific research approach helps to bring an

understanding of what will be covered and included in the study. The research type for this study is narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry, an interpretive methodology, guided this study. Narrative was appropriate for this study because it involved the collection of people's stories to explore their thoughts, feelings and experiences in relation to the research question (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002). For clarification, it should be noted that while some researchers make distinctions between story and narrative, for the purposes of this study, narrative was used synonymously with story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Riessman, 2008). Why was it the most appropriate design for the purpose of this study?

Narrative is a way of knowing (Clandinin, 2007) and meaning making (Chase, 2005, Pokinhorne, 1988, Riessman, 2008). This study focused on how older, retired adults were creating art, and their stories and purposes behind these activities. Through the examination of personal narratives, I began to discover how these older adults continue to learn and the role the visual arts play in their lives. Narratives are designed to explore the participants' perspectives and allows them to provide the information that answered the questions posed by the study.

Data collection involved several sources. I served as the primary collector of data. The primary data collection was face to face, semi-structured interviews that were conducted either on site at the art center where classes are held, or in the participants' home. Secondary source data included field notes and the art work that was created by each participant. Participants were asked to provide a piece of art that represented them personally and/ or represented their retirement. Interview questions were designed to capture the participant's engagement in visual arts and explore their stories and narratives

with regard to successful aging and generativity. More details on data collection including measures on trustworthiness are discussed in Chapter 3.

### **Definitions of Terms**

There are several terms that warrant definitions used throughout the study and are listed below:

1. Adult development is a branch of developmental psychology that examines the development and changes in the adult life cycle. It is seen as a continuous, dynamic process that looks at the social, spiritual, physical and intellectual learning process.
2. Age “is the change, which occurs in all forms of life with the passing of time” (Bortz, 1963, p. 56).
3. Aging describes advancing through the life cycle, beginning at birth and ending at death. Aging is commonly used to describe the process of getting older.
4. Art is all forms of artistic expression: poetry, dance, drama, literature music and visual art. For the purposes of this study, the terms *art* and *creativity* were used interchangeably.
5. Art as a way of knowing leads to a person’s self-discovery through art; through visual images of painting, drawing or sculpture. It is a nonintellectual knowing, through emotion and through body.
6. Artist is a person who produces paintings or drawings as a profession or hobby; or a person who practices any of the various creative arts, such as a sculptor, novelist, poet, or filmmaker; or just simply...someone who creates art
7. Baby boomers are defined as the cohort born between 1946 and 1964.

8. Generation X (Gen X): “Generation X encompasses the 44 to 50 million Americans born between 1965 and 1980. This generation marks the period of birth decline after the baby boom and is significantly smaller than previous and succeeding generations” (Kane, 2011, p.1).
9. Generativity is the process of giving back to society. It usually occurs in midlife, but some believe it can be lifelong. Eric Erikson coined this term, and said in his words, “I am what survives me” (Erikson, 1968, p. 114).
10. Generosity is the habit of giving freely without expecting anything in return. “It can involve offering time, assets or talents to aid someone in need. Often equated with charity as a virtue, generosity is widely accepted in society as a desirable trait” (Generosity, n.d.).
11. Longevity “represents a chronological measurement of a person’s length of life” (Blackburn & Dulmus, 2007, p. 28).
12. Narrative “means ‘to account’ and is derived from the term gno, meaning to know. The oral storytelling traditions of earliest man were narrative inquiries that sought to address questions of meaning and knowing. From the beginning, narrative embodied multiple ways of knowing” (Hendry, 2010, p. 72)
13. Older adults can be defined in a variety of ways but is most often done in terms of chronological age. For the purposes of this study, participants were over the age of 60.
14. Retirement is an evolving concept. It is a period of life that begins after the cessation of work that has sustained adult life; the receiving of Social Security and pension benefits; and a journey into and through new life stages (Atchley,

1976; Costa, 1998). There is a variance in the timing and duration of retirement for all individuals.

15. Retiree is a person who once was working for wages, but is no longer working and is receiving pension income and/or social security.
16. Self-absorption can be defined as doing things primarily for the benefit of themselves and putting their feelings first.
17. Silent Generation is the generation born between 1925 to 1945 (Strauss & Howe, 1991).
18. Successful Aging is the conceptual framework developed by Rowe and Kahn (1998). The three components of successful aging are: a) avoiding disease; b) engagement with life; and c) maintaining high cognitive and physical function.
19. Visual art “includes painting, watercolor, collage making, those areas of artistic creativity that communicate primarily through the eye” (Encyclopedia Americana, 1996, p. 382).

### **Assumptions and Limitations of the Study**

The nature of academic inquiry inherently possesses assumptions and limitations; I have identified several that may be of relevance to this study.

#### **Assumptions of the Study**

The following assumptions are embedded in this research:

1. Retirees desire to live a healthy, long life.
2. Engaging in visual art is considered enjoyable and productive; although it should be noted that some individuals may be participating in art, but not necessarily enjoying it.

3. Retirees were honest and accurate in sharing their perceptions and understandings of learning through visual art.
4. Decline is not necessarily a trait of aging.
5. There are many creative activities available to retired individuals; this is only one of many creative activities available to older adults.

### **Limitations**

This study explored the experiences of older, retired adults engaging in visual art. As is typical of qualitative research, the sample was small and purposeful and limits the generalizability of the study. Rich, descriptive narratives were gathered and may provide the reader with information to determine the transferability of the data to see how applicable it is to their own lives.

1. A pool of potential participants is limited to the suburban area in South Central Pennsylvania; the experiences of older adults in rural or city environments or other geographic areas may differ considerably.
2. Participants have ready access to transportation to be able to attend the classes.
3. Participants must be retired and within the age range specified (60+).
4. As compared to the general population, persons of color are underrepresented in this study.
5. Due to the geographic location of the study, it was difficult to recruit participants of color, or of varying education levels. This study involves only

healthy, retired, older adults who live in a semi-rural area. Therefore, the sample may be limited in ethnic or gender diversity.

6. Other limitations such as my own subjectivity and being a younger person interviewing older people, I am concerned that participants will want to please me, and answer questions the way I want them to answer them. These, as well as ways to mitigate these limitations, are discussed in Chapter 3.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter provides an overview of this study which explores retirement and visual art in an adult learning context. The chapter begins by exploring the significance of retirement and how longevity in our society will affect the future of retirement.

Multiple definitions of what it means to be retired as well as various definitions of art are provided.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Within the greater American society, the 76 million people born between 1946 and 1964 known as the baby boomers, are preparing to and have already begun to retire. With the retirement of this large percentage of the population, it becomes increasingly important to examine this stage of life. Because longevity has increased, adults are spending more time in retirement (Butler, 2008; Fry & Keyes, 2010; Rowe & Kahn, 1998). Several factors, such as advances in medication and increased access to health care, have contributed to the longer life span (Fry & Keyes, 2008; Rowe & Kahn, 1998). In 1950, the average person spent three years in retirement; or about three percent of their life (U.S. Census, 2006). Whereas today, upon one's retirement, one can expect to spend anywhere from 15 to 30 years in retirement. Retirement is a 19<sup>th</sup> century social justice concept which arose from the notion that the government had a responsibility to help keep older adults from experiencing poverty. It was institutionalized "in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, converted into a lifestyle, and dragged unchallenged and largely unexamined into the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (MacBean, 2007, p.41). Baby boomers are in the process of challenging and reexamining the concept of retirement.

Equally important is the role of visual arts in our lives. Older learners are creating art because "...creativity can help people find meaning and purpose as they move toward and through the retirement and aging process" (Dahlberg, n.d., p. 1). Visual arts are what we see with our own eyes. Appreciation of the visual arts is personal to each individual, just as retirement is an individual process (Schlossberg, 2003). Recent studies (Cohen, 2006; Patterson & Perlstein, 2011; Reynolds, 2010) indicate a strong relationship

between improved mental and physical health for older learners engaging in art. If visual arts can help to reduce health care costs and improve the quality of life, the potential for exploring these benefits and engaging in research concerning visual arts could be of great value in investing in arts programs for older adults (Cohen, 2006; Hanna, 2006). In keeping with this potential, the primary purpose of this study was to explore the role of visual arts and its impact on successful aging in older adult learners in retirement. The participants in this study are older retired adults enrolled in a visual arts class at an art center / gallery. This chapter begins with multiple definitions of retirement and provides a historical context for retirement. Trends associated with retirement were also discussed. These sections are followed by an overview of the literature of this study's three conceptual/ theoretical frameworks, along with their conceptual underpinnings: (1) successful aging, (2) generativity and (3) visual art as a way of knowing. It should be noted that these three frameworks were integrated into a single overarching framework. A discussion of how these frameworks served as a lens through which the experiences of these retirees were explored. In conclusion this literature review examined the empirical literature on visual arts and older, retired adult learners.

As a result, this research addressed a gap on the areas of visual arts and creativity in older adulthood because the literature is scant (Romaniuk & Romaniuk, 1981). While this citation is from the early 1980's, during the intervening thirty years from the early 1980s until now, some research has been done, but there is still not a lot of data to get an overall picture of what is happening currently with regard to visual arts and older adult learners. No studies focus on retirees and visual arts specifically.

## Retirement Defined

Retirement can be defined and manifested in many different ways. Retirement is considered a process, an event, a phase of life, and a social role involving novel decision making in order to navigate the remaining stages of life (Atchley, 2000; Costa, 1998; Graebner, 1980; Hodkinson, Ford, Hodkinson & Hawthorn, 2008; Manheimer, Snodgrass & Moskow-McKenzie, 1995). Webster's dictionary (n.d.) defines *retired* as "withdrawn from one's position or occupation: having concluded one's working or professional career" (Retired, n.d.). Generally, the definition of retirement makes reference to two characteristics: (1) whether a person is in the paid labor force; and (2) whether a person is receiving pension income (Purcell, 2008). This may or may not include persons who retain part-time employment or volunteer work, which sometimes pose economic and other problems for persons of retirement age. There are many individuals in society who are still in the work force, but are retired. Military and law enforcement personnel who provided twenty years of service and then retired comprise the largest share of this group. They receive a pension for their service, and many have elected to begin new work and remain employed. The definition of retirement can include people who are both working and not working, but for the purposes of this study, it includes older adults who are not working, and who are receiving retirement income. For clarification, it does not include younger adults who are not working (disabled) and are receiving SSI income. Other factors that affect retirement are general societal and economic factors such as social norms regarding retirement and stock market performance (Adams & Rau, 2011).

Retirement is also generally understood as a multidimensional construct that is a time of self-discovery, personal fulfillment and independence (Hodkinson, Ford,

Hodkinson & Hawthorn, 2008; Manheimer, Snodgrass & Moskow-McKenzie, 1995).

Retirement can be seen as a status symbol for people who are less well-off and as a function of socio-economic status for the middle class. (Erikson, 2008).

Some theorists see retirement as both a life stage and a process (Atchley, 2000; Cornman & Kingston, 1996) that has increased and can last for many years. As a life stage, retirement is sometimes understood as having sub-stages: pre-retirement which is planning for this period of life; the actual day of retirement, which is a definitive day-long event - employees usually are recognized in a ceremony with a luncheon or farewell party; and the final stage is post retirement, which is the period after one has stopped working (Adams & Rau, 2011). There is what is known as the 'honeymoon' stage of being newly retired. Individuals in this stage are often euphoric while becoming familiar with the idea of not working in a structured environment. There can also be a period of a post- retirement stage that can be recognized as a phase when one experiences the diminished sense of purpose, loss of identity and loss of power and may even be felt by those leaving the workforce as they transition into retirement (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2011).

As a process, retirement causes some people to look at their life and make adjustments. It is a big transition. In some cases, "retirement may be so stressful that it actually threatens physical and emotional health, provoking vulnerability, a sense of loss, and depression" (Schlossberg, 2003, p. 27). Yet not everyone feels this way. As long as people have financial security, health, and a supportive network of friends and family, people can adjust to retirement very well (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2011). It is getting used to new daily routines and new patterns. How people adjust to retirement is

an individual process and varies from person to person (Bass & Caro, 1995). “Each person’s retirement experiences are unique” (Schlossberg, 2003, p. 147). Many retirees are in a stage of life that has greater potential for increased free time; they are liberated from the time constraints of work, making possible new venues of imagination and leisure. Retirees are on the cusp of change (Manheimer, Snodgrass & Moskowitz-McKenzie, 1995). Just as graduation is the ending of one phase and the beginning of another in one’s life, so, too, is retirement. While change and transition can be viewed as an opportunity, it can also cause anxiety fraught with unsettling feelings of the unknown (Butler, 2008; Jarvis, 2001). Adjustments have to be made in retirement.

### **History of Retirement**

In ancient times, if you lived long enough “to develop crow’s feet, you were either worshiped or eaten as a sign of respect” (Weisman, 1999, p.19). In that time period, human beings were born, worked, and died. There was no retirement. The term retirement was not coined or considered before the advent of increased life span and longevity. From the literature, it is filled with brief accounts of military conscription, short life spans and discussions of old age. In “The History of Aging and Old Age in Western Cultures” Thane (2010) describes how various cultures and societies view aging differently. In ancient Greece, men were still conscripted in their fifties, but formal military service ended when they turned sixty, on the grounds of old age.

In thirteenth century England, the upper limit of age was set at age seventy for jury service. Thane (2010) claims that historically, women lived longer, but their lifespans were shortened due to death during childbirth. Men in their prime often had higher death rates because of hazards at work, war, everyday violence, accidents and

disease (Thane, 2010). Retirement was still not part of English life nor that of the early American Colonists. Life expectancy at birth in England averaged around 35 years of age between 1540 and 1800 (Wrigley & Schofield, 1981).

During Colonial times up until the 1800's in the United States, people primarily worked in agriculture and farming. On the farm, there was no retirement. People worked long and hard, and rarely engaged in leisure activities until their death. Women worked in the home tending to domestic chores and raising children, while men worked as long as they were physically able to do so. In 1850, 77% of men over the age of 65 still worked (Graebner, 1980). During this time, industrialization began in the United States and with it the need for more efficiency of factory workers. In 1855, the average life span in the United States was about 40 years.

The Industrial Revolution which occurred from the 1790s until about the 1860s altered the structure of the U.S. economy that led workers to retirement. Industrialization had mixed consequences on workers. First, it generated wealth and brought significant increases to longevity (Butler, 2008; Manheimer, 1994). Those who increased productivity enjoyed higher wages and accumulated wealth, allowing some people to reduce or cease work and retire. Workers began earning more than they needed for survival, and began to plan ahead and save the excess wages for use in later life when they would withdraw from the labor force (Manheimer, 1994). In addition, for purpose of social control and to ensure that jobs were available for younger workers, a formal retirement system was instituted. Some older workers could not keep up with the rapid pace of the mass production of goods, and were seen as taking jobs from younger workers. Mandatory retirement, which is no longer legal for most professions, was

outlawed by the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) of 1967, which prohibits the use of age as a criterion in hiring, firing, layoffs, promotions and working conditions (Atchley, 2000). However, there is still mandatory retirement for certain professions deemed too dangerous or that require a high level of mental skills, such as airline pilots and air traffic controllers.

During the Industrial Revolution, the long hours and poor working conditions were tough on people and many did not live past age 65. Machines required laborers to use precision and work quickly. An older worker whose vision was slipping or one who worked slowly and showed signs of age was problematic, especially by the early 1900's which gave rise to scientific management and the Darwinian concept of survival of the fittest in the workplace. Retirement during this time was a rare occurrence. In a 1919 report, Dr. John O'Grady wrote,

Very few wage-earners can expect to be able to work until the end of their lives. They ordinarily look forward to a few years before death when they will no longer be able to earn wages. How are they to obtain a livelihood during those last years of life? This is the problem of old age as it affects the working man (Ohio Health and Old Age Insurance Commission, 1919, p. 201)

In the United States, retirement emerged as part of the life cycle in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Costa, 1998). During this time, the extended family played a much more significant role than they do today. People had larger families and several generations living under one roof was not uncommon. Higher birth rates in those years meant more sons and daughters would help out and provide care and

support to their grandparents. In our current times, grandparents cannot expect to live with or be large part of their children's or grandchildren's family (Lang, 1961).

In 1935, President F.D. Roosevelt and Congress enacted Social Security, which was an expansion of the 1930 Public Old Age Pension Law. At the time Social Security was created in the United States, "life expectancy at birth then was just 58 for men and 62 for women" (Greenblatt, 2011, p. 581). At the close of World War II, Roosevelt wanted to expand the scope of this system to include disability benefits, which would allow soldiers to retire after the war. In 1944, in his State of the Union Address, he commented that veterans should have "the right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment" (Roosevelt, 1944).

In 1958, an organization emerged called the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), which has become a powerful advocacy group on behalf of older individuals. Being a member has several advantages, but an individual must be the age 50 to join and pay the annual membership fee. This organization helps to transition older adults into retirement. This group lobbies the government for the betterment of retirees.

For a worker in the U.S. to receive Social Security, or Old Age Survivors Insurance (OASI), one needs to be 65 to receive full benefits. The U.S. government has moved to gradually increase the age to 67 in order to receive full benefits. This age is likely to increase due to financial pressure on the Social Security Administration, with the increasing number of retirees (and fewer workers to support them) leading to even greater payouts (Greenblatt, 2011).

There is wide latitude as to when older workers make the decision to and eventually retire. The timing of retirement depends largely on pension availability,

monetary standing, workplace rules, and opportunities for continued employment, family circumstances, and health issues (Purcell, 2008). Although a person can stop working at any time, retirement between the ages of 62 to 67 is most common and coincides with the age when Social Security benefits can be drawn currently.

Social Security, which provides near universal coverage, potentially allows workers to remain financially independent rather than relying on family members to provide for their financial support (Purcell, 2008). The middle class could now begin to afford to stop working, which in the past, was only what the leisured class or very wealthy were able to afford. It was seen as unlikely that most middle class individuals could rely solely on personal savings to fund their retirement (Purcell, 2008).

In the United States, retirement went from a rare occurrence 70 years ago - to the present time -where it is now seen as a universal social institution (Purcell, 2008). Retirement is an achievement at the end of one's working life, and it can be expensive (Erikson, 2008). Because longevity has increased, more people can expect to outlive their savings (Erikson, 2008, Purcell, 2008). The increased longevity of the human race, which has also contributed to the costs of retirement, has been made possible by many changes in society and technology: improved medical care – via surgery, drugs, and medical devices (e.g. pacemaker). There has been a rapid growth of people in the over 85 age-group while centenarians are becoming more common, though not so much that is but it is not considered an achievement. A special, regular feature of the *Today Show* is Willard Scott's *Happy Birthday* segment, which features 5 to 7 people who are celebrating their 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Longevity in this age of medical and technological achievement is not always a boon. Life threatening conditions and illnesses such as cancer, heart failure, kidney and liver diseases can now be “managed as chronic illness for long periods of time, even decades, and well into very late life” (Cole, Ray, & Kastenbaum, 2010, p. 226). Many preventative and lifesaving interventions have become more readily available for elderly people changing the landscape for life expectancy. Concomitant with longer years at high economic costs are ethical and socio-medical considerations for life extension, such as quality of life and costs (Butler, 2008; Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2011). If creative and or visual arts can help to promote wellness among older adults, it will help to ease the burden on a society in which lower birthrates will mean there are fewer and fewer workers to sustain the system of institutional benefits from Social Security and Medicare.

For many, the time spent in retirement is longer than was anticipated. Many individuals are living healthier and productively well into retirement, while others flounder and search for meaning (Jarvis, 2001). “Although there are concerns and stressors associated with retirement, consistent with the literature, most people seem to be satisfied or express satisfaction with this time in their lives” (Roberson, 2005). There are several reasons why people retire. While some employees retire because they have been forced into it through furlough, being laid off, or dismissed, however, the majority of workers retire by their own choice (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2011). People cite a preference for leisure as one of the main reasons for leaving the workforce (Costa, 1998; Purcell, 2008). Leisure is defined as time spent in activities unrelated to employment, housework or the maintenance of self. People also leave employment when

they become eligible for public or private pension benefits. Some may leave because they have been injured or they are forced into retirement. Others may take early retirement when employer incentives are offered. Many employers offer buyouts as incentives to employees to encourage workers to retire early. Other factors that affect the retirement decision are health, family, finances and feelings toward work. Unfortunately, unskilled and “working class Americans face real poverty in retirement” (Costa, 1998, p. 31). With poverty, poor health can also be a factor.

If individuals are not having financial problems, some may turn to developing new interests, skills or even take classes. There are literally hundreds of books on financial planning, yet there are few books on the psychological issues of retirement (Schlossberg, 2003). Non-financial aspects of retirement, especially in the programming of older adult education need to be developed.

Several current trends in retirement are occurring that have implications for this research. These include delaying retirement, phasing out (through reducing hours of work to part-time) of the workforce, not retiring at all, reforming healthcare coverage, and revamping higher education for older adult learners.

Because of the current economic downturn, many older adults will work longer, well into their 60's and 70's. Some will stay for financial reasons, others for sense of purpose and having feeling useful in the activities they perform. Some will continue because they enjoy working (Lloyd, 2012).

Retirement will be delayed and many individuals will not retire at all (Lloyd, 2012). In addition, many older workers will try phasing out of the work force. Phased retirement is when an employee begins to receive some pension income while continuing

to work on a part-time basis (Purcell, 2008). More workers have wanted flexible schedules, time off and opportunities to pursue other interests while still working (MacBean, 2007). Boomers “want to restructure retirement so that it is not an abrupt withdrawal from the workplace” (p.48). “The ideal retirement for 71% of adults surveyed is to work in some capacity and almost half of those US adults who plan to work in retirement (45% say they don’t plan to stop working–ever” (Merrill Lynch, 2006). Because the younger cohorts are not as large in number means the nation will need to continue to utilize older workers if the economy is to remain globally competitive (MacBean, 2007).

Another trend is that higher education will be redefined for retirees (Dychtwald, 2005; Manheimer, 1994; Purcell, 2008). Older learners will likely desire a more varied curriculum from colleges and universities. “Lifelong-learning programs at colleges and universities, churches, and community centers and on cable TV and the Internet” (Dychtwald, 2005, p.18) will need to provide more offerings. Marc Freedman, CEO of Civic Ventures, a think tank that focuses on older learners finding socially meaningful work, predicts higher education will awake to a new definition of lifelong learning, which will include an alternative to the traditional self-development courses aimed at older Americans (Miller, 2009). Elderhostel, Senior Centers, and institutions of higher learning could all experience an impact.

### **Conceptual /Theoretical Frameworks**

Education and learning theories can sometimes be developed in isolation from other theories and concepts, thus providing no overall coherence (Beard & Wilson, 2006). This research is utilizing pieces of three separate conceptual frameworks that

have been melded into one in order to view older adult learners cohesively and provide a broader lens with which to understand and explain the behaviors observed in retirement. The first conceptual framework was (1) successful aging, which was followed by (2) generativity and (3) visual art as a way of knowing.

### **Successful Aging**

Many Americans age with grace and success. Yet, aging is still frequently viewed through a lens synonymous with decline and failure rather than with success (Andrews, 2010; Duay & Bryan, 2006; Hanna, 2006). Many researchers have defined what constitutes healthy, productive and successful aging (Bengtson, Silverstein, Gans & Putney, 2009; Havighurst, Neugarten & Tobin, 1968; Rowe & Kahn, 1998; Ryff & Singer, 2009; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Similarities, overlaps, and nuances flow between these terms. For the purposes of this study, the structure of successful aging will draw on the work of Rowe and Kahn (1998) who define successful aging as the “ability to maintain three key behaviors or characteristics: (1) low risk of disease and disease-related disability; (2) high mental and physical function; and (3) active engagement with life” (p. 38). It is the combination of these 3 components that represent the concept of successful aging more robustly. Each of these factors is important by itself and to some degree is independent of the others. This model was chosen because these three factors are broad and encompassing.

To understand the concept of successful aging more fully, each component will be examined. The first factor in successful aging is having a low risk of disease and disease-related disability. Exercise is seen as a benefit to all ages for long term health gains, but it is more than just exercise, it can involve using potential for creativity. Because

‘creative expression’ can improve a person’s outlook and provide a sense of well-being, the fact that older adults are engaging in visual arts could stave off disease and disability (Cohen, 2001).

**Low Risk of Disease and Disease-Related Disability.** Health and wellness are a large component of successful aging. Much of the literature discusses healthy habits for aging successfully: not smoking or abusing alcohol (Newman, Arnold & Naydeck, 2003), and keeping body mass index (BMI) in check (Flood & Scharer, 2006). Regular exercise should be part of a daily routine (Rowe & Kahn, 1998). Prevention and early detection of disease is a key to longer life. Just by the very nature of our longer existence – the increase of being “exposed to build up of ‘errors’ on our cells” (Rowe & Kahn, 1998, p. 69) which could lead to cancer in later life. Preventing or catching cancer early – be it breast, cervical, colon, rectal, prostate, lung, or skin, even with advancing age, include practices to reduce most of these cancers. The other factors that lead to illnesses that may be prevented are high blood pressure, having abdominal fat, high cholesterol which leads to heart disease, and decreases in kidney and lung function.

A critique of this part of the theory is that when looking at particular famous individuals for whom much of society has deemed ‘successful’, such as President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had polio; and world renowned physicist, Stephen Hawking, who is completely paralyzed; neither of these two individuals would be considered successful agers by Rowe and Kahn (1998) using this criterion alone. Both of these individuals however, had high mental function and were actively engaged in life. Because one has a propensity to disease as these two individuals had doesn’t mean they unsuccessfully aged.

The second factor in successful aging is having high mental and physical function. In looking at stroke victims who improved markedly, it was noted that they kept exercising their muscles, and continued attempting conversations with family. Patients were reported to move from a wheelchair to a walker to a cane with time, if they were vigilant in their physical function (Cohen, 2001). Stroke victim's mental function also improved the more they attempted to use their mind.

**High Mental and Physical Function.** Older adults need to maintain sharp mental function according to Rowe and Kahn's model. The MacArthur Study of successful aging (1998) found that those who were more well educated, more physically active, and experiencing good lung function, were better able to appropriate high mental and physical function. One way to achieve this is through multitasking. Many younger people study, listen to music and do an assignment simultaneously with ease. Older adults have a hard time completing more than one task at a time.

“Older adults worry excessively about losing mental ability” (Rowe & Kahn, 1998, p. 126). People mostly fear they are developing Alzheimer's disease or dementia (Rowe & Kahn, 1998). Playing word games to challenge your mind and keep it running smoothly in addition to strategy filled games like chess, pinochle, scrabble, and crossword puzzles keep the mind more active. Reading both fiction and nonfiction, increasing vocabulary and using words and numbers accurately as well as seeing pattern relationships and drawing conclusions from facts were also given as examples to stimulate the brain. The physical function includes activities such as getting dressed, bathing and eating. Sitting at home passively watching TV does not increase mental or physical function (Rowe & Kahn, 1998).

The physical aspect of grasping a paint brush or engaging in pottery or any visual art activity improve fine motor skills; and the creation of a painting can aid with mental function; but there is limited research in this area.

The third component of successful aging is active engagement with life. Little is known about engaging in visual arts, if it is even considered active engagement with life? Yet there is not a how-to manual on how to successfully age. This study looked at these three components and explored older learners engaging in visual arts.

**Active Engagement with Life.** Active engagement means physically or mentally participation in activity. Activities vary by person, but they can be a source of personal development, bringing joy, fun, leisure, making money, being with people, or simply having something to look forward to. For purposes of this study, activity is considered almost anything that involved engagement in visual arts. This part of Rowe and Kahn's theory stems from the earlier activity theory (Havighurst, Neugarten & Tobin, 1968), which suggests optimal aging occurs when individuals remain active and continue interpersonal relationships for as long as possible (Duay & Bryan, 2006). Most people enjoy the rhythm and routines of their lives (Atchley, 2000). Aging and retirement change the activities and routines. Most retirees, if physical decline is not present, and they have the financial wherewithal, can focus on activities of their own choosing. Some of the day to day functions of daily living may include household maintenance, recreation and physical exercise. These activities and others cited include: leisure activities, volunteer activities, civic engagement and political activity (Keyes & Ryff, 1998; Nimrod, 2007). Having a strong social support network could help with coping in older

adulthood (Andrews, 2010; Lauer, 2007). Social support that evolve as a result of engagement in these activities can lead to staying engaged with life.

Successful aging can also include the “individual acting on resources available to her or him to optimize the aging experience” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 12). This type of aging makes the process of growing old a worthwhile experience. In looking at lifelong learning, which is when an individual continues to learn across the lifespan, (Schaie & Willis, 2002) people can learn a great deal of activities suitable to their older age. Importantly, engaging in visual art is given as an example of such an activity.

To gain a deeper understanding of successful aging, the Georgia Centenarian study (Poon, Sweaney, Clayton, & Merriam, 1992) examined successful adaption of cognitively – intact and community –dwelling centenarians, octogenarians, and septuagenarians. The key factor of their success was resilience, which is defined as “a class of phenomena characterized as good outcome in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (Masten, 2001, p. 227). These centenarians tend not to be neurotic, they are not overly nervous, nor are they easily upset. They do not let things fester; they do not hold grudges or harbor unpleasant feelings (Martin, Maruice, Margrett, & Poon, 2010). Yet they connect with others. Relating to others including connecting with family and friends has an important impact on successful aging (Rowe & Kahn, 1998).

Isolation can lead to poor health; just as connectedness shows greater benefits on physical health. The more connected, the greater the benefits and rewards although, there

must be a goodness of fit. The connections should be both beneficial and rewarding or, it could have negative effects (Rowe & Kahn, 1998).

It is important to note that several theorists expand beyond the three factors included in Rowe and Kahn's model. Factors such as having and maintaining a sense of humor (Ryff, 1988, Guse & Masear, 1999); having a sense of purpose and autonomy (Fisher, 1995); learning new skills (Baltes & Baltes, 1990a; Tate, Lah & Cuddy, 2003); spirituality, intellect, social engagement, safety and having a sense community (Lauer, 2007) are important. These factors are not part of Rowe and Kahn's model, but some of these components could strengthen their original model. Other positive characteristics that people need to have for an optimized longer lifespan include mobilizing resources to cope with age-related decline, making lifestyle choices to preserve well-being, cultivating flexibility across the life span, and focusing on the positive versus the problems and difficulties of growing old (Hill, 2005).

It is interesting to note that older adults are often excluded from studies on prevention and wellness (Rowe & Kahn, 1998). There is no how-to manual on maintaining health and preventing disease. In addition, no research was found to date that "has examined the ability to promote successful aging by increasing creativity" (Flood & Scharer, 2006), including visual arts. The concept of successful aging through engaging in art has the potential to change a common negative perception held by many older adults who think that old age is a time of loss and difficulty (Squire, 2010).

## **Generativity**

In attempting to find the “why” behind older adult learners creating visual art, the concept of generativity was explored. Many individuals, after creating art, often give their art away.

### **Adult Development and Generativity**

Psychosocial theory which includes generativity is another concept that is central to the purpose of this study. It will be utilized to gain understanding behind why older learners are engaging in art. Generativity is defined as a strength that results from caring for others and the production of something that contributes to the betterment of society (Erikson, 1963). “Generativity arises from desires both selfless and selfish. It is linked to one’s desire for immortality” (Kleiber & Nimrod, 2008, p. 77). It also encompasses procreativity, productivity and creativity (Erikson, 1997; McAdams, 1998). Thus, the generations of new people, new places, new things, and new ideas, becomes a kind of self-generation concerned with further identity development. If this is not achieved, a sense of stagnation occurs. In Erikson’s (1963) words generativity is, “concern in establishing and guiding the next generation” (p. 267). Generativity can be demonstrated in many ways: doing volunteer work in the community; being satisfied with one’s career and with life and acting on the desire to give back; as well as learning from children or the generation coming up after you. (Cohen, 2002; Kotre, 1984, 1999; McAdams, 1998; Vaillant, 2002). One can be single or married, with no children and still leave a legacy (Rothrauff & Cooney, 2008). Also, one can be a parent and not be generative (Erikson, 1963). Examples given for non-parents are giving through teaching, and giving of oneself by volunteering (Rothrauff & Clooney, 2008). For instance, Butler (1975)

contends that the older person has a profound desire for “legacy,” the desire “to leave something behind when they die. This desire can include intellectual and spiritual knowledge, memories, and lasting works of art” (p. 415). Generativity can have both aspects of “self-expansion, self-expression, self-protection, and self-development” (Kleiber & Nimrod, 2008, p. 77). One’s efforts can have lasting impacts on others and the community (McAdams & Logan, 2004). Generativity can also include self-expression and meeting personal needs.

Generativity can also help inform the understanding of why older adult learners are engaging in art. Adults develop at different rates and follow different pathways, and numerous theorists/ authors associated with adult development include: Gardner (1999; 2011), Gillian (1982); Kegan (1994); Levinson (1996); and Schaie (2002). One of the most widely known and critiqued views of adult development is Erik Erikson’s psychosocial theory of human development (Erikson, 1950). Erikson developed his landmark theory involving eight stages of development across the life span. Table 1 illustrates Erikson’s model. Because the purpose of the study deals with older adult learners in retirement, this study relies on the exploration of the stages of life associated with older age and retirement. Therefore an overview of Erikson’s seventh stage, *generativity vs. stagnation / self-absorption* which is also known as *care* and the expansion of generativity within human development theory by other scholars will be covered in this section.

Table 1.  
Human Development Stages of Erikson's Model

Stages	
1.	Trust vs. mistrust (hope)
2.	Autonomy vs. shame (will)
3.	Initiative vs. guilt (purpose)
4.	Personal effectiveness vs. inferiority (competency)
5.	Identity vs. role confusion (fidelity)
6.	Intimacy vs. isolation (love)
7.	<b>Generativity vs. stagnation (care)</b>
8.	Ego-integrity vs. despair (wisdom)

Adapted from Erikson, 1963.

Each stage of the eight stages of Erikson's development (three in infancy and childhood, one in childhood, one in adolescence and three in adulthood) represents a crisis – a balance between two opposing forces. Each of Erikson's stage represents binary opposites; one a positive outcome- the other, a negative outcome (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2011). Before a person can successfully advance to the next stage of development, a balance between the opposing characteristics needs to be found. It should be noted that these stages do not always occur in sequence. Because retirement often falls within the stage of middle to late adulthood (from 55 and beyond) this is typically where generativity vs. stagnation or self-absorption might be expected to be of considerable interest. The concept of generativity could inform the purpose of my study by exploring what the retirees do with their art once they have finished creating. Do they pass it on to family members? Do they give it away as gifts? Do they donate it for auction at a charity? Finding the answers to these questions could inform my study.

Many scholars have expanded on Erikson's seventh stage of generativity vs. stagnation/ self-absorption (Capps, 2004; 2008, Carlsen, 1998; Cohen, 2001; Kotre,

1984; 1999; McAdams, 1998, and Vaillant, 2002). This stage occurs roughly in the middle-adult years, yet Erikson focused primarily on earlier stages of development with only limited attention to development in this and older developmental stages. Some of Erikson's theories were unclear, poorly defined or unspecified (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2011). Erikson himself acknowledged that his work was incomplete because he focused on the younger years of life, yet he welcomed students and scholars to continue his work. A critique of Erikson's work is that his "mature age" stage only included brief descriptions and spanned more than 50 years. "The stage of generativity claims the largest stretch of time on the chart—30 years or more" (J. Erikson, 1997, p. 111). Because of the long time frame of generativity, more discussion and analysis has begun to flesh out what those years encompass and how this life stage plays out. Life is common for babies, toddlers, preschoolers and during the school years. Once people become adults life can blossom in many directions, hence inability to keep a narrow focus. This is relevant to my study because the time frame of retirement has increased and finding out approximately when generativity or stagnation might be occurring could be helpful to adult educators as we plan for curriculum in the arts.

**Domains and Phases of Generativity.** Generativity can be broken into several domains: biological, parental, technical and cultural (Kotre, 1984). Biological generativity is the conceiving, bearing and nursing of the next generation. One can see biological generativity by noticing our parents' physical traits in ourselves, or when we see ours in our children. This is the time when generativity is awake and alive within us. Parental generativity is full circle. It is the clothing, feeding, schooling, disciplining, nurturing, guiding, advising and eventually letting go of one's children, biological or

otherwise. People can be generative in a wide variety of life pursuits and in many life settings, as in work life and professional activities, volunteer endeavors, neighborhood and community activism, friendships and the way they choose to have fun (McAdams and de St. Aubin, 1998; Kotre, 1999). For example, co-workers often refer to projects as their “baby.”

Another form of generativity is technical. This type refers to the teaching of skills, for example, teaching someone how to cook, fix a car, cut hair, drive, or handle money. Individuals are passing on skills and apprenticeship as the generative object. Cultural generativity is conserving, renovating, or creating a meaning system and passing it on to others. “A culture can be religious, scientific, political, ethnic, artistic – or simply the common sense shared by a particular group of people” (Kotre, 1999, p. 14). Two other forms of generativity are societal and ecological (Schoklitsch & Baumann, 2011). Societal generativity is being a keeper of meaning, maintaining societal institutions and being a mentor...passing on traditions to younger generations (Schoklitsch & Baumann, 2011). One question on a scale used to measure generativity is: “I enjoy guiding younger people”...this gets to the heart of societal generativity. Ecological generativity is expressed by taking care of the earth and the environment. It is part of wanting to leave a positive social legacy and provide guidance for future generations to protect the environment. There does not have to be as much people contact with ecological generativity.

Erikson’s stage of generativity has been developed further into four phases of growth and development (Cohen, 2001; 2005). The phase that aligns with generativity is Cohen’s Phase III:

Recapitulation resolution and contribution (summing up). The age when people go through this stage is roughly between their late sixties through their eighties. People become motivated to share their wisdom; “Bilateral involvement of the hippocampi [in the brain] contributes” (Cohen, 2001, p. 53) to their desire and capacity to express themselves autobiographically; this could reasonably be extrapolated to extend to creating a piece of visual art, not necessarily a written document.

Examples of the summing up phase are given below. They demonstrate how people are shaped by a desire to find the meaning in the story of peoples’ lives. Individuals in the throes of this stage are called *keepers of culture* (Cohen, 2005). Through several qualitative interviews of retirees older than seventy-five, generativity is demonstrated:

From Deborah, an eighty-five year old homemaker: “My husband and I worked hard and faced many challenges. But we ended up doing well. He died and left me a modest inheritance. I want to honor him by giving to charity and those in need.” ...From Celia, an eighty-one year old librarian “I see more clearly now the importance of volunteerism and paying back, the importance of people who know things and know how to do things and sharing that with the rest. Our communities really do need us” ...Daniel, a seventy-nine year old economist; “I want to write memoirs for my grandchildren-filled with interesting anecdotes” (Cohen, 2001, p. 82).

Some theorists have attempted to place the stages of development into age categories (Capps, 2008; Cohen, 2001). For example, generativity vs. stagnation is placed in the 60s and 70s decades of an individual’s life. The ages of 60 to 70 are usually

the time when children have left home and parents have a new found freedom or are in mid-to late career, when achievement and advancement have been fulfilled, and individuals either have time to focus on self or develop a concern for others (Baltes & Baltes, 1990a; Capps, 2001; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; Okun & Michel, 2006). In retirement, generativity is more likely to occur because of the new found free time people have (Kruse & Wahl, 2010). Stagnation and self-absorption, the opposite of the generative perspective has the potential to become all-consuming awareness in old age, when the self-absorbed person is preoccupied with anxiety over death and wondering who will take care of them? (Carlsen, 1998; Vaillant, 2002).

**Measuring Generativity Scales.** Scales have been developed to empirically test and measure generativity (Kotre, 1984; McAdams, 2003). The Loyola Generativity Scale, (LGS), is the most common of tests. It is a 20-item questionnaire utilizing a Likert-scale to measure and assess the consciousness of individuals and their level of concern for the next generation. Generativity results from complex interconnections among societal and inner forces. “The tension between creating a product or outcome that outlives oneself and selflessly bestowing one’s effort as a gift to the next generation (reflecting on a concern for what is a good for society) results in a concern for the next generation and a belief in the goodness of the human enterprise” (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2011, p. 331). Several of the Likert scale questions on the LGS that illustrate this idea include: “I try to pass along the knowledge I have gained through my experiences.” “I have made and created things that have had an impact on other people,” and “I think that I will be remembered for a long time after I die.” One of the Likert statements that relates to ecological generativity from the LGS is: “I have a responsibility

to improve the neighborhood in which I live.” If they answered yes to these questions, the individuals are demonstrating signs of generativity.

Three other measurement scales used to measure generativity are the Gen-Life, Gen-Current, and Gen-Parental scales based on Kotre’s (1984) four domains of generativity. The first 2 scales consist of 29 items on the 4 generativity domains: technical, cultural, social and ecological; while the parental scale consists of 2 domains: biological and parental. Other measurement scales focus on the “present, the future, or the recent past, [these] scales assess generative concerns including a life review and a past perspective” (Schoklitsch & Baumann, 2011). The Gen-Life Review and the Gen-Current ask the same 29 questions, but the Gen-Current Scale is applied only to the current moment. Some of the items on these questionnaires include “I get politically involved”; “I pass on skills” and “I create enriching works”. All of these scales work to capture forms of generativity.

Older adult learners are deriving personal meaning from generative living, including the production of artwork, woodwork and crafts. McAdams and Logan (2004) also show how generativity is “the single strongest and most consistent predictor of many dimensions of socially responsible behavior, including volunteerism and contributing one’s time and one’s money to family members and to community concerns” (p. 23). They also reported a relationship between generative concern and life satisfaction. Although one study found no association between variables such as education, marital status, employment, gender and generative behavior (Grossbaum & Bates, 2002).

Generativity consists of concern, caring for, and making a commitment to the next generation in the roles of teacher, grandparent, older friend, advisor, mentor, volunteer,

guide, and contributor to the leaving of a legacy. The end of this stage comes, either slowly or quickly. If it becomes evident that a person begins to decline and can no longer contribute by giving up the positions of responsibility in the family and community, an older person may feel stagnation. They will begin to have diminished energy as well as physical capabilities. This is relevant to the purpose of my study because both stagnation and generativity are occurring in society; it is important to note the differences between them.

### **Self-Absorption and Stagnation.**

The LGS asks individuals to rate themselves on a Likert scale: “I feel that I have done nothing that will survive after I die;” “I do not volunteer to work for charity;” and “In general, my actions do not have a positive effect on other people.” If individuals strongly agree, or agree with these statements, then they are likely experiencing stagnation and self-absorption.

If healthy, older Americans have not achieved generativity, then the result tends to include self-absorption and stagnation. This is seen in adults who do not look beyond their own needs. People living within this stage fear meaninglessness or inactivity. Some are obsessed by personal success and accumulating money (Goldberg & Deutsch, 1977). According to Bettinger (2007) “stagnated adults are self-centered individuals who have difficulty looking beyond their own needs and seek to maximize their pleasure at the expense of others. These individuals may be fairly happy until confronted with the onset of physical and psychological consequences of aging -- at which time an identity crisis may ensue” (p. 74). One of the questions on the LGS that gets to the heart of this is: “I feel as though I have done nothing worthwhile to contribute to others.”

Table 5 explains stagnation/ self absorption vs. generativity in a robust way. The table shows characteristics of both stagnation and generativity as they relate to: relationships, the mind, the physical and vocational. It is absent any categories for ecological and societal domains, yet it does encompass parental and biological categories. Research on the *stagnation* side of generativity demonstrates how self-centered people, either through circumstance or difficult times, such as abuse, divorce or domestic violence could not easily or successfully achieve generativity. This research mentions people who are prejudiced, rigid, self-pitying, surly, or just plain mean. Some of these individuals are more likely to be stagnated and clearly miss the genuine rewards of generativity (Carlsen, 1988).

Table 5  
Stagnation vs. Generativity

<b>STAGNATION</b>	<b>GENERATIVITY</b>
Boredom	Energy, motivation
Mental decline	Mental growth
Self-absorbed	Other-absorbed
Obsessive pseudo-intimacy	The establishment of the next
Narcissistic self-indulgent	Generation through the production
	and care of offspring, or through
	other altruistic and creative acts
	<b>Relationships</b>
1. Deteriorating	1. Growing
2. Selfish	2. Selfless
3. Taking	3. Giving
	4. Involve in community, children,
	etc.
	<b>Mind</b>
1. Closed	1. Open
2. Rigid	2. Flexible
3. Stuck	3. Growing
	4. Creative
	<b>Physical</b>
1. Unrealistic body image	1. Realistic body image
2. Imbalance	2. Balance
	<b>Vocation</b>
1. Disillusionment	1. Sense of being needed
2. Boredom	2. Ongoing exploration, discovery
3. No sense of contribution to others	3. Contribution to society, children
4. Stagnation	4. Generativity

Adapted from: Carlsen (1988) p. 242

With respect to stagnation, the following words are used to describe a stagnated person 'closed rigid and stuck'. If someone is stuck or rigid, it is unlikely that they will engage in new activities or be giving of themselves. With regard to generativity, people are described with the words: open, flexible, growing, and creative; which does seem to fit the definitions of generativity. Overall, the table is informative, but lacks some domains of generativity.

The table may prompt those nearing retirement to ask themselves if they gave their time and talent to their corporation, to their employer, to a foundation, boy/girl scouts, garden club, library, church, etc.

**Generativity and Successful Aging.** Generativity in retirement focuses on people giving back to society in various ways. The successful aging component in generativity can mean engaging in visual arts and staying actively involved in this manner. Some researchers indicate that generativity impacts one's ability to age successfully with fulfillment (Rothrauff & Cooney, 2008; Schoklitsch & Baumann, 2011; Vaillant, 2002). Benefits of generativity include achieving a sense of immortality, passing on one's genes, enhancing one's purpose in life and giving back to the next generation (Erikson, 1985; Rothrauff & Cooney, 2008). Generativity can be a key to successful aging; it includes commitment, energy, tolerance and humor (Vaillant, 2002). "A vital ingredient of generativity is hope, but such hope is only possible if one's mind can encompass the concept of adult development" (p. 123). *Aging Well* (2005) focuses on numerous stories of people who are aging - some better than others. The differences are

not just due to focusing on the next generation, but focusing on purpose and meaning.

One of the stories told is of a 75-year-old man who could not wait to get out of bed in the morning because:

Every day offers new experiences: [the 75-year-old] regarded the last few years as the happiest of his life, adding, perhaps it is not so important to add up what we are doing as what we are being. I am doing nothing that people admire, that is, I have no consuming ‘project’ or single charity that people can point out to illustrate how focused or “wonderful” I am. I am not accumulating wealth or possessions. I am not producing new knowledge to add to the world’s store. What I am doing is probably pretty insignificant...I am a subscriber to a wide variety of local and national charities. I help cook meals for a city soup kitchen and have proctored statewide examinations for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders in a local school. I care for my house and yard, walk a good deal and do some swimming. He understood that not being of ‘considerable value’ at 75 can lead to freedom, not boredom (Vaillant, 2002, p. 220)

A criticism of Vaillant’s qualitative work is that although it is extensive with over 800 participants, most were selected from one institution, Harvard; which means the population was probably better educated and had obtained higher socioeconomic status than most of the population. So the data is potentially biased and is difficult to replicate. Individuals with more money and more education seem to have more resources to help them age more successfully than others (Rowe & Kahn, 1998; Duay & Bryan, 2006).

To sum up, generativity is, in Erikson’s words “I am what survives me” (1968, p. 141). It is seen as the drive “to invest one’s substance in forms of life and work that will

outlive the self” (Kotre, 1984, p. 10). Generativity provides the spark for renewal of self-worth and a legacy that provides societal work and a purpose for valued life for the older adult. It is giving something of oneself that is valued for the sole purpose of helping the future generation. Generativity shares meanings with concepts like creativity, and creating for others. It flows to the next component of my conceptual framework: art as a way of knowing. The next part of this review looks at retirement through an arts based way of knowing lens exploring successful aging through the lens of adult education.

### **Visual Art as a Way of Knowing**

Visual art as a way of knowing (Allen, 1995; Sherman, 2005) will be used in this research as a conceptual framework to explore how older adult learners come to find meaning in retirement. Visual art is one thing, and visual art as a way of knowing is another. Both will be defined and the nuances between them will be described in this section. In addition, three themes emerge from a review of the literature on art as a way of knowing: (1) creativity (2) emotion and (3) meaning making. Each of these themes will be discussed.

**Visual Art.** Defining visual art is perhaps as varied as attempting to define love. Visual art is “painting, watercolor, collage making, those areas of artistic creativity that communicate primarily through the eye” (Visual Arts, 1996, p. 382). Another similar definition includes “creations we can look at including painting, drawing, sculpture, architecture, photography, video and filmmaking, fashion and graphic design, interior design and other decorative arts” (Visual Arts, 2012). Creations that are visual; that you can see, including calligraphy, illustrations, body art and even graffiti are considered visual art.

Visual art "...is built into our species, innate to every one of us, whether we are plumbers, professors, short-order cooks, or investment bankers. It is ours whether we are career-oriented or home-centered. [Visual arts are] the flame that heats the human spirit and kindles our desire for inner growth and self-expression" (Cohen, 2001). From the earliest days, people who lived in caves were creative and artistic when they began to draw on walls. Their hieroglyphs tell a narrative story (Cherbo, Stewart, & Wyszomirski, 2008). Existence itself was not enough; we had to depict what was happening in the form of visual art. From the beginning of human existence to today, visual art and creativity are evident in everyday life - from weddings, costume parties to commercials depicting cavemen buying insurance; to lawns decorated for Halloween and other non-secular and secular holidays. From the colors of pink and blue at birth- to the images etched on tombstones – art is present from birth to death (Cherbo, Stewart, & Wyszomirski, 2008).

**Visual Art as a Way of Knowing.** Visual art as a way of knowing is a nonintellectual way of knowing (Allen, 1995), and is a way of knowing that is complex and subtle (Eisner, 2002a; Gardner, 2011). It is as a way of knowing that allows individuals to transform their consciousness by making sense of what they see (Damasio, 1999; Eisner 2002a) and make sense of it. It is knowing something through visual art. One way of explaining this is through books that exist without words; solely pictures. These picture books can tell us a story in elaborate detail with no text or dialogue. How do we know what is going on in the book? A story is being told visually through pictures. We are finding out the narrative story through the art work and through the pictures someone has created. We know what we know through visual art. Epistemology is defined as "*how we know what we know*" (Crotty, 1998, p.8, italics in

the original). Sometimes knowledge can be better expressed by or through visual art more easily than it can be expressed by words. “The [visual] arts provide opportunities to learn in different modalities and to understand one’s own unique characteristics” (Sherman, 2006, p. 43). What happens to some of us when we experience visual art is that our imagination fills in what we cannot actually see, smell, taste, touch or hear (Eisner, 2002a). Visual art as a way of knowing is a way of seeing the world around us, and can be for some, a search for meaning within this venue. It is a way of knowing that “is what we actually believe...it is our imagination...the most important faculty we possess” (Allen, 1995, p. 4).

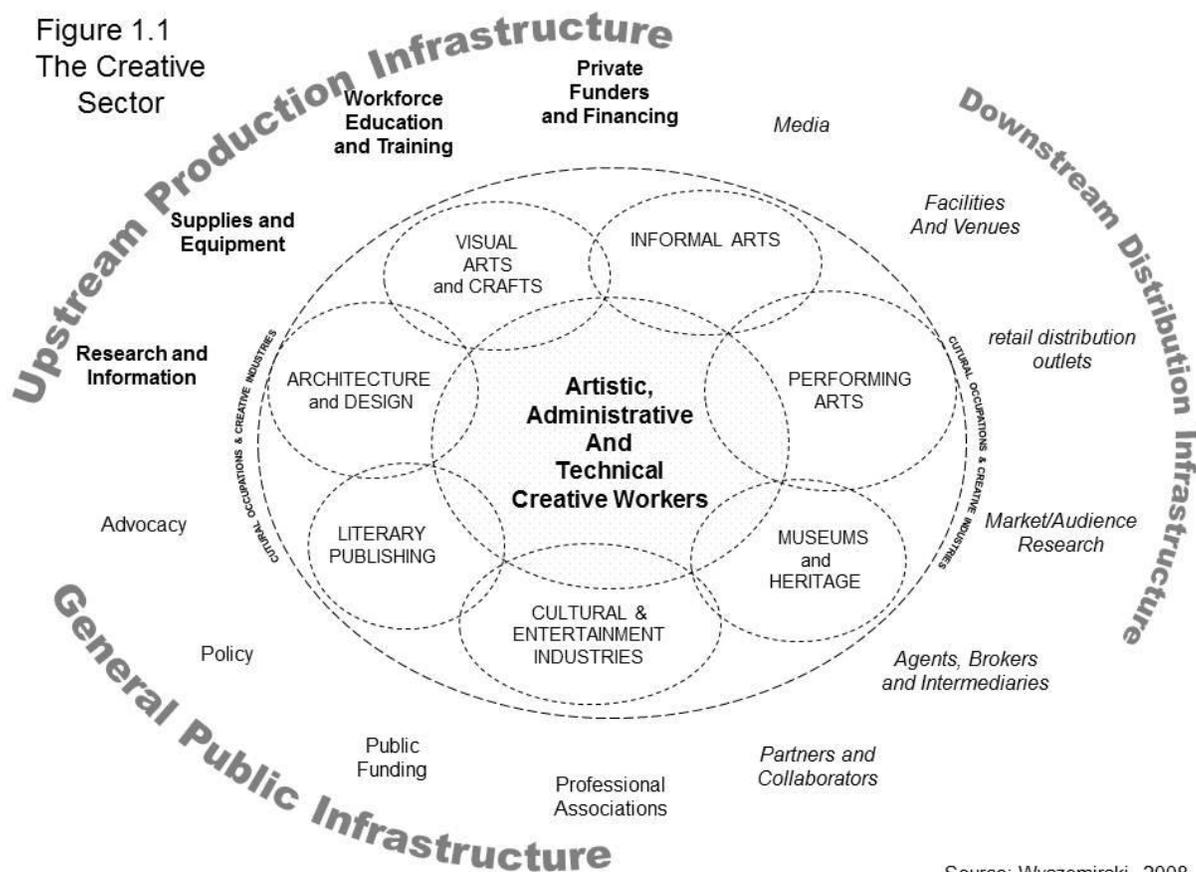
Visual “arts represent ways of knowing about the world that are legitimate and yet fundamentally different from those that operate in the scholarly disciplines, such as science or history, or in the professions, such as law or medicine or journalism” (Gardner, 2011, p. 40). Knowing can come from the creation of visual images, through painting, drawing or sculpture (Allen, 1995).

In adult education, multiple ways of knowing (Dirks, 2001; Gillen, 2000; Lawrence, 2005; Tisdell, 2003), have been a topic of considerable interest and knowing through art is another alternative way of knowing. The artwork allows us to open up space to incorporate this visual way of knowing. Individuals are examining art and comprehending it in their own way. Through the visual arts...older learners can view and unravel the complexities of art better than younger individuals (Lindauer, 2003). Everyone reacts differently to art. Older learners “achieve a more global understanding of a work of art, arrive at a general impression of its broader meaning, and gain a firm grasp of its overall mood” (Lindauer, 2003, p. 229). Sometimes older viewers of art miss

the details and intricacies of color, light and shadows that some younger viewers may notice; yet younger viewers may see the proverbial trees and miss the forest (Lindauer, 2003). Years of experience and the multitude of daily observations of life give older learners the opportunity to see the global picture more clearly than their younger counterparts. As older learners are engaging in visual arts, this study explored how they are making sense of what they are creating, be it pottery, or on canvas.

There is a lack of literature addressing retirement, the visual arts, and older adults together. “Separate work can be found on older-adult learning and on arts education, but very little joins the two topics” (Sherman, 2006, p. 42). No work was found to date that specifically studied visual arts and retirees and visual art as a way of knowing.

Because visual art is so very prevalent in our society, and we see art all around us from the buildings and homes designed by architects to the landscaping and highway designs, the arts, including visual arts have become an important sector of the economy. Figure 1.1 shows the varied sectors and illustrates how visual arts and the arts in general are vast and embedded into our culture. We come to know what we know when concepts become embodied in visual arts and take on a public form of representation (Eisner, 2002a). Notice in the figure that visual



arts and crafts are only a small part of the infrastructure, yet on the outside circle: research and information relate to museums, libraries and galleries that display and teach about visual art; supplies and equipment relate to art supply stores and the material necessary to make art; education and training relate to all the teachers and art educators involved in training about art. The distribution and general public infrastructure are wide and encompassing, and show that art is present and pervasive in our society. Visual arts are all around us, yet we may not see it as art. “The fact that the image is visual does not mean that the experience we have of it will be visual. All of us have synesthetic experiences” (Eisner, 2002a). As artists create with their hands and mind, the art can be an avenue of communication and the message will be different for every receiver (Allen, 2005). In light of these creations and communication, three themes emerge from the

literature on art as a way of knowing: creativity, emotion and meaning making. Each of these themes materialized from the literature by being mentioned over and over again by numerous scholars. Many of the participants in the studies discussed being better able to understand themselves through creating art and through their emotions. Art as a way of knowing is experiencing the world in a new way (Eisner, 2002a, Gardner, 2011; Greene, 1995).

**Visual Art and Creativity.** There is a connection between visual art and creativity. Creativity is much broader than visual arts, and can include the written word, including poetry, plays, novels, and stories. Creativity can also include music, and is defined as an individual capacity to generate ideas that are both original and useful (Simonton, 2002). It is a cognitive process that is not related to intelligence. It is “divergent thinking and the ability to generate novel ideas” (Adams-Price, 1998, p. 270). Creativity can also include “the process of bringing something new into being” like creating a piece of art, a product, a meal, or an idea that has an impact (May, 1975). Many visual artists are creative by the very nature of their artwork; they have created a piece of art that is unique, novel and possibly divergent in thought. This is relevant to the purpose of my study because all of the artwork likely symbolized something of value to the creator, and each piece was distinct and unique.

People can use their imaginations to create whatever they want; visual art as a way of knowing allows people to get in touch with their inner-selves and become more alive in the process (Greene, 1995); “imagination, fed by the sensory features of experience, is expressed in the arts through the image” (Eisner, 2002a, p. 4). Making art, the process of giving the imagination a shape and / or form, allows individuals to learn to

be more flexible and have more options in their lives (Allen, 1995). In addition, the visual arts offer older adults opportunities for learning and vehicles for creating meaning, and exploring and experiencing possibilities in retirement (Allen, 1995, Dahlberg, 2002 & Sherman, 2006). Visual arts are part of creativity which can expand social connectivity through taking classes and sharing art with others. Visual arts can give retirees a sense of purposeful activity and improve self-esteem through productive engagement (Manheimer, 2000).

Development of creativity can be seen as anything as easy as modifying a recipe to make a new dish, to using new colors to create a masterpiece of art. Often due to criticism, or other factors, creativity and the process of creating visual art can be dormant, especially in older adults. Creativity re-emerges more strongly in later years of life (Cohen, 2000; Simonton, 1990).

Yet, while Cohen (2002) states that all of us are creative, or have the potential to be creative, many are not comfortable with, or are unable to perform creative tasks (Hoffman, 1992, Lawrence, 2005). People can create through visual arts: drawing, painting a narrative, making sculptures, knitting, cooking, taking pictures, and sewing.

Older adults who participated in creative programs or who were creatively productive perceived an increase or stability in creativeness with age (Dohr & Forbes, 1986; Goff, 1992; Saunders, 2007; Simonton, 1990). While decrements in creativity have been associated with aging (Dohr & Forbes, 1986) studies show that creative attitudes and interest do not necessarily decline with age (Cohen, 2002 & Engleman, 1981). Potential for growth, development, and creativity exists throughout life; it is not affected by simple chronology (Lifelong Learning, 1991, p. 10).

The human experience of creating visual art can be a lifelong process with development beginning in the very early years and continuing throughout life (Bramlett, Gueldner, & Bennett, 1994). “Older adults can use creative thinking to rediscover talents and passions that they may have pushed aside during their working lives. They can engage their imagination, make new connections, discover a sense of purpose and feeling of personal growth, and express their creativity in ways that contribute to society” (Dahlberg, p. 3). Everyone has potential to produce meaningful art. Just as aging is a journey and not an end, so, too can visual art be viewed as both a process and a product.

Most of the literature on creativity is directed at children, adolescents and young adults (Eisner, 2002a; Romaniuk & Romaniuk, 1981). There is little research on visual arts and creativity in adulthood, and even less on old age. In the intervening thirty years, there is still scant literature on later adulthood and visual arts.

**Visual Art and Meaning Making.** Art as a way of knowing can bring an understanding to the learning and meaning making of older retired adults. “Man’s search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life” (Frankel, 1985). Many retirees are creating art, be it sculpture, paintings, photographs - they are creating meaningful and tangible products. Older learners are creating art for several reasons: for the sheer joy of creating something; to have a tangible product; to enrich their daily lives; to learn something new (Price & Nesteruk, 2010; O’Hanlon, 2007; Squire, 2010). Retirees could also be creating art to be generative and give their art away to friends, family members, or for charity auctions (McAdams, de St. Aubin, & Logan, 1993). Retirement can truly be an opportunity (Schoonmaker, 2007) to create visual art and find meaning.

Meaning is elusive and individualistic; it is a different definition for every person. Carlsen's (1988) definition of meaning includes discovering "its role in creating significance, in structuring reality, in servicing as a kind of superordinate principle which orders disparate elements into synergistic systems. But, even more, to study meaning is to find oneself drawn into its dialectic of content and process, of noun and verb, of meaning and meaning-making" ( p. 18). Meaning is a mental process, both noun and verb, one of creating understanding of an experience, a painting, an encounter, a play or a movie and how one comes to understand what needs to be understood. Significance and purpose are associated with *meaning*. Perhaps to understand meaning...we should start with the opposite of meaning...*meaningless*...or simply to have no meaning? This is at times how some retirees feel after they have stopped working (Manheimer, Snodgrass, & Moskow-McKenzie, 1995). The unconscious mind is the place where we attempt to make meaning through art (Eisner, 2002b; Cohen, 2001). Older adults may be attempting to make meaning through visual art unconsciously. To see art, one must experience it firsthand...with *original eyes* (London, 1989; Simonton, 2002; Eisner, 2002a). "Seeing the thing directly is having an experience with all the complexity of thoughts and feelings and somatic reactions that accompany all experiences" (London, 1989, p. 53) lets the view of art get in touch with their emotions. This idea expresses art as a way of knowing well. In order to experience art, one should 'see' an artist's creation.

According to Kegan (1994) meaning is, in its origins, a physical activity (grasping, seeing) a social activity (requires another), a survival activity (in doing it, we live). Meaning understood in this way, is the primary human emotion, irreducible. "It cannot be separated from the body, from social experience, or from the very survival" (p.

18) of the person. Art classes are also a social experience, and for some, a survival activity (Allen, 1995).

A way of trying to make sense and meaning from art is through art therapy. The creativity coach, Eric Maisel (2005), wrote *The Van Gogh Blues*, which is more directed at art therapists than artists. He discusses how older adult learners make meaning after their jobs are gone when their purpose for living has changed or started to crumble after decades of letting life flow. An important way that older adults can make meaning is to recognize that meaning, identity and purpose are not fixed – meaning shifts as our life changes; retirees cannot cling to an outdated purpose and identity (Maisel, 2005).

There are multiple ways in which the world can be known (Eisner, 1991, 1998). Artists, writers, and dancers as well as scientists, have important things to tell us about the world. Eisner (2002) beautifully describes how individuals have come to know autumn through multiple ways of knowing:

Autumn can take form in scientific propositions that deal with chemical changes in trees, in astronomical propositions about the location of our planet in relation to the sun, in poetic expression disclosing the smell of burning autumn leaves, in visual images that present to our consciousness the color of Vermont Landscape, in auditory forms that capture the crackle of leaves under our footsteps . Autumn, in short, is known in a variety of ways and the ways in which it can be known are expressible in a wide range of expressive forms (p. 147).

**Visual Art and Emotion.** Some people can have strong emotional reactions to visual art (Carroll, 1986). Visual art as a way of knowing can be felt in the pit of the stomach, the heart, the mind; it is possible to have an emotional and feelingful reaction to

art (Allen, 1995). Art touches many people on an emotional level, whereby Dirkx (2001) suggests we come to understand and make meaning through emotions. “Emotions and feelings play a critical role in our sense of self and in the processes of adult learning” (Dirkx, 2001, p. 64). Images are usually associated with our emotions (Dirkx, 2001). Emotions are usually self-reflective, and our imagination can be a source of how we make sense and meaning of our lives. As individuals begin to comprehend these images, they can start to understand themselves, but they have to be open to experience art. Further, the adult learning environment is a good context to explore the imaginative in arts based learning because it is extra-rational, which is defined as beyond what is rational. Individuals must go the extra mile beyond rational and beyond our imagination to know art. While it is not totally clear how emotions are activated in arts based learning, it has been suggested that part of the brain, the hippocampus, is involved in producing these feelings (Cohen, 2006). Visual arts provide opportunities to grow and have deeper appreciation of the world and our relationship with it. In order to attain maximum growth, human beings need to engage in self-expression, to gain an understanding and acceptance of self and to become aware of the part we play in directing our own growth and development (Fleshman & Fryrear, 1981).

Visual art can be experienced in a powerful and evocative manner (Gardner, 2011). In this way, individuals can have a connection to visual art as a way of knowing. We can go deeper and gain more understanding of ourselves by examining visual art. For understanding and meaning, Lawrence (2005) suggests that it is co-created by the audience and the artist. The artist may create something with a specific goal and/or meaning. The viewer of it will likely see it from a different perspective.

Older adults engaging in art could be doing so to express emotions. In dealing with visual art and older adults who are retired, art educators must first come to understand that these learners are coming to create with a special set of circumstances (Meltzer, p. 185). If they have left their job, they could have end-of-career issues, loss of identity issues as well as the possible loss of independence. Art therapy and engaging in art could help older adult learners deal with the emotional aspects of retirement. Many retirees have experienced the death of family and friends and could be feeling the loss of sense of self as a fully functioning adult (Wadson, 2000). They may be seeking to find meaning in their past and future experiences through art. "Art is a universal language" (Lawrence, 2005, p.5). Sherman (2006) concurs and adds that art is a language in which we can express ourselves; discover; make new meaning develop new ways of seeing and knowing; experience cultural heritage; and foster appreciation for our culture. This is evident in museums and art galleries depicting visual art and exhibits that bring the untouchable worlds of the depths of the oceans to outer space into our visible realm.

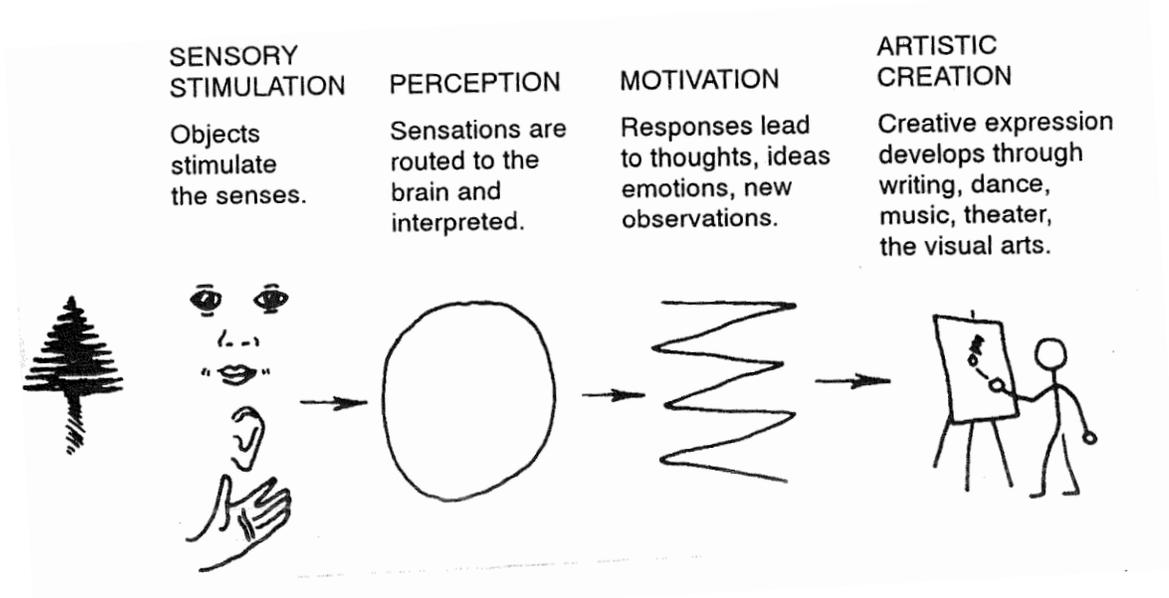
Hands on projects in many visual art classes help older adults feel connected to their art. "For our species, hands and handiwork have been essential" (Cherbo, Stewart & Wyszomirski, 2008, p. 71). These types of creative activity are very common: embroidery, knitting, quilting, and woodworking. Many participants see the results of their work readily.

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, people began bonding together in different ways. One of the ways was through art. With flags, flowers, pictures, candles, people came together; many people turned to visual art. "Moved to the depths by something incomprehensible and extraordinary, Americans showed that art was a natural

thing to do. Their artifications helped them to cope with a traumatic experience” (Cherbo, Stewart, &Wyszomirski, 2008, p. 65). The tangible aspects of art provided one outlet for powerful and sometimes confusing emotions.

Table 2 is a graphic depiction of how people use sensory stimulation, perception and motivation to come up with an artistic creation. From the table, in the motivation stage...perhaps the motivation is to understand our emotions in the creation of a piece of art. Intellectual ideas become more complete when an artistic creation is developed (Eisner, 1972). Art is a representation of one’s mental image (or a mental picutre) that has been applied by the sensory stimulation. “Thinking creativly is not an easy task...it is an intellectual act and requires constant practice” (Hoffman, 1992, p. 33).

Table 2  
Development of Artistic Creation



Adapted from Hoffman, 1992, p. 33.

This diagram helps to bring an understanding of visual art as a way of knowing comes into being. People take sensory inputs into their brain and mix in their thoughts and emotions and come up with a visual representation of their thoughts. The study of art can stimulate intellectual curiosity (Hoffman, 1992).

From the basic visual arts to architecture and design, which includes the aesthetics of interior design, exterior landscaping, lighting, to set designs on television, costume making and fashion design, visual art is vast and encompassing in our society. From the colorfully decorated tube of toothpaste we reach for in the morning, to the designed tableware we eat from during the day, to the wine or beer glass we might drink from at night, visual arts are part of our daily lives. Art as a way of knowing captures a perception of reality, and can teach or uplift the mind, can allow for the expression of emotion, the creation of beauty and binds a community together (Gardner, 2011).

### **Review of Literature**

In reviewing the literature, studies were selected based on the following criteria: (1) participants being older adult learners, (2) individuals in the studies were retired, and (3) engaging in creative activities including visual arts. Most of the studies involved participants who were enrolled voluntarily in free standing artistic programs. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies were reviewed; with qualitative being the predominant method. In addition, four conceptual pieces, (Berman, 2003; Chinen, 1991; Meltzer, 1996; & Goff, 1991) that provided a holistic overview of older learners engaged in art were also reviewed. For the purposes of this study, the literature was reviewed in the following areas: older/adult education, creativity and visual arts and retirement (e.g., Aadlandsvik, 2007; Bramlett, Gueldner, & Bennett, 1994; Dohr &

Forbes, 1986; Lieberman, & Lieberman, 1983; Maday, 2007; Pope, 1990; Price & Nesteruck, 2010; O'Hanlon, 2007; Roelofs, 1999; Sauders, 2007; Squire, 2010; Jamieson & Strafford, 1998; Matilla, Joukamaa & Salokangas, 1988; Goff, 1992; Cohen, 2005; Grossbaum & Bates, 2002; Merriam & Kim, 2004; Vesely & Torrence, 1978). The literature reviewed included dissertations, peer-review articles, and conceptual pieces for a total review of twenty-three articles. Topics varied from areas of recreation, leisure, music education and gerontology. Although it is not totally germane to this study, the literature on adults and art education /art policy is growing and was also reviewed. It should be noted that the terms creativity and visual arts will be used interchangeably.

In adult education, there are multiple ways of knowing, and the work in art as a way of knowing is limited to Lawrence, (2005); Simpson, (2007); Stuckey, (2007); and Mont (2005). None of these writings are about older adult learners. Mont (2005) focused on artistic ways of knowing but focused on African Americans. Stuckey (2009) focuses on creative expression as a way of knowing in diabetes education. And Lawrence (2005) offers knowing through two dimensional art forms and uses music, dance, dramatic performances, and creative writing. These works were only of tangential relevance for this study.

Others in adult education that have focused on the diverse way of knowing and learning are Dirks (2001) and Tisdell (2001). Dirks (2001) postulates that learning is derived from the adult's emotional and imaginative connection to self and the world. He does not focus on art as a way of knowing, nor does Tisdell (2001).

A dramatic change in the literature has occurred in the last forty years. The early literature on aging (Lehman, 1953) mentioned by almost all of the more recent studies,

discussed the decline and decremental changes in the aging population. The thinking of the past indicated that aging was associated with senility and older people being unable to care for themselves. Recent studies (Cohen, 2001, 2005) have overturned the earlier pessimistic views dealing with creativity in later adulthood. Newer research shows that there are good indicators to be optimistic.

While all of these studies provide valuable information, none of them address the specifics of visual arts and its impact on retirees. This research will address this gap in the literature on how adult learners in retirement are impacted through visual arts and creativity. The theme of purposefulness is demonstrating some language of generativity, which could have implications for my study.

### **Key Themes and Synthesis**

Based on the literature, a number of important themes emerge regarding the effects from engagement and meaning-making that potentially has implications for visual arts during retirement. Four themes resulted from the analysis of the articles in the literature review on visual arts and aging and retirement: 1) control, cognitive growth and purposefulness 2) return to play; 3) increased enjoyment from life; motivation for living; and 4) increased health benefits and successful aging.

#### **Control, Cognitive Growth and Purposefulness**

Many older learners found themselves more in control of their lives and felt cognitive growth and purposefulness through visual arts. Control is defined as one being able to exercise direction over their own activities; when retirees worked, some had limited control over the activities performed at work. In a study of 330 retired women who forged their own creative paths in retirement, Price and Nesteruk (2010) reported

that participants felt more in control of their lives by being able to set their schedule for activities of their own choosing. Participants enjoyed having control “over the quality of their work, an advantage many felt was absent in the bureaucratic settings of their earlier employment” (Lieberman & Lieberman, 1983, p.272). Having control over their time and chosen activities led to greater feelings of self-worth and growth for older learners. In a study of 75 adults ranging from ages 60-92 years, the older adults enjoyed manipulating materials, making gifts, and the increased intellectual stimulation that the creativity brought them (Dohr & Forbes, 1986). Older adults saw retirement as wonderful and fun, filled with curiosity, and desire and the ability to pursue hobbies they enjoy. Creativity “helps us engage more fully in [life] and helps us develop the opportunities inherent in life’s challenges” (Cohen, 2001, p. 19).

Art can aid in expanding cognitive growth. In one study, a group of fourteen older adults learned “to use theater and arts to educate middle-school children and community groups about environmental hazards that endanger people’s health in their own communities” (Sherman, 2006, p. 44). This group found that passing on knowledge about the environment through art also resulted in a sense of satisfaction and happiness for themselves.

Older adults also find that they have a purpose through art (Cohen, 2001). Adults engaging in art education are undertaking something new, with the hope that they will gain more knowledge, further enhancing their lives. Older learners engaging in art derive pleasure with the product they have created (Meltzer, 1996; Milner, 2006) because it demonstrates their expressiveness (Roelofs, 1999). When a person spends much of their time creating something that they value, they develop an appreciation for what they have

created. If a person then sells their art, it lets the creators of art know that they have an audience for what they are doing and creating. It is an activity that may raise the self-esteem of the participant. It allows individuals to experience a feeling of personal competence (Jamieson, Miller, & Stafford, 1998). Some artists who sell their work take great pride when someone buys their creations. They feel they are doing worthwhile work (Lieberman & Lieberman, 1983).

Another cause for increased enjoyment from art is possibly through generativity, by giving their art to family members and friends to enjoy (Osgood, 1984). Helping other people by donating their time and talent [through art] can help retirees, even if the task is as elementary as helping to hang pictures (Roelofs, 1999). Price and Nesteruk (2010) reported that generativity in their participants who saw “retirement as an opportunity to give to others and, at the same time, a chance to gain a sense of purpose” (p. 142). Generativity is the outcome because of something that one does; it is having a sense of connection, and touching people through their donations, which can have a positive impact on people. It also allows for recognition from participants, and has a positive impact on feelings (Lieberman & Lieberman, 1983).

The process of building or making something also provided added self-worth and self-esteem and a sense of being able to contribute meaningfully to society (Kuster, 2006; O'Hanlon, 2007). While individuals may be looking for purpose in their lives, we may see an increase in enrollments in art courses as baby boomers begin to explore their creative side. Different purposes and motivations drive them for matriculating in artistic activities. Few studies have explored older learners' motivations for participating in learning (Kim & Merriam, 2004) activities or in visual art. Older learners are self-

directed and enroll independently, yet they do not want to be evaluated or graded on their projects, as if they were enrolled in a degree program or being formally schooled.

### **Return to Play**

As human beings, we feel deprived without avenues for play and entertainment. Retirement for some can be viewed as “my turn” to play. Many participants in the studies felt that retirement was a time to do something fun...a time for enjoyment and relaxation (Price & Nesteruk, 2010; Bramlett, Gueldner, & Bennett, 1994; Osgood, 1984). Several studies report that seniors revert back to imaginative states of play and creativity (Chinen, 1991; Blatner & Blatner 1988; Cohen, 2002; Goff & Torrence, 1991). Pope (1990), too, found that creativity was “an inherent quality discovered early in the lives” of the twelve participants over the age of 65 she interviewed, and then they returned to it later in life. Mid-life and older adults did not take up creative endeavors “until after the age of sixty five when they had retired from their work responsibilities” (Pope, 1990, p. 68).

Participants in several of the studies reported having fun in a variety of self-expressive formats: painting, crafts, traveling, sculpture, as well as volunteering and grand-parenting (OHanlon, 2007). People experienced feelings of enjoyment with the product they are creating such as jewelry, poetry, furniture, clothes, calligraphy, and paintings (Lieberman & Lieberman, 1983; Meltzer, 1996; OHanlon, 2007). When one acts in a play and uses the magical realm of make-believe...“we see imaginative forms of play that can be used as a vehicle for adult recreation and artistic expression as well as a form of therapeutic intervention” (Goff & Torrence, 1991, p. 301). What also equates to

joy and fun, is that the artists love what they are doing...they cherish the time during which they are creating (Lieberman & Lieberman, 1983).

Another form of imagination and creation is creative storytelling. It is a form of artistic expression and can be good for the creative mind. Storytelling can be fun and playful on so many levels, especially when the story “portrays older adults doing something apparently outrageous or foolish, after years of being practical and predictable” (Chinen, 1991, p. 46), a return of wonder, magic and creativity in older adulthood (Vesely & Torrence, 1978).

There is also a sense of playfulness when the self-directed nature of artwork and the lack of accountability to a boss open up an enjoyable world to these older individuals (Lieberman & Lieberman, 1983; Price & Nesteruk, 2010). Many describe this new found freedom of retirement as having time to pursue interests they did not have time for while they were working (Price & Nesteruk, 2010). Csikszentmihali (1988) claims that a flow experience, “an optimal state of experience” (p.3) is a product of an intense creative process that can be related during play and leisure.

Art and creativity allow retirees to investigate the possible (Milner, 2006). It did not matter if the creative activity was via visual or written work. Humor and playfulness emerge naturally during the act of writing for those engaged in poetry and narrative (Aadlandvik, 2007). Sherman (2006) also suggests it is easier to learn through laughter and play, which may be a factor for participants in some art classes continuing to meet even after the course was over, so they could continue the fun they were having.

Some studies (Aadlandvik, 2007; O'Hanlon, 2007; Price & Nesteruk, 2010) looked at retirees who took art, as well as other courses. Many participants loved the

leisure aspect of an art class and associated it with escapism. (Aadlandvik, 2007; Price & Nesteruk, 2010). This was a way to have distraction from regular life and free time to engage in something...a diversion from day to day activities. During the art classes, some older adults reported feeling they were becoming as creative as a child (OHanlon, 2007). Children have playtime and recess at school, but for adults, it often times seems that they lack playtime in their lives.

While one study (Smith & van der Meer, 1990) suggested that enhanced creativity in older participants (as cited in OHanlon) was associated with mental regression, the literature review did not reveal any other evidence of age regression. Rather the effect was more akin to letting out one's inner child. One of the most essential characteristics of a meaningful life is that of joy – joy which is brought about by a spirit of freedom and playfulness (Allison, 1992). Long term implications indicate that more playfulness is needed in peoples lives.

### **Increased Enjoyment from Life**

In retirement, people who are engaged in artistic creativity derive enjoyment and pleasure from several sources including the art courses themselves, their actual artwork, and from the socialization in the art classes. Art has the potential to enrich lives aesthetically, socially, physically and mentally.

When people enjoy what they are creating; they value and derive pleasure in creating. They also often experience improved moods, *vitality of life*, and feeling more alive (Bramlett, Gueldner & Bennett, 1994; Goff, 1992; Meltzer, 1996; Milner, 2006; Vesely & Torrance, 1978). The psychological advantages of participating as an artist are great; people report that they feel fortunate to have an opportunity to be able to create

something original (Lieberman & Lieberman, 1983; O'Hanlon, 2007; Osgood, 1984). Older adults engaging in creative activities are physically and emotionally happier than cohort members not engaged in creative activities (Milner, 2006; Treat, 1999; Pope, 1990). Older persons continue to have dreams, ambitions and desires. They are more involved in overall activities (Cohen, 2005; Tharp, 2003). Engaging in artistic activities helps older people cope with life changes (Osgood, 1984; Jamieson, Miller & Stafford, 1998; Milner, 2006).

Older learners enjoy recreational activities and activity-based programs (Cohen, 2005; Withnall, McGivney, & Soulsby, 2004). "In the context of an art class, learning these skills would not only provide seniors with opportunities to experience joy, relaxation, and the company of others, but...also enhance seniors' creative thinking, critical thinking, and self-confidence" (Squire, 2010, p. 3). Older learners become absorbed in their activity. They enjoy what they are doing to such an extent that before they know it several hours have past (Treat, 1999). Participants experience a new openness to nature, details, colors, melodies, memory and language (Aadlandsvik, 2007). While participants may experience increased enjoyment, there are gaps in the literature on the effects of creativity, visual arts, and motivation in older age. These psychological issues of retirement are areas in need of further investigation because there is a dearth in literature that connects these topics.

### **Improved Personal Relationships**

Participants in several studies reported having fun meeting new people and feeling better about themselves through art classes. (Bramlett, Gueldner, & Bennett, 1994; Dohr & Forbes, 1986; O'Hanlon, 2007; Osgood, 1984). Treat (1999) describes one

group, *Seniors Making Art*, that sees their group as a gathering place to meet other seniors that enhances the quality of their relationships. “Arts enrich individuals and communities by celebrating the human spirit” (Milner, 2006, p. 58). Studies reported that participating in creative programs made them feel less lonely. The simple fact of being around people and seeing what others were interested in helped several participants to feel less lonely (Bramlett, Gueldner & Bennett, 1994; O’Hanlon, 2007; Osgood, 1984).

These art students use their art, such as poems, dance, and photography, as a form of communication. Participants in the arts classes are connecting with others (Milner, 2006; Squire, 2010) which provide them a break from solitude (Roelofs, 1999).

Art can re-connect loved ones. In one study, Lieberman & Lieberman (1983) reported improved marital relationships, especially when both husband and wife were involved in the arts. Art classes provide a fertile setting for forging new friendships and opportunities for sharing memories, thoughts and experiences. Osgood (1984) found that participants in an art class setting became close as a group and created friendships. As a result, they felt supported and happy.

Creativity brings people closer together – through writing and sharing of texts, people can understand each other (Aadlandvik, 2007; Roelofs, 1999). Gergen and Gergen(2002) point out that individuals who have more social contact are more likely to feel supported and cared for; as well as less likely to feel depressed (Myer, 1993). They go further and claim that the improved positive state of mind will improve relationships (Gergen & Gergen, 2002).

Some retirees enroll in art classes to have improved social contacts – to make new friends and enjoy the company of like-minded people (Jamieson, Miller & Stratford,

1998). A definite camaraderie forms among artists (Lieberman & Lieberman, 1983) and the simple act of creating something helps to forge relationships with “discussion groups, grandchildren and old friends” (O’Hanlon, 2007, p. 49).

A recent study (2010) looked at attributes and associated factors to become a centenarian (living to 100 years of age) revealed that extroverted, outgoing individuals who enjoyed social contact was one of the factors for resilient aging in late life. It helps if one is a “people person”. “In a meta-analysis of 286 studies of well-being, having a supportive social network was one of the most important contributors to longevity” (Martin, MacDonald, Margrett & Poon, 2010, p. 231 ).

Rowe and Khan’s (1998) research also demonstrates that for the aging, strong social ties are increasingly important. In fact, having a social connection proved even more important in preventing illness than genetic background (p. 290).

### **Improved Health**

Many studies found positive relationship between creativity and health (Bramlett, Gueldner, & Bennett, 1994; Cohen, 2005; Dohr & Forbes, 1986; Osgood, 1984; Vesely & Torrance, 1978). For example, Rowe and Kahn’s (1998) research challenged the common belief that the genes you are born with determine one’s health and vitality. It is the way an individual lives her or his life that determines health and vitality. *The Creativity and Aging Study* is the largest and included 300 participants age 65 and older, who were living independently at least at the start of the study. The study found improved mental and physical health among older adults engaged in art. There were disease prevention effects such as lowering stress, improving mood, and sleeping better for the participants engaging in creative activities (Cohen, 2006). The activity of

producing art lowers stress, particularly for those individuals who had demanding careers that involved psychological stress like lawyers, architects and engineers. One participant indicated, “I didn’t retire, I told them to shove it [the job]” (Lieberman & Lieberman, 1983, p. 268). Studies also found that creating art helped individuals experience an improved mood (Cohen, 2005; Goff, 1991; Meltzer, 1996; Osgood, 1984) and more restful sleep (Vesely & Torrance, 1978). One of O’Hanlon’s (2007) participants summed up how an older person can be aided after experiencing grief and loss, “creativity is making something good out of something difficult” (p. 50). Sometimes, art can help resolve conflicts – focusing on the craft and art; instead of personal problems. More research is needed, because there are not very many studies that measure these factors of health.

Participants reported being so busy enjoying the act of creating art, that they were not concerned about their aches and pains (Lieberman & Lieberman, 1983). Sherman (2006) also reported that “some older adults say that when they are on stage, they can move without a cane; their aches disappear” (p. 44). Art helped participants experience a reported increase in wellness (Cohen, 2005, Tharp, 2003, Dohr & Forbes, 1986).

By enhancing programming for older adults to include opportunities for individuals to creatively involved, active aging organizations can improve their clients’ health and well-being (Milner, 2006). An older woman artist commented how participating in creative writing made her feel ageless, “You’re not identified by age but as another human being, expressing views and experiences for others to share” (Dohr & Forbes, 1986, p. 130). Disabilities also did not limit creativity (O’Hanlon, 2007). In O’Hanlon’s (2007) study, some participants indicated that they wanted to work longer and

not retire, but felt that positive attitudes and being creative enabled them to regain a sense of purpose.

A ten-year longitudinal study also suggests that older adults who participate in creative activities may live longer, healthier lives than their age cohorts not involved in the arts (Dawson & Baller, 1972). Many of the aspects of creativity in retirement are components of positive aging. Engaging in activity; having a positive mental state, and physical well-being are all parts of healthy and positive aging (Gergen & Gergen, 2002). “Creativity presumably can enhance successful aging, it seems important to understand it better and find ways to promote its expression” (OHanlon, 2007, p. 2).

### **Summary**

Many retirees are active adult learners. They are self-directed and seek activities that will enhance their lives by developing their skills. The literature on aging and later life adult development is extensive and growing. The literature combining aging and creativity is also expanding. This literature review has highlighted recent writings in the field of adult and higher education and art and creativity in order to provide a foundation for this research study regarding engaging in visual arts and creativity in retirement. Based on this review, it has been determined that little is known about the health benefits of retirees when engaging in arts related activities and on successful aging. Does being generative contribute to successful aging? There is also limited literature in this area.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **METHODOLOGY**

In the preceding chapters, an exploration of older adults in retirement as they navigate through successful aging, generativity, creativity and art as a way of knowing were covered. This chapter begins by explaining an overview of the qualitative research paradigm and how such a perspective fits with the purpose of this study. It is followed by an explanation of the research type, narrative inquiry. The next sections provide my background, the procedures for selecting participants and data collection, data analysis, and strategies that were used to insure the trustworthiness of the study.

The purpose of this research was to explore the role of visual arts and its impact on successful aging in older adult learners in retirement. A qualitative methodology was employed to study older adults engaged in art, an area in which data provided is minimally reported in the literature; so the literature and the knowledge base of these activities has been expanded upon. The focus of this study through interviews was to provide narrative inquiry of the retiree's stories- why they are engaging in art, why they are taking classes, the artwork they create, and the stories behind the art. The study also explores the concept of art as a way of knowing through the perceptions of older adult learners and how they derive meaning, value and worth as they engage in art in retirement. Before I began to collect data for this dissertation, I had already completed a pilot study of four retired, older adult learners.

In the pilot study, done in the spring of 2011, four older retirees were interviewed; three women and one man. The mean age was 72.25. Each had retired after at least 10 years of steady employment. All were enrolled in different art classes at the same art

center; yet had come to the class for very different reasons. A commonality was that they all proudly displayed their art work at the exhibits and shows put on by the art center that spring.

Other themes also began to emerge from these four participants. All had entered their artwork in juried competition and won at least one award for their work. Each enjoyed the critique, the shared camaraderie and the jovialness of painting amongst their classmates. Each participant spent numerous hours painting and found that their artwork began to multiply, and after a while, they had a lot of art on their hands. They started to give their art away. Three of the four participants donated pieces of their artwork to charity to help raise money for a cause.

When the participants were asked to share a specific piece of artwork that



exemplified their retirement, different stories emerged. It became clear that their artwork encompassed some aspects of their lives. And through their art, they were able to express themselves. Their artwork had personal

meaning and each piece told a story. An example of this is a picture one of the participants painted of an older, rusted out pick-up truck. The truck was in a field of flowers. The truck did not have a hood, and flowers were growing out of it. The artist

said that she was the truck. Feeling old and weathered, yet she was surrounded by the newness of life. The flowers represented young children and technology to her.

Several items of note occurred during the pilot study. First, instead of narrative, storytelling as a methodology had been considered. As Tyler (2007) notes, storytelling “can be a powerful organic force” for gleaning information from participants. The problem was that the interviews meandered far off course. Too many topics not related to art came up in this type of methodology, and one interview took over four hours because of the conversive nature of the method.

The interview technique used in storytelling differed significantly from the chosen methodology in the actual study. In the pilot study, the interviews began by my stating “tell me a story about your art...” or “tell me a story about a time when you...” So, it began by asking for a story. And there was little interruption of the participant; they told their story without much prompting or discussion. Whereas, with narrative inquiry, the questions helped to guide the discussion to yield more rich data.

The pilot study helped with the selection of methodology, as well as with the guided questions that were selected in Appendix B. This initial study also led me to believe that the participants had valuable information to share about engaging in art.

### **Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. What do older adults perceive as the purpose of engaging in the visual arts?
2. How does evidence of the role of creativity in successful aging inform educators in supporting life-long learning for retirees?

3. What is the relationship between successful aging, generativity, retirement and the engagement in the visual arts?

### **Overview of Research Kind - Qualitative Research**

The choice of research kind should allow for the best fit with the intended investigation. The methodology aided in finding answers to the research questions and resulted in holistic data for this inquiry was qualitative research. The answers to the research questions posed stressed how social experiences created and gave meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Qualitative methodology provided a deep focus lens with which to investigate older adults who might have been attempting to find understanding, worth and successful aging through their visual artistry. It also provided older adult learners the opportunity to give detailed narrative accounts of how creation of visual art making tended “to boost quality of life, well-being and life satisfaction” (Jenkins, 2011, p. 413). The goal of qualitative research is to “achieve an understanding of how people make sense of their lives, to delineate the process of meaning making, and to describe how people interpret what they experience” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 98).

Qualitative research draws conclusions from non-statistical procedures; so the findings are produced by non-quantifiable measures (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). One of the main assumptions of qualitative research is that human experience is not an objective fixed reality to be understood numerically. This research is situated in the interpretive paradigm. In the interpretive paradigm, researchers look for patterns of behavior and experiences to arrive at an understanding of those experiences and perceptions. Instead of testing a hypothesis, like with quantitative analysis, Morse (1994) notes that the goals of qualitative research are to describe, explain, and understand a

particular phenomenon. All of which was informative in evaluating the impact of visual arts on older adults. The sample of human beings for this study was 10 older adult learners, both men and women who were retired and engaged in art. The data began to saturate after talking to eight participants. I began to hear similar responses from participants. These older adults were participating in the meaning making here, through non-numerical means.

Another assumption of qualitative research is that each person is a product of the culture in which they live and it is their own unique experiences that shape their distinctiveness. As such, reality is different for every person; which means that there are multiple interpretations and perceptions of how the world exists. In the view of this rapidly growing age group, the richness of their perceptions adds to the complex tapestry of experience and their narratives reflect this. Other characteristics of qualitative research exist. The researcher sought to understand and interpret the data of how people make meaning from their experience, and qualitative research allows for a belief in multiple realities. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The researcher was the primary collector and analyzer of the data (Merriam, 2002). This had both advantages and disadvantages and is significant because to gain an understanding, the researcher could respond immediately by adapting the questions being asked. One advantage was that the researcher can clarify and check for understanding right away. A disadvantage is that the researcher has built in bias and may affect the study (Merriam, 2009). The researcher also made a commitment to report the participant's story holistically and from their point of view (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

There are several distinct techniques for performing qualitative research. These features have specific strategies that are used for studying people in their natural setting. Bogden and Bilken (2007) identified five features of qualitative research which include the following: naturalistic, descriptive, concern with process, inductive, and focus on meaning. For older adults who are creating art, all of these features lend themselves very well to the study.

Qualitative research is both descriptive and naturalistic and is useful for studying human behavior in context (Silverman, 2011). Descriptive research means that the researcher is interested in the process, meanings and understandings gained through words or pictures; while naturalistic means observing in the behavior in its natural setting. To achieve these qualities in my study, I went to each person's home and gathered data in their naturalistic environment. The where, when, how and under what circumstances were easily observed. As a qualitative researcher, I attempted to collect thick, rich descriptive data. Components of the descriptive data include audio recordings, transcripts of the interviews, field notes, pictures, and artwork from participants. In addition, tone of voice, gestures, jokes and body language were also noted; particulars difficult to include, and not relevant in quantitative research.

This type of research is inductive and also concerns process (Bogden & Bilken, 2007). It is the process of putting pieces together to come up with a holistic understanding of what is being studied. In the initial stages of retirement, retirees are going through a process; and creating art is also a process. Once again, this component of qualitative research fits nicely with the research being performed. A theory may emerge from the data in qualitative research; this is the inductive, bottom up approach

typical of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Silverman, 2011). This means that conclusions are not evidenced based, as in quantitative research, nor is it generalized to different populations. It is putting a deep lens on a segment of people's lives and getting a closer look. Qualitative research looks at smaller populations and draws conclusions from a lens that has focused on depth rather than breadth of ideas. Inductive research also allows for the observer to be immersed in the group being studied (Merriam, 2009).

A major focus of qualitative research is on meaning making. This is the participants meaning; the researcher attempted to uncover and learn about the meaning that the participants have about the problem or issue. This is not the same as the meaning that the researcher brings to the research or that has been expressed in the literature (Creswell, 2009). As such, narrative interviews with older adults emphasized how they understand the unique nature of art. It is the creativity of the mind that provided a deeper understanding, which could serve as examples for others to build upon. Their creations could inspire others to create.

For the purposes of this study, the fit with narrative for retirees is that their experiences are better lived and understood qualitatively, rather than quantitatively. It is difficult to quantify the description of a work of art. "A life is a work of art, probably the greatest one we produce. It is not simply art in the living. For we do not live our lives in any naked sense, save when we are caught aback and leave our faces behind" (Bruner, 2004). So how do we capture peoples' lives as works of art? How do we make sense of it? Statistics can be gathered with regard to how many people felt an improved relationship or felt that their health had improved; but the richness of a description of

how producing art makes retirees feel - would be lost. For older adults, they can tell their stories through visual art. A picture can have multiple meanings and can be interpreted differently by different viewers and learners. The qualitative methodology of narrative inquiry in adult education is often used to understand how people make meaning of their experiences. Thus, narrative inquiry was utilized in this study to explore how older adult make meaning through art.

### **Overview of Data Analysis – Narrative Inquiry**

There are multiple types of data collection and data analysis approaches and types of research within the qualitative paradigm. A researcher could employ phenomenology, ethnography, case study research, grounded theory, historical research, basic interpretive, action research and narrative to collect and analyze data. Narrative is retrospective meaning making-the shaping or ordering of past experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 64). Narrative has been defined as the way in which humans experience the world (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narratives, which are be referred to, and use interchangeably with stories, can be epistemologically understood as the way people make sense of their lives (Chase, 2005; Riessman, 2008) and also as a way of knowing (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). For clarification, it should be noted that while some researchers make distinctions between story and narrative, for the purpose of this study, narrative is used synonymously with story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

According to Bruner (2002) the origin of the word narrate includes *narrare*, telling and *gnarus*, knowing. Narrative can also be defined as both phenomenon (the experience studied) and a method (inquiry tool). Narrative inquiry is “a method that uses

the following field texts as data sources: stories, autobiography, journals, field notes, letters, conversations, interviews, family stories, photos and life experiences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 3). The definition of narrative is broadened a bit more by including both oral and written stories and by explaining that narrative can also be a naturally occurring conversation (Chase, 2005). Particularly relevant for this research, narrative can also be defined and understood as “a story or account of events, experiences, or the like, whether true or fictitious. 2. a book, literary work, etc., containing such a story. 3. the art, technique, or process of narrating” (Narrative, n.d., p. 1). However, it is more than that: we learn from telling and hearing stories, and we construct ourselves narratively. Older adults have many stories to tell. Some are telling their stories via their artwork. Narrative can be a sense-making act, which can explain to some, how people bring meaning to their own experiences (Clark, 2010). Narrative can take the form of personal stories, life and oral histories, testimonies, vignettes, or small pieces of text within a longer text (Chase, 2005; Clandinin, 2007).

Narrative inquiry in the qualitative method serves to identify research data in the form of stories and gives the participants lives deep description data for conveying the lived experience of the aging process. For older adults, narrative inquiry renders life as John Dewey puts it ‘more luminous’ and our interpretations with them ‘more useful’ (Clandinin, 2007). Bruner (1986) also asserts that there are two modes of thought by which we make sense of our world: paradigmatic and narrative. In paradigmatic thinking, the mind makes sense of things by putting information into structured, logical categories. But narrative, according to Bruner, is the way we make sense of life itself. We make sense through stories, through historical accounts of what happened, through

gripping drama, and the uncertainties that human frailty contribute to our understanding (Maddox, 2001).

Narratives can illuminate complex problems in teaching. Curriculum journals and guides set forth the modalities of instruction: what was effective, what was ineffective - stories from teachers are useful. Narrative provides an account of what happened using real examples to discuss what might have been done differently. John Dewey was the precedent setter for education, because his teaching was rooted in experience. He was also very tied to context; stating that to be understood, one must be situated within society. According to Rossiter and Clark (2010) adult educators should understand how narrative works in order to make the practice of adult education more effective. Adult learners have an increasing capacity for learning through narrative (Rossiter, 2010). Sometimes it can be easier to learn from examples and stories than from reading 'how-to' manuals; storytelling narrative seeks to understand the rationale behind human action (Lyons & LaBosky, 2002).

For older adult learners, if they have been successfully aging, as discussed in Chapter 2, and if they are creating visual art, they certainly have some stories to tell; and told them in several ways, through their words and through their artwork. "Storytelling, meaning making, big-picture thinking, and pattern recognition – all closely aligned with narrative knowing – are among the capabilities that will be essential in this...age" (Rossiter & Garcia, 2010, p. 44).

There is an assumption with narrative that knowledge can be held in stories: and it can be relayed, stored, and retrieved. And with the aging population, narrative can aid in capturing stories. "The humanities and arts help us appreciate the meaning and value of

aging and later life while questioning the conditions under which longer life can also be a qualitatively enhanced one” (Maddox, 2001, p. 517). Older learners are immersed in story, and they have so many experiences in their lives that they can share and reflect upon.

The myriad of interpretations of artwork lends itself to narrative inquiry. Narrative research grounds itself in truth for the individual and his or her particular circumstance. This study entails artwork created by older adults and the meaning-making they perceive and are experiencing in that process. The stories elicited from face to face interviews with these older adults produced constructed meaning- making – and that requires creativity (Rossiter & Garcia, 2010). Their narratives cover thoughts, feelings and experiences in relation to the research question – so overall, narrative was an excellent choice for qualitative methodological fit with regard to seniors making meaning through visual arts.

The relationship between the researcher and the teller; a narrative story always has a point-of-view. The researcher has a tendency to interpret and judge dissonant conversational approaches according to one’s own conventions of speaking. This method encourages the researcher uses the teller’s words.

The narrator must tell why the narrative is worth telling, and it is seen through his/her lens. It is the interpretation of the teller, filled with thoughts, emotions and actions.

McAdams and Bowman (2001) found that those who score high on conventional measures of psychological well-being and generativity live to tell “narratives of redemption” which is to construct negative events with beneficial consequences.

Just as with quantitative research, where one can manipulate the numbers to show almost anything that needs to be shown, so, too, can a researcher take narrative and include only what they need or want to present. A clear example is from a woman writing about historical living on a farm. “A woman writing about deterioration of farm life said ‘I write about reality of my life experience, I don’t try to present a sentimental image’ ” (Dohr & Forbes, 1986, p.131). So if the researcher wants to present sentimental images of farm life – parts of this woman’s narrative could be excluded to show only that. So there is a concern that the researcher can hear only what they want to hear. And is the teller telling only what they want to tell. There is also a concern that the teller may be trying to please the researcher, and say what they perceive is what the researcher wants to hear.

Another element of narrative is the very small sampling size; sometimes only one person is being interviewed (Chase, 2010). This is also why the results cannot be generalized; there is just not enough data to go on; but, importantly, qualitative research is not intended to be generalized. As Bruner (2004) points out the “...very instability [of life] makes life stories highly susceptible to cultural, interpersonal, and linguistic influences” (p. 694). Given the constructed nature of stories and the connection to culture and language “life narratives obviously reflect the prevailing theories about ‘possible lives’ that are part of one’s culture” (p. 694).

Yet another characteristic of narrative inquiry is that it is sometimes seen as being too informal and unorthodox to be accepted as formal, scholarly or scientific research. It is not considered to be “theoretical enough” since it may be difficult for a researcher to know what questions to ask. Researchers have to be good listeners and take care not to

interrupt a person's story. In addition, a researcher can get very detailed information from an in-depth interview. But, stories are not clear cut...they can be and are messy. How does one make sense of them? Herein lies the beauty of meaning making and interpretation.

### **Background of the Researcher**

As I entered my doctoral program in my early forties, I knew I was going through a process of change. It was around that time that I began to notice my girlfriends suddenly stop aging. Several had started to lie about their age; thirty-nine forever. At first, I thought it was silly; then after a couple of years, I found it sad. They had begun denying their own existence of being alive longer. To me, aging and growing older is a celebration of each day; how lucky I am to grow and to engage with life and have new experiences and to be alive in this moment.

For me, growing older has allowed me to become more of who I am and to stop gratifying others. I wanted something for myself that no one could take away from me, so I quit my job and started a doctoral program. And as I see more of my former co-workers and friends begin to retire, the questions of successful aging and retirement feel like a natural fit for me to study. I think that many retirees, too, are on the cusp of becoming or revisiting their more authentic selves. Many no longer have a boss or work constraints controlling the majority of their time and have the freedom to live just for themselves. In addition, I am a wife and mother of two elementary age children who both show signs of creativity. And I mean more than just coloring and painting. They love to create models, sing, dance, play dress-up, and decorate anything! As I watch

them create things...I wonder where did my artistic ability and creativity go? It appears that creativity did leave me for my adult years, but I want to learn to be artistic again.

As a researcher, my role is to document, analyze, and most importantly, synthesize the data I collect. But I am showing up, in the middle of my story, to interview a participant, who is also in the middle of his or her own story. Together, we are “in the middle of a nested set of stories-ours and theirs” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 34). I understand that inquirers are co-constructors of meaning. And narrative is a powerful research tool used in the construction.

I attempted to capture retirees understanding through their art, what meaning and understanding they have– and narrative is a rich and engrossing method to capture the representations of that experience. They are engaged in a complex activity and narrative inquiry preserved the content of their stories in a holistic way. I understand that the experience and the narrative was temporal in context to the individual; that fact and fiction can be messy and that memories can change over time. Yet, I hope to produce something informative, lasting, beneficial and useful.

### **Participant Selection**

The purpose of qualitative research is to seek out the “why” questions through analysis of unstructured information to get at insights into people’s attitudes, behaviors, concerns and lifestyles. Researchers select representative samples because they cannot study all relevant people, events or circumstances intensively and in depth (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The sample of participants selected for this research provided the richest source of information that could possibly be obtained. This is known as a purposeful sample, which is usually small, but represents information-rich individuals

(Patton, 2002). The individuals chosen for the study were selected because they are older adult learners who meet the age criteria of being an older adult and were engaging in visual art.

The purposeful sample used both a theory based sample, as well as a snowball sample. A theory based sample represented a group of people that represent a theoretical construct (Patton, 2002). The theory based sample included participants who are at least 60, and the snowball sample may come about by having participants enrolled in art classes give me the names of others who matched the criteria and to see if they were interested in participating. For this study, specific criteria for participant selection were used, and participants meeting the criteria were recruited. The criteria for selection included: (a) being an older adult, over the age of 60 (b) must be retired from employment and (c) must be enrolled in a visual art class.

As is typical with qualitative research, the natural setting should be used, so the setting was the participant's home where they engage in their artwork. One interview occurred at the Art Association because the participant lived about 70 miles from the University. Several of the participants were enrolled in water color and drawing classes offered at a private art center. This is where I drew participants for the pilot study as well as four participants for the study. The rest of the participants came from the Art Association of Harrisburg, and then from other participants as the sample snowballed. A snowballed sample is gathered via the original participants who then identify others who have similar characteristics (Patton, 2002).

### **Data Collection Procedures and Methods**

There are several methods of data collection that can be used in qualitative research. Methods include directly observing participants, in depth -interviewing, reviewing artifacts, collecting and analyzing documents and records, as well as focus groups. Deciding which method(s) to use is based on which method will produce the most relevant information to best answer the questions posed by the study (Patton, 2002). The primary tool for data collection was an open ended interview conducted by the researcher.

### **Interviewing**

Qualitative research relies heavily on in depth interviews with participants. There are three different types of interviews: highly structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Merriam, 2009). Highly structured interviews are those which ask a specific set of questions and do not deviate from a script; while unstructured are more free flowing conversations. I conducted in-depth face to face semi-structured interviews with 10 participants; each was interviewed at least twice. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to two hours in length. A semi-structured interview is flexible and allows for questions that might arise as the participant is answering another question. It is informal and was more of a conversation, as opposed to a structured interview which has set questions and is more formal. The questions asked revolved around learning and understanding through art. See Appendix B for the list of questions that were asked via qualitative interviews. I considered these more as conversations with a purpose, where the researcher guides a conversational partner into extended discussions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). These discussions were the primary data source of the narrative (Riessman, 2008). The reason for using semi-structured interviews with

this group of retirees is because sometimes, the conversations can meander far off course, and it is important to have a list of questions to direct the conversation. From my pilot study, I found that the participants had time on their hands to just sit and talk for hours about art and tangential topics. While these conversations were free-flowing, the study pilot study was aided by this type of semi-structured, as opposed to completely unstructured format.

As a researcher, I worked to build trust and did not use adversarial interviewing techniques. In interviewing, the personality, style and beliefs of the researcher matter. Even though the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is temporary, it can yield very meaningful information. I used responsive interviewing because it is a design that is flexible and adaptable. The sample interview questions (See Appendix B) that were approved by the IRB were used as guiding questions. I told respondents there were no right or wrong answers to these open-ended questions. The conversations that emerged from these questions took many twists and turns. A conversation “should be a mutual and sincere collaboration, a caring relationship akin to friendship that is established over time for full participation in the storytelling, retelling and reliving of personal experiences. It demands intense active listening and gives the narrator full voice” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 122). The interviews were recorded and transcribed. I also had follow-up interviews and member checks. All participants were interviewed on two separate occasions. I met with one participant, Lauren, three times because she was the first one interviewed and had extensive collections of art.

Only 10 participants were interviewed because saturation was reached. The data began to saturate after eight participants, but a total of 10 were interviewed. Saturation

occurs in qualitative research when the data has been heard before. This is the point where there is really no need to continue interviews because participants are repeating what has already been stated by other participants. The object of the interviews was to “bring the respondent to consider an issue in his own words, leading the interviewer towards the areas of greatest importance for the respondent” (Dick, 2006, p. 93).

Biographical information on each participant is given in the next chapter, the biographies do not provide context to some of the ongoing issues that older adults face. Four of the participants live in a retirement community. Bella, Lauren, Connie and Jennifer. Three of these women are widows and miss their spouses a great deal. Two are still grieving. In addition to grief, they frequently encounter death and illness of friends. Connie had to re-schedule our interview due to attending the funeral of a close friend. Bella also had to reschedule because her neighbor had a stroke that morning and Bella needed to tend to her neighbors pets and other obligations for her neighbor. Upon interviewing Jennifer and Lauren, ambulances were carrying away a frail elderly person on a gurney. Both women said that the ambulances were a common, almost daily occurrence at their community.

### **Documents**

There are primary and secondary types of data. Primary data is gathered from first hand sources, such as direct observation, interviews and surveys. Secondary data are items like documents and public records (Merriam, 2009). Documents are a secondary source of data for qualitative researchers. I did not collect or analyze brochures or the like, but did save email and other correspondence that the older adult learners provide

me. Some participants may provide me with sample artwork or a photo of the artwork that represents their retirement.

I utilized my own research journal to take field notes. My field notes are extensive for each person. When I arrived for the interview, I took note of some art work and we had much discussion before the interview actually began. So after I left the interview, I went back and typed up the recollection of what they told me about their home and or artwork. I also logged my thoughts, feelings and observations in this journal and note anything unique about the interviews. I also jotted down items I wanted to come back to during interviews for further clarification from the participant. I am keeping the signed consent forms, names, phone numbers as well as any photos of the participants or sample art work that they have given me until they have to be destroyed as directed by the IRB.

### **Ethics and Informed Consent**

Even though ethics in qualitative research is more subtle than in experimental research; the use of narrative also involves ethical concerns (Chase, 2005). Talking and conversation can stir emotions. When a research becomes familiar with their participant, personal friendships can develop (Riessman, 2008). Participants were protected by the informed consent forms which can formalize the interaction between researcher and participant.

The Pennsylvania State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) requires all graduate students to obtain pre-approval with their office before the research begins. Participants must sign a vetted form of informed consent (See Appendix A) that includes a description of the research, as well as their role as a participant in the research. The

major ethical concern of any study is that no harm should come to the participants, whether it be emotional, psychological or physical. The other concern is that the privacy of each participant be maintained.

Any potential harm coming to participants was minimized by the IRB informed consent forms. Participants were completely aware that they are involved in a research study for a Penn State graduate student, and that their participation is voluntary. Participants are free to make their own choice as to whether or not they participate without fear of negative consequences. Just as with underage participants, who are considered a vulnerable population, so too, are retirees in older adulthood a vulnerable population. They are at a stage in life where things may not be going so well, and they may recall an event that can trigger some emotionally difficult feelings. I will use the utmost care and concern with regard to safeguarding their concerns. A network of services to provide support to these individuals will be available through the IRB in order to assist a participant if this occurs.

Even with consent, I worked to avoid or completely minimize unpleasant feelings coming to a participant. With regard to privacy, I worked to protect their anonymity and their utmost privacy. The interviews were stripped of any personally identifying information. Files are kept in a locked office and online with a password. I have stored the audio-file in a locked file in my home computer and am keeping the recording for 3 years. At the end of the three years, I will destroy the files (Fall 2014). The data gathered from your individual interview have been stored and secured in my home in a password protected computer file. My advisor and I are the only people having access to the data collected for this study, including the audio-files. In the event of a publication or

presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis will bring order, structure and interpretation to the voluminous, massive amounts of data that will be collected. As the transcription of interviews begins, so, too will analysis of the data (Patton, 2002). Data analysis does not proceed in a linear fashion (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Even before I begin to collect data and interview participants, I have been thinking about the theory, the questions that will be asked, my own background and assumptions, the current economic environment and its impact on retirees; and what else might impact my analysis. In addition, I will continually question my assumptions with regard to the process of data analysis. Marshall and Rossman (1999) describe six phases of data analysis: “(a) organizing the data; (b) generating categories, themes and patterns; (c) coding the data; (d) testing the emergent understandings; (e) searching for alternative explanations; and (f) writing the report (p. 152). Each of these phases requires a form of data reduction as massive reams of data are brought into meaning and insight to the interviews that will be given. Raw data has no meaning; but upon analysis, data becomes information.

### **Organizing the data**

In the process of first hearing the older learners responses as I interviewed them, then transcribed the interviews; then read and re-read each interview, this will allowed me to become intimately familiar with the data. I transcribed all of the interviews myself. In addition, I have photographs, quotations, field notes, as well as their interviews to analyze. Much qualitative data is descriptive, and care have streamlined and transferred

the data from the voice recording to paper transcripts. There is no doubt that when first confronting all of this data that it seemed like an overwhelming task (Patton, 2002).

Narrative and knowledge management are linked because both are methods of identifying, representing, sharing and communicating knowledge (Stehr & Ericson, 1992). After organizing the data, categories, themes, and patterns were generated.

### **Coding the data**

Coding involves putting chunks of data into established categories. Warren and Karner (2010) recommend using “open coding to develop analytic patterns or themes” (p. 219). Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggest ways to code transcripts so that new themes can emerge: word repetitions, key-word in context, metaphors and analogies, transitions, using connectors, unmarked text, and pawing (or handling) just to name a few.

Combining several of these techniques is a powerful way to analyze data. In the interviews, which contained random data, with content analysis: looking for the repetitions or key words, patterns emerged. Word repetitions were looked at to see how frequently phrases or words were used. I also used metaphors and analogies for coding because many older learners tend to use metaphors, particularly when reflecting on the past. Also, it is important to assess coding consistency. Which means that a risk exists that the coder’s understanding of the categories and coding rules may change subtly over the time, which may lead to inconsistency (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I worked to keep coding consistent by color coding the interview transcripts by using different color highlighting pens to underline passages with similar meaning.

## **Categories, Themes and Patterns**

This was the intellectual part of analysis that is challenging, complex, creative, and for me, fun. When immersed in the data, one needs to be able to see the ‘forest through the trees’. Just as with artwork, the more abstract the interview, the more interpretation was needed. What then, entails the process of gleaning patterns from the data? Making sense of peoples own written and spoken words requires that language, ideas, keywords – looking for, and finding patterns that link the ideas and people together will be utilized. Qualitative data analysis software programs assist in finding and identifying themes. But an astute researcher can make sense of the complex, scholarly data from multiple interviews into themes and subthemes without the use of software. Even as the data was collected it began to be organized into classifiable categories (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). I searched the transcripts for recurring words, themes and identify core consistencies and meanings (Patton, 2002). As someone who has experience with this portion of research, I was aware of the possibility of oversimplifying themes and missing important issues as they emerged. My awareness worked to minimize this. In the vein of inductive analysis (Patton, 2002), I continued to revisit the data and examine and re-examine the categories and themes.

Qualitative analysis is usually inductive, especially when creating a codebook for content analysis to figure out potential themes, patterns and categories (Patton, 2002). “Inductive analysis involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one’s data” (Patton, 2002, p. 453). As I interacted with the data, and analyzed the content of the interviews and reveal patterns, findings emerged. I discerned themes and categories using this inductive process. When developing categories from raw data, a researcher is

encouraged to use the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This allowed differences in categories to emerge and assist in the creation of new categories. The essence of this method allowed me to fully understand the categories and continually code the data.

### **Testing the emergent understandings**

As I began to evaluate and simultaneously code the data, I also examined the findings as they emerged. Do some parts of the conversations not mesh with what others are reporting? Or was the data beginning to saturate? Were the participants saying the same thing, but in a different way? I examined the expressions of feelings in language validating how useful the data was in answering the research questions being explored (Patton, 2002; Warren & Karner, 2010). The usefulness of understanding for individuals created reflections that may or may not cover the circumstances of whole groups, but sheds light on important ways in which participants were able to navigate through their own lens. While this form of information is not generalizable to all, it provides guidance and is transferable.

### **Searching for alternative explanations**

In order to search for alternative explanations, I challenged the themes and patterns that seem clear and obvious and considered instances where they did not fit into the patterns. This required me to look for other explanations as to why something was the way it was. I looked for logical explanations that might lead to different findings (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Prior to writing the final report, I attempted to apply the findings to another setting to "...place the results in a context of established knowledge, to identify clearly findings that support established knowledge/theory, and claim clearly

new contributions” (Morse, 1994, p. 34). This required the narratives of the older learners to be combed through and applied to different settings.

### **Writing the report**

Writing up findings can be a complex business. The writing should be concise and clear. I attempted to provide as much specific detail and to include rich, thick descriptions where applicable. Qualitative research attempts to assess a participant’s meanings made within a certain context, and it “aims to get a holistic understanding of how individuals in different cultures and subcultures make sense of their lived reality” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 193). I returned to the original purpose and guiding questions as the data was sifted through, coded and indexed, analyzed further; were the questions answered? What might arise were issues with regard to the trustworthiness, confirmability, credibility, dependability as well as the transferability of the research. In the next sections I address these issues to ensure that my written findings are strong, accurate and of high quality. The “process judgments can tell the reader something about the trustworthiness and authenticity of a given study, but they say little about the quality of the narrative presented” (Lincoln & Guba, 2002, p. 206). In order for this study to achieve high quality, many factors were considered.

### **Verification**

The quality of the data collection and analysis depends on several factors (Patton, 2002). The criteria for judging the research paradigm differs by research kind. In quantitative research, there is validity, reliability, objectivity and generalizability. For qualitative research, the same criteria cannot be used. The four alternative criteria to judge qualitative research are credibility, dependability, transferability, and

confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). For validity in quantitative research, there is both internal and external validity.

### **Credibility & Dependability**

There was no specific formula with which to gauge the credibility of research. The credibility criteria refers to establishing the truthfulness or believability of the data collected from the participants. Research and data validation techniques I will use include: (1) member checks, (2) triangulation, and (3) reflexivity, which were documented in a field journal to aid in the credibility and dependability of the study (Merriam, 2009). Member checks, are, as the language implies, checking and confirming with the participant that the information they provided and the analysis derived from it is accurate based on their own understanding. Member checks were begun by developing a good rapport with the participant with an open and comfortable dialogue. Checks also came in the form of participants reviewing the transcripts of the interview to confirm that my notes accurately portray their responses. To further ensure accuracy, throughout the interviews, I restated and summarized what they had said, continually affirming understanding. I also used checks to clarify, or when something was confusing. If, after the participants read and agree with what has been summarized and what was written in the transcript, then the study is said to have credibility.

I also used triangulation, which means that multiple sources of data were checked to ensure consistency. Using multiple methods to check the accuracy of the data makes the study less vulnerable to errors than if only one method is used (Patton, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For triangulation, multiple interviews, documents, and member checks were used. Multiple interviews provided a more nuanced understanding of what

older learners may have been experiencing. Multiple interviews will allow for different stories and perspectives and elucidate how a wide range of versions of truth can come to be true simultaneously. Triangulation requires that at least three sources be used for credibility and consistency. Included in triangulation are my reflections, and how these reflections informed my findings. “Triangulated reflexive inquiry provides a framework for sorting through...issues during analysis and report writing” (Patton, 2002, p. 495). A personal field journal also allowed me to use reflexivity, as I reflected on the entire process, my theoretical framework of successful aging, the participants and the interviews. Multiple interviews helped to capture and corroborate findings which demonstrate dependability. Multiple interviews also offered perspectives through different contexts and interactions (Patton, 2002).

Another source is my field journal. A field journal is a written representation of what has been observed (Warren & Karner, 2010). The field journal contains valuable information, and includes detailed, thick descriptions of the setting, participants, the mood, and the feel of things. In addition, observations and activities that were going on at the art center classes, the details in the journal provided a mental picture of the place and what is occurring there, including details of their homes and artwork. For reflective purposes, I used all of these sources to evaluate what is occurring and evaluate the data as it came forth.

In addition, intellectual rigor, professional integrity, and methodological competence add to the credibility of the study (Patton, 2002). The task was to make sense of all the data. This researcher took these factors of rigor, integrity and competence and add perseverance, creativity and insight to the interviews. Rigor enhances the quality of

data collection during field work (Patton, 2002). Rigor is defined as combining trustworthiness and authenticity (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Authenticity and trustworthiness was derived from the researcher and the interviewees, which ultimately support the credibility of the research.

Dependability is a term used in qualitative research that reflects reliability. Dependability of the data means that it is transparent, accessible and the procedures of the study are easily understood. Just as with credibility, the data should have an audit trail and be triangulated. Dependability also refers to the degree to which findings could be replicated in subsequent studies (Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), conducting an audit trail can assist in establishing dependability.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others. The doctoral committee plays a role in this. With the dissertation process, the role of the committee is partly to evaluate conclusions. Each member of the committee brings strength and expertise to aid in the conclusion that the study is of quality.

Another factor that adds to confirmability was an audit trail. This means providing an audit trail consisting of (1) raw data; (2) analysis notes; (3) reconstruction and synthesis products; (4) process notes; (5) personal notes; and (6) preliminary developmental information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 320 -321). It was also important to examine both the process and the product of the research for consistency (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985). Member checks and multiple interviews were conducted which adds to the confirmability.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which results can be transferred to other contexts or settings, and this is dependent upon the person attempting to apply the results to their own contextual situation. For this study, are the results of older learners similar enough to younger retiring counterparts? Is it so much so that the younger learners are considering applying the results of this research to their own lives? According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) “the degree of *transferability* is a direct function of the *similarity* between the two contexts, what we shall call ‘*fittingness*’” (p. 124). Criteria for transferability include purposeful sampling, which this research study has, as well as dense, rich description of the context and findings. Since this study may yield some transferability, I will make readers of the research aware to the shortcomings and limitations of transferability.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter began with an overview of the study and discusses the details of the qualitative research design, as well as the method, narrative inquiry. The criteria for participant selection, the specific method for gathering data, interviewing and documents, are included. A look at strategies that were used to analyze the data. In addition, several factors, that if present, are used to enhance the quality of the research; this chapter shows how this study’s trustworthiness will be ensured, the role of the researcher, ethical considerations and informed consent are covered in this Chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### BIOGRAPHIES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The purpose of this research is to explore the role of visual arts and its impact on successful aging and older adult learners in retirement. The narratives of these participants begin to tell an interwoven story through their artwork and words. Visual arts are a part of each participant's life with varying levels of engagement among participants. This chapter is divided into two sections. First, demographics of the participants are described, followed by the second section which are the biographical sketches. This section also includes samples of artwork from each participant.

The selection criteria for participation in this research study are: (a) older adult, defined as being over the age of sixty, (b) engaged in visual arts, and (c) retired and currently not working for wages. While many come to retirement with a sense of apprehension and fear of change – knowing their lives will forever alter after they leave the workforce, these participants have been able to transition to life after work; some with more ease than others. Art has impacted each participant. Their families, lifestyles, and previous work history demonstrate that they have richly diverse lives. Each participant has redefined themselves in retirement. Both men and women who engaged in art were interviewed on two separate occasions; these participants shared their stories of retirement, and how they found art and made time to engage in their craft, and also discussed art's impact on their health. After interviewing each person twice, biographical sketches were written up. These biographies provide only a snapshot view into the lives of the participants. It should be noted that all of these individuals had more than one artistic talent.

### General Demographics

This was a snowball sample of ten participants, all of whom met the previously specified selection criteria. Six women and four men were interviewed on two occasions. Nine are Caucasian and one is African American. Both Lauren and Jennifer were employed the least amount of time and worked part-time with the majority having worked full-time. The education level of the participants varied from high school (HS) to doctorate (PhD) to medical doctor (MD). Participants in this study range in age from 65 to 89, with the mean being 77.1 years.

#### Demographics

Name	Age	Marital Status	# Years in Workforce	# Years Retired	Education level	Type of Art
Jennifer	85	Widowed	12	35	BS	Painting & Theater
Lauren	85	Married	30	32	BS	Jewelry & Art displays
Rachel	72	Divorced	30	12	PhD	Painting & Sculpture
Bella	89	Widowed	21	35	BS	Woodworking Sewing & Knitting
Connie	74	Widowed	33	21	HS	Knitting & Cross-stitch
Brad	65	Widowed	22	5	AA	Fashion Design; Writing & Sewing
Reba	83	Widowed	10	38	HS	Knitting, Crafts & Drawing
Henry	71	Married	27	14	MD	Painting & Photography

Jesse	72	Married	45	10	Some college	Painting & Photography
Tom	75	Married	40	14	Some college	Painting & writing

### **Biographies**

The findings from this study are based on the stories of four men and six women who are introduced in this section. No one declined to answer any question (an option explained in advance) and pseudonyms are used.

Most participants were interviewed in their homes, and a couple at the art center; all signed the IRB consent forms. All criteria were met. They all worked; all retired; all are receiving some type of pension income and social security. Participants all are engaged in art. They were asked the approved questions listed in Appendix B.

One participant, Henry, was very financially set, but upon retiring became extremely depressed. He went on medication and elected to have electro shock treatments to try and beat his depression. Two other participants were recovering from surgery, but were still able to continue their art through painting.

#### **Jennifer**

Jennifer has been a painter for over 25 years. She was recently widowed at 85 when her husband died of Alzheimer's. She has two children, eight grandchildren, and lives in a retirement community. Her apartment building holds over 300 residents and bustles with active retirees. She's lived here for four years. Before she came to this community, she lived in over seven states, always moving for her husband's job. Because of the moves "you don't hold on to your friends for long when you keep leaving people behind. I like people, but I like to be alone, too."

Even though her husband's employment provided their main income, she held several jobs, as well. Her work included working at a bomb factory in the 1940s on an assembly line. She was also employed by an airline in reservations; a department store in men's clothing; a radio station as a book-keeper; a nursery school and a dental office. When her children came along, she stayed home and raised them. When they left for college, she had a terrible case of 'empty nest' syndrome. "We came back after delivering my son, Mike, to college. It was a rainy day, and I came back to such an empty house; and I couldn't stand it. The rooms were empty and it was not a fun feeling for a mother who spent most of her time concerned about things with her children. And then they are gone, just totally gone." She missed them so much that she decided to go to college at the age of 46. This was in the 1970s and not very common for a middle aged woman.

She got the idea to further her education after starting to work part-time at a hospital when her children left for college. This led her to the decision to pursue a degree in medical technology. However, she had worn a hearing aid since the age of 30, and had trouble hearing in the large lecture halls. She asked the faculty for preferred seating in front and she would tape record the lectures, but felt that the faculty did not like the idea of a middle-aged woman attending college. Several faculty sat her in the back of the room. Despite these setbacks, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1977. She said "I have



never been so proud of myself in all my life!” She had trouble finding work, which she felt was because of her hearing impairment and her age (in her 50s) coupled with not much work experience and that she was passed over for younger people who could hear better. She eventually found work, but it was only part-time. She decided to retire shortly afterward, because her husband also decided to retire.

The last home that she and her husband purchased was large with walls that needed accessorizing. These were about 6 foot by 8 foot spaces...so she needed some fairly large pieces of artwork. She couldn't find anything she liked, so she decided to paint some herself. So at the age of 63, she began to dabble in art. And dabble she did!



She began to take art classes; both water color and oil painting. Her first art teacher became a friend and mentor to her, continually encouraging her to paint and praising her work. She was also given constructive criticism. “She would give me suggestions to maybe darken it...or use

lighter colors, just little suggestions, always good and always encouraging.” Jennifer started slowly and eventually became a very prolific artist. She filled all the walls in her home, and then gave several works of art to her daughter. Today, Jennifer has numerous pieces in storage because she has so much of it.

She has painted some award winning pieces. She began to receive recognition and entered juried shows. Her artwork won prizes, both blue ribbons and monetary prizes. Her picture of Iris flowers won a blue ribbon at a local art center, and was entered in a

contest at the State Museum. “This was a biggie... I got up there and my son-in-law and daughter were there with me, they had a big reception, they took a picture of me with my painting... I got all teary and all emotional. It was the first time I had any recognition for any of my artwork... I couldn’t believe that I won!”

When her husband’s health began to fail, they downsized the house and moved to a retirement community. Upon moving to the retirement complex, she donated several large art pieces to the community. Her art work adorns the community room and hallways; all had once hung in her home. She had painted them. Many of the residents at this facility call her the “artist in residence” which she loves. She had stated that “my ego had been hanging around my ankles because of my hearing loss.” So it felt nice for her to



have recognition. “It brings me joy to show my art in the hallways!”

When her husband developed Alzheimer’s, she transitioned him to assisted living because she could no longer care for him. Her husband died last year in September. She mentioned his

death several times stating that she paid approximately \$127,000 for assisted living from January to September, when her husband passed. Her artwork kept her busy during this time. She painted a lot while he was in assisted living. The staff in assisted living told

Jennifer not to visit her husband to allow him to get accustomed to the new situation. “I painted a lot then. When I did go visit him, he would beg me to bring him back home. Then he finally stopped recognizing me.”

Last year, when she was 84, she decided to have a cochlear implant to improve her hearing. She was surprised at how clearly she can hear now! Her newfound hearing has given her confidence and a new outlook on life. “I know art has given me tremendous benefits. I am...I guess been feeling a little bit less than...because of my hearing has done it to me, I have been deaf most of my life, and I haven’t participated in a lot of things. I don’t go to movies, I don’t go anywhere, because I can’t hear. But now that I have this implant and I’m blossoming somewhat on a small scale.” Her hearing and her art have given her confidence, and, “it’s wonderful for the ego! Because my ego has been around my ankles for a long time...I wish I had the surgery years ago.”

Jennifer does give some of her art away, but mostly loves to display it for others to see. She stated “I am altruistic but also love the accolades.” She provides her art for others to see, because it makes her feel good. She spends many hours a day painting and each painting such as the ones seen here can take up to four to five months to complete. “I would never sell my art, but will give it to my grandchildren.” I have given some of the art I made as birthday presents.”

With regard to her favorite art, Jennifer talked about several pieces that her daughter had made for her. Her daughter, age 60, engages in stained glass art as a hobby, and Jennifer had several beautiful stained glass pieces in her bedroom and kitchen that her daughter had given her as gifts. The stained glass incorporates flowers and birds and was very colorful.

In her own collection of artwork, Jennifer's painted flowers were among her favorites. Three are included here. The vibrant colors and the depth and texture of the paintings were particularly meaningful to her. She loves flowers and paints them from seeing the real ones, not pictures, but the actual flowers themselves. "I get lost in my paintings. I so enjoy the time I paint and it feels so wonderful to have a finished product at the end." A product that others appreciate brings her joy. "When you are around flowers, you feel like you are forever in a garden...and that is a good feeling."

Jennifer went to her bedroom to retrieve a newer painting she was working on; several different colored flowers. "This is my latest; it will take me several months to complete." Painting requires time and patience, both things that Jennifer has plenty of these days.

Even though art was not part of Jennifer's life growing up, it has been "very much a part of me for the last 25 years!" She loves to paint and receives much joy from the recognition she receives from her art. "It has meant so much to me...doing something I love...and having some success with it...it feels so good...and relaxing" when she engages in art.

### **Lauren**

Lauren states that "art is in my life every day...from the meals I prepare, the presentation of the food; you want it to look beautiful! My house, I want my house to be attractive and up-to-date; my clothes, even though they may be old, I can add a scarf and be quite fashionable!" Lauren is 85 and has been retired for 30 years. She taught middle school and junior high for over 30 years. She is a mother of two daughters, has five grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. She has been married for over 60 years. She

and her husband spent most of their working years in Delaware. He was a chemist, and they raised their daughters there. Both of their daughters moved away from Delaware, one coming to Pennsylvania. Lauren retired one year prior to her husband, and she said “that was a good year.”



Lauren and her husband toured

Europe right after he retired. They took an Elderhostel trip and visited numerous art museums including the Reich Museum in Denmark, and the Louvre in Paris.

She has been very busy in retirement. “I thought I was going to do a lot of things...I started writing my biography, got about half way through; I thought I would read more, I thought I would paint more, too. just haven’t had time.” When Lauren was 55, she decided to take a silver-smithing class. She admired silver jewelry and wanted to learn how to make it. She began creating unique silver jewelry; rings, broaches and earrings. She never knew how to do any of



this and was inspired by the beautiful results of silver-smithing. She said “you have to have a lot of uninterrupted time” to perfect a craft. As Lauren and her husband turned 80,

they downsized considerably, sold their home and decided to move closer to their oldest daughter. Since they had visited her in Pennsylvania many times, they decided to settle close to her. Their routines changed significantly in Pennsylvania. “It’s not easy to live with someone 24/7, but luckily we have different activities on different days now.” She swims Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; takes stretch classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays and participates in line dancing on Tuesdays. Her husband walks and participates in Tai Chi and yoga so they can have some built-in separation. “It’s good to have a break...One thing we had in Wilmington that we don’t have here is a lifelong learning program through the University of Delaware. He [her husband] took a lot of non- credit courses and was gone during the daytime. The courses were taught by everybody in the community. They were personal interest courses...music, philosophy, French and photography; it was wonderful!” In Pennsylvania, neither Lauren nor her husband have found courses similar to the offerings in Delaware. Her husband has started to experience some health issues at age 89. But so far, she does not have any health issues or take medications. Lauren claims it is because: “I stay active!” As far as her other artwork, Lauren has had many projects over the years. The most meaningful art she worked on was a painting project she completed with her daughter. Together, they spent 150 hours painting a complete room mural in her daughter’s dining room. “In order to keep mentally sharp, you have to do a lot of observation, and in order to paint, you have to do a lot of observation, too. I can see so much detail!” As you can see from the pictures, each wall had some significant meaning for her in some way. One wall depicted an actual picture of her house, including the flagpole and dog in the front. (see picture). Another wall depicts Gettysburg, because her son-in-law and daughter met at Gettysburg



Lauren engaged in art and asked her to paint them. The hazards were local Pennsylvania landmarks. Lauren enjoyed painting them and adding the finishing touches to this project.



For several years now, Lauren has been in charge of very large display cases in the community. She solicits items and the residents provide items voluntarily. On my first visit with her, one of the larger cases had dolls from 1900 to the present. Each doll had a calligraphy written placard with the resident's name on it, identifying who had donated it to this display. Lauren arranged the dolls in chronological order on each shelf and made the placards. She created an interesting and appealing display. When I returned a few weeks later, Lauren had changed the display case to reflect the upcoming fashion show in the community. She had received an overabundance of items to put on display. She attractively arranged shoes, pocketbooks, ties, scarves, watches, jewelry and belts in various color schemes. It was very eye catching. "I can create a visual display that is appealing, maybe more than the average Jo."

At 85, she has embraced technology and also utilized graphic design software on her computer to make posters for the upcoming fashion show. She said she spends "a lot of time on the computer."

At the entrance to her apartment in the retirement community the door and area in the hallway was ornate and decorated...similar to curb appeal at a house. Displays of rugs, plants and pictures graced the hallway! Upon entering, it was so colorful and adorned with warm furnishings and rugs, flowers, paintings. She showed me her family crests which she had created with needlepoint. One crest was for her maiden name, the other her married name; both were framed and hanging in her bedroom.

She created much of her art to give away, especially to her daughters and grandchildren. "One thing I've always done for my family is to make Christmas stockings. For everyone in the family, I have made one. I just made the last one for my great grandchild and I can tell you that my fingers don't work quite as well as they used to." She showed me pictures of all the stockings on the mantle during the holiday time and she pulled out hers and her husband's. They were very ornate and detailed!

Lauren considers herself "a people person. I have always considered myself a jack of all trades and master of none." In retirement, Lauren has managed to have a great mix of alone time with her art, and engagement socially with others.

**Rachel**

Rachel is 72 and both a sculptor and a painter. She retired at age 60, after working as both a professor and an administrator. She taught hematology and parasitology for several years, and became the Dean of Allied Health at a large university. “My path was unusual, because I became an Acting Dean as an untenured faculty member. The school was closing departments, and I got a lot of great experience there.” Later, she returned to an executive MBA program at the Wharton School of Business. After earning that degree, she became a Provost and Executive Vice President at a different university. During her last few years as Provost, she “became a student again at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA) in Philadelphia. I commuted for four years going half time to school and working part-time at the Medical Center.” She was in her late 50s upon returning back to the classroom. “I always love learning new things. I got a certificate, but I didn’t do the studio part, just the academic part. I had my own studio.” She had a studio built onto her current home that she shares with her sister. The studio is large and accommodates up to seven or eight artists at a time. Rachel hosts open studios on Mondays and several people come to paint and /or sculpt with her. The painting is both watercolor and oil on canvas. Rachel paints, makes jewelry, ceramics and creates sculpture.

Rachel has two grown children and was a single mom for many years. She is twice divorced. For recreation, Rachel keeps busy by playing tennis, walking and swimming. She exercises regularly. She used to dance, but does not do that so much anymore. She makes annual trips to Florida, where she stays during the winter months. She takes studio courses while she is there. I take classes because “I’m not very

disciplined to work a lot in the studio on my own...so if I have a class, it forces me to go. The classes are good for me. I always learn something new. I am a perennial student; I like to learn; every teacher has something new to give you.”

Rachel was not an artist when she was younger, but says her mother tried to encourage her art. Her mother taught ceramics well into her 80s. “My mother went back to school when she was older. She ended up marrying the Dean. My step-father was the founder of the Tyler School of Fine Arts at Temple University. He was a student of Rodin, and I was exposed to a lot of art through him and I did my first sculpture with him.” Rachel was in her 20s when he became her step-father. “My mother had a lot of natural talent for art. She was very good.”

While she claims she was not a young artist, she does have two significant memories about art. “My mother took me to an art museum, the Art Museum of Philadelphia. They were offering a sculpture class. I must have been eight or 10, but I

remember that I made a mermaid.” The other early memory is from elementary school. She remembers doing a ‘scratch’



picture. “I guess I enjoyed art when I was younger, I didn’t have very much exposure to it, or experience with it...it must have always been there; but I wasn’t active when I was younger, I didn’t draw and I didn’t have exposure to materials, paints or other art materials.”

Art currently plays “a large part of my life! I see things differently. I study things I see! I love my Mondays. I love looking at the work I created. I like teaching and helping other people.” Rachel enjoys many varied art projects. She paints, creates sculpture and makes jewelry. Some of her jewelry is on display in museums and she has sold some of it to friends. The jewelry was so beautiful, and there was demand for it, but she “was making it for fun, not to sell it, really.”

While art enriches her mind and “feeds [her] spirit,” she did have a hip replacement a couple of years ago. This “has precluded me from doing sculpture. It’s heavy work; clay is heavy... moving around 25 to 50 pound bags of clay. I can’t do it anymore. I stopped doing sculpture and I miss it. Her favorite sculpture, she calls “Loss and Remembrance.” There is a great deal of detail in the sculpture. “She is Loss and he is Remembrance...it is one of my better sculptures.”



For Rachel, she feels unrestricted in retirement. I work in my garden, studio and my house. And I travel. In the first year after retirement, she stopped wearing a watch and didn't carry a pocketbook anymore. I had more opportunities to go to the beach and watch the sun go down. "I set my own calendar." In her art studio, she has hundreds of magazine clippings, as well as pictures from books and brochures serving as inspirations for her to paint. Many are nature scenes of items such as beaches, mountains, farms, plants, sunsets, trees, flowers, people, celebrations, or houses. There is a great mixture of vibrant colors for her to paint! "When I paint I stand, and I stand for three hours. And three hours goes by in a flash!" One of her favorite paintings, pictured here, is of a friend on the beach.

Rachel rarely gives her art away. "I don't do a lot of that." She has given a few pieces away, but mostly "it gets stashed away." I have shared some pieces [of art] with the art association. I think I need to have a show; someone should have a show for me" because of all the artwork she has. Many of her sculpted pieces have won prizes. "I used to collect art, but after a while, I started to donate some of my collection." She donates some art, other than her original pieces that she collected to charity. Her home is filled with paintings and sculpture. Her gardens are filled with sculpture. Out of every window in her home, you can see a sculpture.

Art "is part of who I am...not a tangible benefit...It's who I am, I enjoy doing it...I have to do it...I would be less than me if I were not" engaged in art.

**Bella**

Bella is a woodcarver and a widow who is 89 years old. Bella not only carves wood, but also knits, sews, makes jewelry and teddy bears. She had been married for over 60 years, has three children and several grandchildren. Her husband died two years ago. She worked for 21 years teaching reading and literature to junior high school students. She specialized in literacy and helping students read with more fluidity. She also taught Spanish. She retired when she was 55. Her husband retired two years later and they moved from Pennsylvania to North Carolina. “We moved to get away from the snow!” They moved to a retirement community, purchasing a new home on a golf course and were only a few miles from the beach. She stated:

We both loved playing golf and we golfed a lot a first. We just loved it! We thought we’d spend the rest of our days just playing golf and walkin’ the beach, that’s what we had in mind, but that gets old pretty quick. You can only do that so much!

Bella’s grandfather whittled. She would see him whittling, and she wanted to do that too! “I just loved it. I would sit and watch him and I’d say...let me do that...and they wouldn’t let a girl have a knife...they would let you have knitting needles, but not a knife...so my curiosity was there very young. And my mother wanted me to paint and become a commercial artist.” She and her mother argued over that. Bella wanted to become a teacher, not an artist. Eventually, Bella won out. But, “then when I had my family, I was too busy...didn’t have time for it. When I was in college, I just didn’t have time for it [art]...then when I got married and had my family...there was no time.” But she did take up sewing. “I sewed clothes for myself and for the kids.” Right after she

retired, and before they moved to North Carolina, Bella attended a craft show near where she lived. She stated:

They had one table of wood carving and the gentleman manning the table was from my church. I knew him. I told him I wish I could do wood carving and he told me I was in luck...the Senior Center is starting to have classes starting next week. So I drove to Somerset County from Johnstown about 30 to 45 minutes each way. So I took six classes once a week for six weeks. And that just grabbed me!

Bella felt that she became an artist at 55 when she took the class. Shortly after moving to North Carolina, her barber asked her if she would be interested in sewing bags for a friend of his who was starting her own business. Bella told him “I’m retired! I



don’t want to work!” But, eventually Bella contacted his friend, who happened to live only a few blocks away, and told her that she would work for her, but only on her own schedule. Bella walked over to this woman’s garage about twice a week and began to sew bags: duffle bags, canvas bags and hand bags. The woman sold them in her shop called, Barefoot Traders. Every bag Bella

made sold. “She did pay me. I didn’t need the money...I didn’t want the money. I just wanted something to do besides golf and beach.” When the store owner had to leave to go buying and selling, she asked Bella to watch her store. “I took care of the shop for her, and there was a resident alligator that lived under the porch...I used to have to bang

sticks along the way and be real careful so he would hurry out of there and go out into the marsh where he lived!”

The store owner eventually moved her shop to Myrtle Beach, about 20 miles away, and asked Bella to continue. But, Bella did not want the long drive, so she declined. Shortly thereafter, she made friends with the owner of a Christmas shop. Bella had wood carved numerous Santa Clauses and made Christmas ornaments and wanted to sell some of them at her friend’s shop.

Eventually, the Christmas shop owner asked Bella to come and work in the store. She really did not want to, but went to work in the store two days a week. At that time, Bella was sewing teddy bears for fun and decided to sell the teddy bears at the Christmas shop. The owner had ordered kits of doll houses that needed to be assembled and painted. “So I got the tools and put the doll houses together, and I painted the houses.” She decided to make miniature furniture for the houses. She thoroughly enjoyed assembling the houses and making the furniture.

One day, a man came into the shop and asked who had made all the miniature furniture. Bella said that she had made it herself. The man invited her to join a woodworking club. She was thrilled! She had been looking for a club like that but could not find one. But, the first time she went, she was disappointed. “It was in a big gymnasium...it was full of dust with power carving machines...that’s not what I call fun...everybody had a mask on...it was like walking into the clouds.” I do carving with gouges on a small scale...and I didn’t have anybody to carve with.”



Eventually, the same thing happened with this shop. Her friend decided to move the Christmas shop to Myrtle Beach, and asked Bella to continue. “I went back to playing golf and going to the beach frequently and declined the Myrtle Beach commute.” But it was truly her other interests that kept her going. She continued to wood carve and paint. “I just love doing it!”

After 23 years in North Carolina, she and her husband decided to move back to Pennsylvania to be closer to family. The funny thing was that about 6 months after they returned to Pennsylvania, her daughter and her son-in-law decided to retire and they moved to North Carolina! They had loved visiting us all the years we were down there...so they moved into the community we left!



Bella is still very active in making wood carved ornaments and knitting afghans. She makes them and donates them to the retirement community for their semi-annual craft sales. “The craft sales help pay for activities for the seniors.” She also volunteers every Tuesday in the skilled nursing area. Skilled nursing is where the wheel-chair bound individuals live. Bella goes over and takes four or five people to Bible study. “I help them into their wheelchairs, then I wheel them down to the Bible study and go get

the next person. When we are all together, I help them turn the pages in the hymnals.”

Many of these skilled nursing individuals have lost complete use of their hands. Several of them are younger than Bella. Bella is grateful to have her craft and feels that it helps her physically. She was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and woodworking helps keep her fingers active. “My doctor has given me medication, and I take it when I have a flare up. I can’t do anything with my hands during this time.” She gets right back to carving as soon as she is able. She worries that she will lose the dexterity in her hands. Knitting also helps her hands. When she knits “and feels up tight, after just knitting for a while, my whole body feels better...I think my artwork keeps me healthy.” Bella said she is proud of her artwork, “maybe a little too proud.” But she is happy and enjoys what she does a great deal.

Bella is on Coumadin, a blood thinning medication. She has to be very careful not to cut herself when she is wood carving. Cutting yourself can be a hazard in



woodcarving. She was at a show recently where a man had told her to put black pepper on her cut. She thought that was crazy, but a week or so later, another friend of hers got cut and started to put black

pepper on the wound.

She has won several blue-ribbons for small wood carving figurines that she has carved and painted. Her most recent work is something called ‘relief carving.’ “I made two of these. One for my daughter and one for myself. It is a scene from our vacation.” This piece holds a special meaning for me and my daughter. Bella is headed to a woodcarving camp with younger carvers and enjoys the social aspect that woodcarving brings her.

Bella says of retirement, “I don’t have the pressures I had, I am healthier...these are happy years! I have more time for friendships. Living in a place like this to meet people with a similar age and similar interests has been wonderful.”

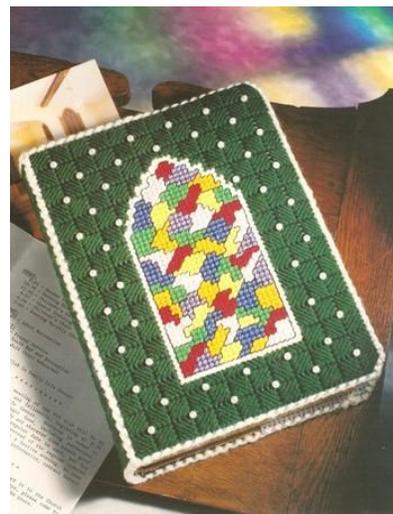
## Reba

Reba is 83 years old and knits and makes many items with needlework. She worked full-time for about 10 years as a secretary. She attended Central Pennsylvania Business School and worked for an insurance company, a school district, and for the military in secretarial capacities. She has one son, and stayed home with him, going back to work only part-time while he was in school. She was married for 60 years when her husband passed away four years ago. After her husband died, Reba downsized, sold her home and moved into a retirement community. It was difficult for her to sell the house, but she moved a significant distance to be closer to her son. “I have lots of friends, but I couldn’t depend on them for things.” Her son visits her regularly, and she is very close to him. “He calls me almost every day and checks in on me.”

Since moving to the community, Reba has made numerous friends. She has signed up for many activities including Wii Bowling, knitting and cross-stitching. “I try to keep myself as busy as possible.” She organizes birthday parties for the residents on her floor and mini-golf outings. “Right now, I am involved in knitting with a group of girls and a sewing group...I don’t like to be alone, so being with other people and

keeping busy helps me....I sign up because I like to be with people. I am a people person.”

Although she doesn’t consider

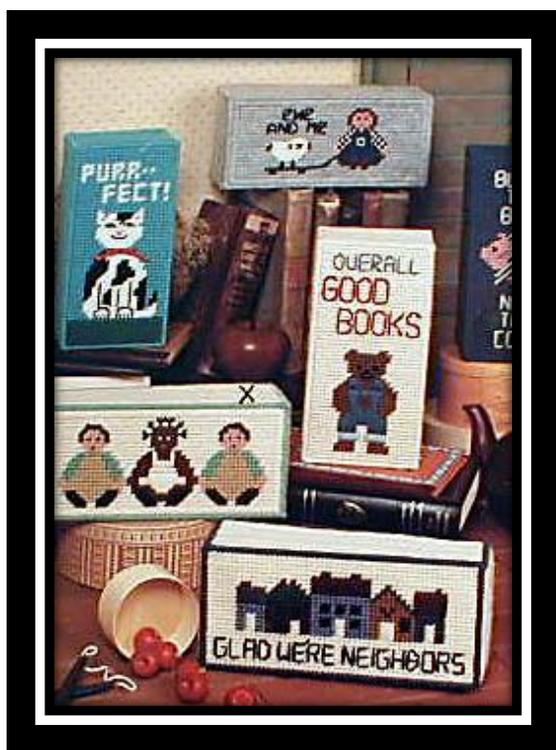


herself a creative person or an artist in particular, she has been active in knitting, cross stitch and recently, at the age of 83, drawing. “I was scared to draw, because I had never done it before...I was in a creative arts group...and the girls coaxed me into it...they said ‘come on...try it!’ so I did and then I was tickled with it! I was very pleased with it!” The drawing is of a covered bridge, and it is very detailed. She framed it and it hangs in her living room. “I’m proud of that.”

Reba does give much of her art away, but also enjoys “just keeping what I have...I have a lot of it....it brings back memories” to look at the art. “I like keeping what I make.”

She made hundreds of brick covers and Bible covers out of plastic needlework. “I don’t know how many I gave given away over the years.” The brick covers were very

personalized; either with the person’s name or their address. She has many covered bricks and Bible covers in her apartment that she has made. She also made plastic door covers and hangings for every season and every holiday for her father, son and for herself. A friend had also commissioned her to make door covers. “She had a vacation home with eight doors, and she wanted every door changed for different occasions (Halloween, Thanksgiving, New Year’s,



etc.). It was a lot of covers. My friend wanted to pay me, but I just loved making them.

She gave me a donation which I then gave to a local charity.” Even though she thinks these are attractive, she didn’t feel particularly creative making them because she followed a pattern from a kit or a book.

The knitting is where she feels more creative. Reba had rheumatoid arthritis, and her doctor recommended keeping her hands busy to inhibit the onset of the arthritis. She knit some very large pieces; one is a king-size bed cover with very detailed patterns. “It took me a long time to make this, and it was very hard to get them [the patterns] tight in the center...and my quilt...it is priceless to me.” She cannot do counted-cross stitch anymore because it is too hard on her eyes. She feels relaxed when engaging in knitting and ceramics. She enjoys the social aspects of where she lives. She was encouraged to join into new activities, wii and drawing for example, that have brought her both appreciation and joy.

**Brad**

Brad is 65 and the only African-American participant in this study. He describes himself as a “creator of art” and a fashion designer. “When I am engaged in creating art, I am fulfilled!” He has a website where he promotes the sale of his creations. Brad married his high school sweetheart when they were both 20, but she was tragically killed in a car accident when they were 22. The accident left him with two small children to raise alone. He never re-married.

He was a single father and raised his children with some assistance from his mother and sister. He went on welfare to support himself and the children. When they were little and all throughout their school years, he worked odd jobs, construction, tearing down buildings whatever he could do to help support himself. He would also do alterations, but didn’t have many customers because no one knew he had this skill. He made his children’s clothing from remnants purchased at a nearby fabric store. When he was 16, he “took sewing lessons from an older German lady, she taught me the fundamentals of sewing. I took lessons for 6 weeks, one night a week. She had me make potholders and other projects to teach me how to make straight lines and vary the colors.”

When his children were about seven and eight, he moved to Pennsylvania. He became involved with an annual arts festival that occurred every weekend in June, July and August; the festival was in close proximity to his home. Artists would come from all over to show their artwork, give lectures, and teach. Many of the programs were directed at youth. His kids enjoyed the festival, and he was involved in organizing them. “It would take all day Friday to set it up and all day Monday to tear it down.” There was always a fashion show. The Barbizon school would come, have models, and the clothing

was beautiful. Every year, he sewed creations for the models to wear. “There would always be someone else who wanted to show clothes. Basically, I would find a handful of women who were interested in modeling and the women modeled for free because I didn’t have any money. This went on for years.”

He was so involved in organizing these art festivals that he would spend his own money on advertising or materials needed on making it work for the community. This was sometimes a detriment, because he didn’t have very much money. But the sense of the entire community seeing the arts was important to him. He wanted to share all the beautiful clothes and artwork. He wanted others to experience that, especially his children.

When his youngest graduated from high school, Brad decided to become a student. He attended a trade school for two years and earned a certificate in heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC). He got his first job with benefits when he was 39 with an HVAC company. “But the work was outdoors in new home developments. Most of the time, it was freezing, and I don’t like being out in the cold, so I quit.” He then found work managing a restaurant. He served in that role for a few years when he heard that the State of Pennsylvania was hiring. He took a test and got hired. He worked in facilities and did HVAC work, but much of it was indoors, so it worked out for him.

Brad worked for the State for 17 years before retiring. “I had the age, not the years, but I had the age and the retirement benefit program was really good. I was told that every year after that, there is a possibility with the economy being the way it was, that benefits could get less. I was worried. The main reason is I wanted to pursue my hobby [designing clothes]. Even though it [retirement package] was not that much

money, I could supplement my income with this. [His art; clothing design]. So I retired.”  
He has not regretted retirement at all. “I love not having to work!”

I think everybody needs something to give them a reason to live or that will add to their joy and happiness in this life because so many people are unhappy with their work... If you can find something that you enjoy doing: the Buddhist would say something that gives



you ‘bliss’ ....that brings joy and that brings happiness that can’t be bought with money. And that is what I got and what I am still getting every time I sit down to do some sewing.

When I am sewing my creations, I get out of my mind, out of my head. Away from my ego...which is what blocks my true essence from coming forth. I feel truly happy and at peace.



Brad feels “if you are engaging in something that you love to do...then some of the more negative hobbies that you might have will drop away...you don’t want to spend time with people that don’t have anything of value to talk about. It will open up more positive circles in your life. People that are creative and positive are attracted to each other.” His friends are models and other designers.

His apartment is filled with racks and racks of clothing and coats that he designed and made. “I have a friend who goes to Africa bring me these beautiful and unique fabrics and I make personalized items on commission.”

The walls of Brad's apartment are filled with eclectic and very different pieces of artwork. He described each piece in great detail. Every piece of art had a story behind it. He remembered the artist who gave it to him, the context in which it was given and the meaning behind it. There were also many photographs and posters of models wearing his creations. He is very proud of his creations. "This is my passion, and I am good at it!" But he feels he needs to improve his marketing and sales part of this equation to supplement his income.

When the concept of generativity was explained to him, he made a connection. While he does not give away his clothing, what he thinks he has passed on to his kids is the interest he sees in them giving back to their communities. "They [his kids] are honest, loving and community-oriented. They are into church. They give [of their time and teaching in] their community. They are very involved and give of themselves through teaching. We never made any money through that. But, it's all positive."

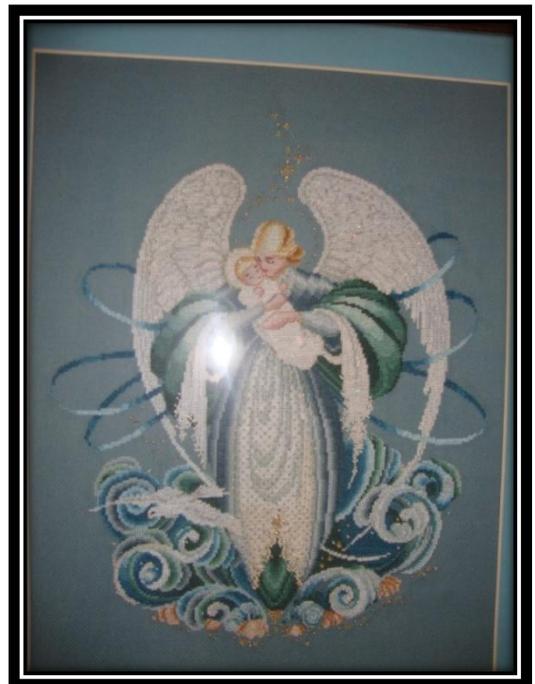
Brad is the youngest participant in this study, and he looks chronologically much younger than 65. While he looks good physically, he is the only participant who smokes. In addition, he was told that he needs a hip replacement. He used crutches for several months and feels good now. He does not want to "go under the knife" unless he absolutely has to. For Brad, it is about "mind and body. If you are thinking positive, then you will be more healthy. It has a lot to do with what you believe." He credits his participation in art with good concentration. When he starts sewing something, he doesn't use a pattern. "It just flows...and what you are left with is a beautiful product." Brad's apartment is filled with beautiful products, both of his own creation and many from other artists.

## Connie

Connie is 74 and spends some of her recreational time engaged in counted cross-stitch and knitting. Connie's husband of over 40 years passed away last year. She has two sons and four grandchildren. She worked as an executive secretary for over 20 years at a heavy equipment corporation. I loved my job, but, "my husband told me I could retire as soon as our youngest graduated from college. So after he graduated, I retired." She was thrilled and happy to retire.

"My husband took a two-year sabbatical and we traveled around the country together in a 32-foot mobile home. We traveled from East-to-West and North-to-South." They went all over the United States together. "When we got back, we built a house in Rehoboth Beach and we could travel down there a lot. We went boating and bought a jet ski, but I haven't done that since he died." She now spends a lot of her time reading, swimming, doing water aerobics, and trying to stay fit. She also spends many of her evenings knitting and cross-stitching. She began cross-stitch on her own when she was in her 30s. She is self-taught. "I picked it up to pass the time."

Her husband was profiled in a 2006 retirement magazine article about how to retire with assets to help you travel and do all the things you want in retirement. "He had so many plans for us, but he died so suddenly...I'm glad we had the opportunity to travel around the country when we did."



Her own health is excellent. She exercises and is a non-smoker.

They had moved to a retirement community upon their retirement nine years ago, and she loves the two bedroom home where she lives. It is filled with 16 very large counted-cross-stitch angels. “A lot of detail goes into cross-stitching. Your eyes have to be very good to do it.” She tried to teach a cross-stitch class at her community, but the participant’s eye sight was not strong enough. “Many of them just couldn’t see well enough to do it [cross-stitch].”

She learned to knit when she was 8 years old and has many intricate and detailed sweaters that she has knit. She has also taught knitting on occasion to groups of women that live in the retirement community.

Connie’s creations are something she enjoys doing. She stated:

It gives me –‘me time’ I enjoy curling up in this chair and knitting or cross-



stitching a project. I enjoy the time for me. And not being selfish me, but it’s things that I enjoy doing. I’m not an artist. I am a creator. I feel like I create.

I feel gratified. Definitely, I am gratified. She likes having the alone time. “In fact, I look forward to an evening when I don’t have to leave the house, I can just stay home and be in

the house and just sit here and knit. I look forward to that!”

She makes lap robes for the residents in assisted living. Lap robes are smaller knitted blankets that fit over the lap and legs of a person confined to a wheel chair. It has certain measurements and cannot be too big as it would obstruct the wheel chair. She donates the lap robes to assisted living. She also knits sweaters for the community sale that benefit residents of the community. One year, she had a picture of Santa. It was “Santa Clause sitting in his seat with 4 dogs and relaxing. I wanted to share that so bad! And they made a spot for me in the village so I could show it. It was so nice. I do...I enjoy just showing them to everyone. They’re [the artwork] beautiful, they’re creative and I like other people to share it.”

She has at least 10 to 12 sweaters that are very elaborately patterned knitted that she wears in the winter. She enjoyed making these for herself. Connie gives both her knitting and cross-stitch away as gifts, but more of the cross-stitching because they are personalized. She makes them for wedding, birthday and baby gifts to give away.



At one time, Connie also worked with ceramics. But, “I ran out of stuff to do in ceramics. After a while I didn’t want to make anything else.”

## Henry

Henry paints and although he has “always loved art,” he only began to create it 13 years ago at the age of 57. He is married and has 2 children. Retirement for him came due to health concerns. “I had a 90% blockage of four main arteries; they had to do a quadruple bypass.” Recovery was long and difficult. “I went back to work for about 6 months, but just couldn’t keep up.” He left his career of 27 years, and “went through some depression.”

Henry had been a nephrologist and surgeon at a teaching hospital, and his work demands were high. He had rotating interns from the medical school and taught new surgeons every year. It was extremely busy. “I suffered from depression after I left work, but then I thought about coming here (to the art center) and take some time off and smell the roses.” Retirement to him means not having to work 16-hour days and not having phone calls on nights or weekends. “And now especially, having the chance to come out here [the art center].”

When he retired, his office manager had given him an easel and paint brushes as a gift. He also received a gift certificate to an art supply store. “I had never been in a place like this (art supply store).” Shortly after he retired, he saw an ad for a “Free Spirit Watercolor Class” and the description sounded interesting to him, so he signed up. The description from the brochure read:

*In Free-Spirit Watercolor, each painting is a new adventure.*

*Have fun with watercolor... and create fresh, spontaneous*

*paintings using transparent colors. Award-winning artist,*

*[name removed], puts great emphasis on creating excitement*

*in your work, stressing good principles of design with color, value, and composition. Work at your own pace with florals, still life, photos and landscape slides.*

After he read the description, he was hooked. “Wow! That’s me!” he said. He had always possessed an interest in art. For 25 years, when he would attend a medical conference in Chicago, he would always go one day early so he could go to the Chicago Art Institute and spend the entire day there. He described the art museum: “It is massive...you could just be in there for days and not see everything. They have an impressionist section and a Renaissance section and I walked into one room and they had all Rubens miniatures...it was like art heaven.” He collected prints for his office and had considered himself a “doodler, not an artist.” And in fact, when he first came to the art center, he didn’t know how to paint, had never tried it. At first, he painted apples and oranges. Then he graduated to peppers. The instructor came along as he was painting a pepper, and “sliced it tangentially crosswise, and said ‘now paint this’ and I never knew how complicated the insides of a red pepper could be; all the seeds and everything else in there.” It was difficult for him, and the painting took hours. In the beginning, his art teacher encouraged him. She has been his same art teacher for all these years, and the two are friends now. He also loves joining the art class for the social aspects.

The people he has met at the art center have positive criticism for him. They help him pass the time when they paint all day on Mondays.

When Henry retired, “I left a five bedroom home to move to a two-bedroom apartment so my son has a lot of my art.” He stopped having his art framed, because “framing is expensive.”

He had several pieces of art that depict modes of transportation, such as boats, trains and trucks.

Henry was both thrilled and surprised when a painting of his sold. After a while, his paintings started to accumulate. A friend asked him if he could have one of his paintings, and Henry gave it to him. “Two weeks later, he gave me a check for \$600.00 because the painting sold. He had placed the painting at another friend’s shop, and it sold! I was stunned!”

He does not make it a habit to sell his art, but he does display the art in shows and has a lot of it “just laying around.” He has donated some to the American Heart Association to auction off for charity because of his own heart condition. “I have given some [art] to my son, but only because he has asked me for it.”

Henry does feel that art has improved his mood and helps him feel less depressed. “I feel productive...like I am creating something of aesthetic value...I am trying to capture the essence of something...” Coming to the art center and spending time away from home has also “improved my relationship with my wife.” In addition, the camaraderie with his classmates has helped him gain

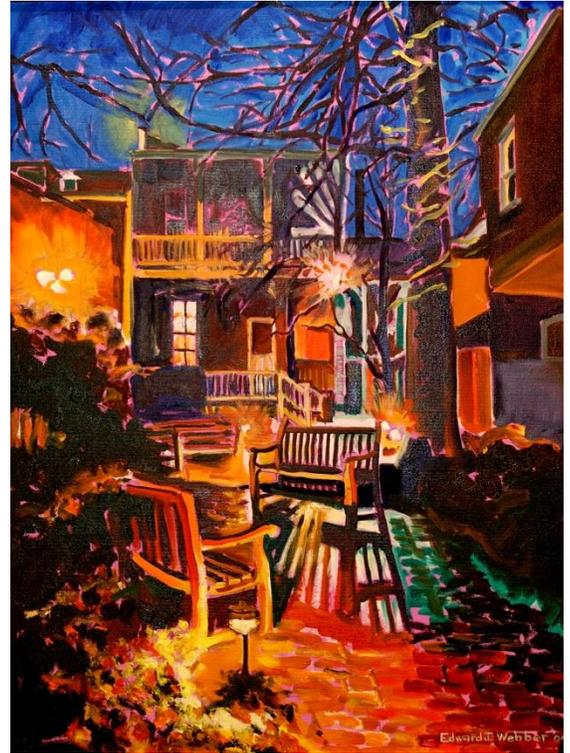


different perspectives on things. “You don’t meet a group of people like this just anywhere. There is a person from Japan, one from Mexico, California...we talk politics and laugh a lot. It is just a great group of people.”

## Tom

“If life is the music, then art is the dance...” Tom says that he is a visual learner, and that “artists respond to the music of life in a visual way. It is a natural thing.” Tom is 75 and a painter. He is truly a lifelong artist.

Both of his parents were artists. His father was an architect and his mother studied art in Paris in the 1920’s and taught at University of the Arts (originally Museum School of Art in Philadelphia). He recalls being little and going with his mother to her art classes. He worked for 40 years as an artist, both at a large company in three-dimensional advertising and for the State Museum of Pennsylvania as an illustrator and artist. He still does commission work, if asked,



and is an active member of an active artist group in Central Pennsylvania. Tom is re-married and has four children, two of whom are also artists. He is the only participant to get married in retirement. His first wife divorced him shortly before he retired.

After he retired from his company position, he worked at the State Museum for seven years. He became very tech-savvy there, and at age 75 uses Photoshop, iMovie and puts all of his images into digital files for easy retrieval. He is an avid photographer as well.

Tom retired at age 61. He took a buyout package from a company where he had worked for almost 30 years. “It was a good deal because the company was soon taken

over by [another company] and the benefits were reduced.” Since he retired, he and his wife have traveled extensively. They live in a 55+ community. His home is filled with portraits that he painted. He has so many, that he has a storage unit for his portraits.

Tom has donated over 50 portraits to his church. He also sells home portraits to bidders at auction. For the winner of portrait, he takes a photo of their home and then paints a picture of it.



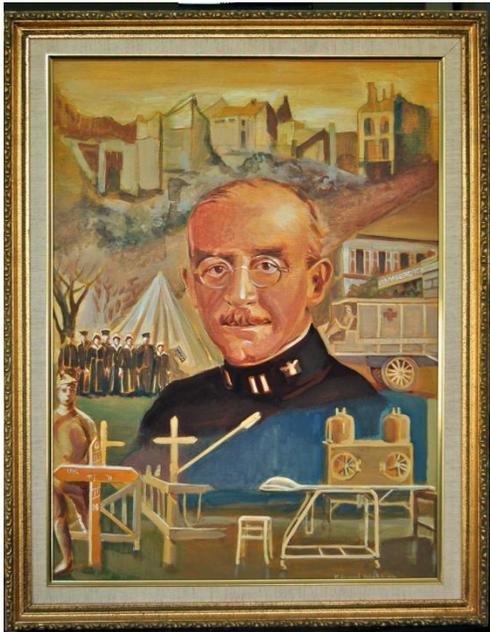
Many of the portraits that he has done for the church are personalized. There is usually some story behind each work. His own family pictures he painted of his father and grandfather also tell stories. The picture he painted of his father represents the fact that he was an architect, fought in World War II, and had four children. His

grandfather's picture shows that he was a doctor in World War I. All of Tom's other portraits tell stories of the trips or other meaningful events in his life.

As far as Tom's health, he had a heart attack two years ago. Tom indicated that they were not amused with him in the emergency room(ER) cracking jokes about the television show, *House*. Dr. House's character has been described as acerbic and as a curmudgeon. Tom said in the ER, "I can't be dying of a heart attack. It's just not done in my family. We don't die of heart attacks! We die from cancer."



Tom likes to paint on the street because it's social. People come up to him and ask



him about his painting. Tom likes painting collages because he can incorporate a great deal. Asked about what a self-portrait might include, he said "I would include my wife, my four children, my artwork, places in Pennsylvania and other personal items."

Much of his artwork is in storage. Tom rotates works of art from his storage unit to the art on his walls. He has donated over 50 works of art to his church. He is very generous with his art and his children all want select pieces of his art.

## Jesse

Jesse is 72, and a painter and artist. He has been married for 45 years and has one son. He has worked during most of his life. When he was 11, he went to work with his dad remodeling and building homes. By the time he was 17, he had already built seven homes. In school, he excelled in art winning the *Best Artist of the Year* award all four years he was in high school. Art was always his favorite subject.

He moved from Pennsylvania to Los Angeles, California and worked briefly in the movies, “mostly Westerns - doing stunt work. Falling off horses, fighting in bar scenes...small parts like that.” But that came to a halt when he was drafted into the Vietnam War. He considers himself lucky because he worked for a General writing speeches and drafting. Jesse didn’t see combat but many of his friends did. He was in the military for two years. When he left the service, he worked for both UCLA and McDonald Douglass Aircraft as Chief Coordinator of Publications for several years. After that, Jesse became an author and illustrator, illustrating over 10 books.

He moved to Colorado and became an avid photographer. He loved the landscape of Colorado and photographed wildlife and the landscape. At this time he became an art teacher and sold some of his artwork, some pieces for several thousand dollars.

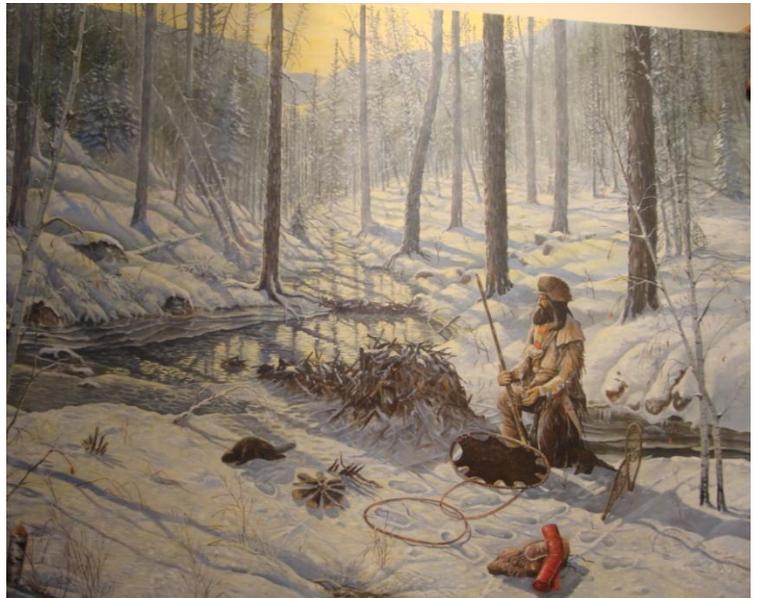


He loves art and for him art “is a never-ending learning process. I learn something new all the time! Learning is social and art is social.” He moved back to Pennsylvania and became a landscape architect. He did that for about 10 years before he

retired, although he claims, “artists never retire.” Currently, he volunteers teaching at different art centers and teaches older adults learn how to paint. With regard to his art, “when you love what you’re doing...I mean as far as doing it for the rest of your life...then that’s the most enjoyment you will get out of life because you are doing what you want to do.”

There are many benefits he derives from art. “Art has kept my mind engaged...it is unlimited. I don’t know of another word to describe how art makes me feel. It takes me to another world...but it’s my world. A world [I] created. There is no pressure; it’s freedom. Art relaxes people.”

“I especially like to paint period pieces, like from the 1800’s. I love to paint animals, too...[another wonderful thing about art] ...that it is this open



space just to hop in, and do anything[you want] in the art world.” He used to do woodworking, but a football injury to his shoulders precludes him from this activity. Jesse does see physical benefits to art class. “I see people in art class using the paint brushes...and when you create with your hands it [improves] dexterity.” Jesse thinks the psychological benefits to art are greater than any physical benefits there might be. “It opens your mind. Artists are looking forward. They are creating something new. Sometimes when you look back, it could put you in the doldrums and make you

depressed. But when you are creating ....there is always something different. The newness. You never know when it's going to happen...or where it will take you." In addition, he feels that "art is a great way to reduce stress." Art keeps you busy and the process keeps your mind engaged. "To me, art is the residual process of creative thinking; it's not really a product."

For recreation, since he retired, he loves traveling and "recently got back from a safari in Tanzania. It was 15 days. I took lots of pictures there. I love when you are retired, that you can go anytime of year, you don't have to wait for a vacation...you can just go." He loves the freedom that retirement brings. He jogs with his son and lifts free weights. He also hikes, but mostly to find spots to photograph in the woods. He can hike for several hours a day.

Jesse gives a lot of art away, especially to his son. "He can have anything he wants [of Jesse's artwork]. But I give it to cousins, my sisters, nieces, people who are close to me." He also donates art to charity and auctions, especially Ducks Unlimited to benefit waterfowl and wetland conservation.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presents the demographic data and biographical sketches of the 10 participants. Each person's life and engagement with artistic endeavors is complex, and their artwork rich in story. The next chapter will draw upon each of these interviews – the common themes that were found and that provide for a deeper understanding of retirement and the impact of engaging in art on aging.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS

Exploring the role of visual arts and its impact on successful aging and older adult learners in retirement is the purpose of this study. This chapter presents thematic findings from a holistic, integrated analysis of all of the narratives. Some items of note include that all participants were financially able to support themselves, and each discussed planning financially for years before they actually left employment for their life in retirement.

This research was premised on three guiding questions (a) what do older, retired adults perceive as the purpose of engaging in the visual arts? (b) How does evidence of the role of creativity in successful aging inform educators in supporting life-long learning for retirees? (c) What is the relationship between engagement in the visual arts, generativity and successful aging?

In the previous chapter, the narratives were presented as stand-alone pieces in order to offer background information on each individual. Several themes emerged from the interviews. Direct quotes from the participants in this chapter will be used to support emerging themes. The following table outlines seven themes with several subcategories that emerged from the data. These themes are frequently mentioned and repeated by several participants.

#### **Schema**

- 1) Early Influences in Art / Family's Influence
- 2) Uncertain Identities and the Production of Art
  - a) I Do Not See Myself as an Artist

- b) Art as a Product of Imagination vs. Pattern
- 3) Art and its Relationship to Health
  - a) Physical Health
  - b) Detriment to Health
  - c) Emotional Health
- 4) Art as a Solitary and Social Activity
  - a) Solitude and Escape
  - b) Being around Others
- 5) Art Allows for New Learning
  - a) Returning to the Classroom
  - b) Forging Mentoring Relationships
- 6) Degrees of Generativity vs. Being Generous
  - a) Teaching Art
  - b) Donating or Preserving Art
  - c) Taking Art Public
- 7) Art as Story

### **Early Influences in Art**

This section explains dimensions of the participant's early lives, and how family members influenced their participation and interest in art. Several participants were also exposed to art via cultural institutions such as galleries and museums. The piece that emerged among several of the participants is not only did they have an interest in art early on, but some of their families were involved in the production of art also.

Some of these individuals had an early connection to art, and when the parents were influential, it led the individual to have a lifelong connection to art. Many of the participants indicated that family positively influenced them at a young age by providing encouragement and buying them art supplies. In addition, interactions with all levels of relatives including grandparents, parents and children have had an effect on several participants' interest in art.

For example, Bella, who began woodworking at the age of 55 and describes herself as a woodcarver, discusses her experiences as a young child. She stated:

When I was a kid, my grandfather whittled. I just loved it. I would sit and watch him and I'd say...let me do that....and they wouldn't let a girl have a knife...they would let you have knitting needles, but not a knife. That's how I got started...there wasn't a club or anything, I was alone.

Bella admitted to this early interest in woodworking, and she returned to it at a later age. It was only after she raised her family and retired that she returned to woodworking. She was also influenced early on by her grandfather about the importance of art. Her mother also enrolled her in painting lessons formally with an instructor, but Bella enjoyed the woodworking more.

My mother tried to convince me to be a commercial artist. I didn't think I could stay with it. I did it for fun...I love to do the art work for fun...but don't think I could make a living out of it. I wanted to be a teacher...I've always wanted to be a teacher. So I prepared to teach instead. So, I did have a little experience with art. Then when I had my family, I was too busy....didn't have time for [art].

When I was in college...then when I got married and had my family. There just wasn't time for art.

Similarly, Tom has had a lifelong interest in painting and art. His mother was also an artist. "Back in her day, a woman could only choose from certain careers...and my mother was an artist. She studied in Paris." His father also dabbled in art. Tom remembers: "My mother would take me to her art classes and to the Art Museum of Philadelphia. She would take me a lot. I remember going there many times and having this feeling that it was someplace very special." His mother was very influential on him and encouraged him to paint, even when he was a young child. He has many memories of painting in his childhood since his mother was a teacher having access to brushes, paints and canvas.

As an older person, Tom is grateful now, for the support of his own children, two of whom are artists. He explains:

My kids' youthful outlook helps me. And acceptance of the change affects me as an older person artistically. But it comes through as an example from their own creative reaction and how they can look at my art and critique my work. I am lucky to I have an understanding family.

Another participant, age 72, Rachel is a former Dean and Provost of a major university. She has been painting and sculpting for 12 years now. She was also greatly influenced by her parents. When she was in grade school, her mother sent her to a special class for art lessons. She stated: "I remember making a mermaid and being so proud of it!" Her mother was also an artist, and her step father studied under Rodin, a famous French sculptor in Philadelphia.

“My mother had talent. She was a ceramist, and taught ceramics into her 80s. [Art] came to her naturally. My step-father founded [a prominent art school in Pennsylvania].” Rachel felt that her interest in art manifests itself because of being encouraged by her mother and step-father. “I was exposed to a lot of art through him and I did my first sculpture with him.”

Rachel also stated:

My mother sent me to painting lessons...I took classes from an old lady, probably as old as I am now, and she and I produced some pretty nice oil paintings. So I did have some exposure to it.

Despite this early influence, Rachel did not return to art until she was retired. In addition, two other participants, Connie and Henry both indicated that some of their first memories of art were visiting art museums, which had a significant impact on them.

Connie, for example, stated, “I have two big memories...when I was little [age five or six] my mother took me to the art museum...the Art Museum in Philly.” This had an impact on her because she loved the art and wanted to make beautiful, aesthetically pleasing items.

Henry visited museums both as a child and as an adult.

I always loved art, though. Well, I intentionally took graduate courses in Chicago. And I would go out early and spend an entire day at the Art Institute in Chicago. That was every year for 25 years; that's why I like Chicago. I grabbed the ‘L’ train which would take me out to the University of Illinois Medical Center. This was during the day...so I would spend the whole day going to the Art Institute. It was

massive...you could be in it all day. They have one section an Impressionist section; and a Renaissance section; and I walked into a room about half this size of Rubens had done miniatures and there are Rubens. And it was like art heaven!

Most of the participants had early experiences involving the actual engagement with art through various mediums, while for others it was being exposed to art through museums and galleries. Despite this early influence, most left art for their careers for many years before they returned to engage in art. Upon leaving work, two of the participants were unsure how to describe themselves. And several participants did not see themselves as artists and were uncertain of their identities as an artist.

### **Uncertain Identities and the Production of Art**

The data suggests that because people of this older adult generation, as one participant put it, saw artists as, “live[ing] a bohemian lifestyle,” they did not associate themselves with being an artist. The term *bohemian* refers to "a socially unconventional person, especially one who is involved in the arts" (Bohemian, n.d). In the past, artists have been associated with being eclectic and some, even non-conformists. None of the participants would describe themselves as Bohemians. Reality is quite the opposite. Findings show each participant contributed to society. They appear to follow conventions; such as saving for and being able to retire; they still drive, do laundry, cook, pay taxes, use the internet, shop, and maintain themselves. They did not appear to be ‘unconventional or non-conformists’ in any way. From conversations that unfolded, several of the participants did not consider themselves artists.

When participants were asked, “how long have you been an artist?” a few asked...what does that mean? In response to their question, a dictionary definition of a

clarified an artist: “A person who produces paintings or drawings as a profession or hobby; or a person who practices any of the various creative arts, such as a sculptor, novelist, poet, or filmmaker.”(Artist, n.d.) Defined simply...an artist is someone who creates art.

The response from several participants was that they had been engaging in art, but did not feel like an artist. This is not how they saw themselves. Instead they saw themselves as retirees concerned with pensions and social responsibility. All were somewhat family oriented.

### **I Do Not See Myself as an Artist**

Several of the participants who create numerous painting and pieces of art did not consider themselves to be artists. There was also a relationship as to how the art was produced and the perception of being an artist. Some participants felt that if they merely copied a pattern and no creativity was involved, that they could not be considered artists. However, some participants felt they were more creative than others in their art classes.

For example, Jennifer, who has been painting for 22 years, sums it up by saying: “I don’t call myself that [an artist]. I don’t know what to call myself.” Jennifer has won awards for her paintings, and is very prolific.

Another participant, Rachel, who sculpts and paints, had an addition built on to her home which is now an art studio. Her studio is filled with sculpture and paintings, and she was the most formally educated of the participants, having a PhD, MBA, and then earned a certificate in Fine Arts at age 60. She states that at age 72, “I still have trouble calling myself an artist, I still feel like a student.”

Reba, who has made numerous quilts and plastic Bible covers, agrees and says, “I do not consider myself an artist. I just enjoy doing it!” Reba would never consider doing anything without a pattern.

Another participant, Connie, who knits and produces counted cross-stitch, has a different way of looking at herself. She said, “I’m not an artist. I am a creator. I feel like I create.”

The only person who felt like an artist was Henry. But, he felt like it took him a long time to identify himself as an artist ...until he was “ age 67...that’s when I felt like I became an ‘artist’...that’s when I thought to myself: I’m not doing too badly in comparison to how they (others in the class) are doing.”

### **Art as a Product of Imagination vs. Pattern**

Art as a product of imagination is creating something original from your mind’s eye while art as a pattern refers to replicating or copying a pattern. If the participant felt like they were using their imagination, they felt much more creative and artistic. As for replicating a pattern, a person does not “gain much from copying an entire composition, slavishly mimicking every blurred mark and accidental smudge” (Gheno, 2004). For many in the art world, copying is not considered creative. For these participants, there was a distinction between being creative by using their imagination versus using a pattern. The findings show that participants who used a pattern felt much less creative.

The participants who felt less creative were Reba and Connie. As Reba notes, “I enjoy doing it, but I always use a pattern. I’m not creative .With using a pattern, you are just copying something.” The majority of Reba’s creations were not just from patterns,

but also pictures from magazines and books. If she saw something she liked, she would copy it as best she could. “There’s no creativity to it,” she said.

Connie also used patterns in counted cross-stitch. While the patterns left little to creativity – Connie’s creations were personalized. “I do cross-stitch for anniversary gifts and weddings and sometimes baby gifts; I always put [embroider] the date on it. That’s what’s different, is the date and the names of the people I’m giving it to; but basically it’s the same pattern.”

The participants who used their imagination felt much more creative. The participants were Rachel, Brad, Henry, Bella, Lauren and Jennifer. One example that Rachel gave was her sculpture. She does not use patterns, or even a model. She said, “I just got back to my sculpture...that head there...I didn’t have a model; I did it from my imagination.” The head that was sculpted was very detailed and looked like a real person. Rachel did it free hand with nothing but her thoughts and creativity.

Similarly, Brad does not need patterns. “I don’t sew from patterns...I just let it flow.” The clothes that he makes are free flowing, integrating many different textured fabrics. “I am definitely creative and artistic,” he said.

In addition, Henry states, “I take liberties with what I paint. I feel like I can paint out of thin air sometimes.”

Another participant who felt very creative was Bella. Bella has been woodcarving from age 55 to her current age of 89, and she has made hundreds, maybe even thousands of unique pieces over the years. “With woodcarving, I make Whimsical Houses. Every one of them is different. You can’t use a pattern, they are unique.”

Another example from Bella is that she made her daughter a broach. It was a Santa Claus

broach, and she sent it to her daughter who was studying in Switzerland at the time. Her daughter was shopping in a gift shop when she was approached by the owner. The owner asked her where she had gotten the broach; the daughter said that her mother had made it. The owner contacted Bella to commission broaches like that. Bella made 15 different broaches that were sold in Switzerland.

Another participant who does not follow patterns is Lauren. She lives in a retirement community and is responsible for the display cases in the hallways. Lauren feels creative in making displays look aesthetically pleasing. “I use what people give me and I arrange it just so to make it look attractive. I don’t use everything I get...that would be overwhelming and not look good. You have to know what you are doing to make things look beautiful!” Lauren creates unique displays, not using any patterns. She also comes up with the ideas for the displays. There are several displays that are seasonal, so while those displays can be somewhat predictable, they are always different from year to year as Lauren thinks of new ways to display the items in the cases.

Another creative participant is Tom. Tom thinks ideas out first, and sketches items before he paints. He had elaborate notebooks and travel journals with pictures he drew free hand. It was as if it was an architect’s notebook. Tom has a gift to draw and sketch free-hand from memory with no patterns. Jennifer sums it up: “I have given some prints away. But that’s just a copy; not like you are giving the original away. The original is meaningful, not the copy.” It is true in art that original pieces of artwork can sell for hundreds of thousands of dollars, while a print or replica of the art can be purchased for very little money.

The fact that several of these participants felt less creative is significant because when individuals do not label themselves as such, they can be less focused and insecure about their work. An analogy here is cooking...some people need a picture with a recipe in order to cook. Some add their own ingredients and do not use measurements; but are they not all cooking and can be called a 'cook' even if only for the evening? A similar analogy can be used for musicians. If a person knows the 88 keys on a piano, can they change the tempo? Remix the music...are they not musicians if they do not create *new* tunes and merely just play a song written by someone else?

### **Art Has an Impact on Health**

The findings reveal that as participants engaged in art, that it had an impact on both physical and mental health. The findings reveal that creating art has had an impact on several participants' health in some way. As would likely be expected with participants of this age cohort, many of the participants have or have faced serious health concerns. Both Tom and Henry previously suffered heart attacks. Reba and Bella each have rheumatoid arthritis. Jesse sustained shoulder injuries when he played football in his younger years and feels uncomfortable doing sculpture. Rachel had a hip replaced, and Brad's hip needs to be replaced. Although he used crutches and suffered painfully for eight months, Brad feels at least for now, he has averted the need for a replacement. Jennifer's hearing was improved by a cochlear implant. Lauren and Connie so far, have no health issues. To some degree, artwork has aided in their health issues, but not in all instances. Several participants were productive, even proactive in their art-making. Findings from some of the participants indicate that art allowed them to take their mind off of ailments, some of which are age-related.

## Physical Health

Several participants reported that creating art helped the flexibility and dexterity in their hands physically. Their ability to grip and manipulate a paint brush, fabric, knitting needles, and / or wood may have led them to have more dexterity and improve the function of their hands. Hands play “a role in the development of human intelligence, evolution and the creative process” (Gheno, 2004, p. 27). The loss of the use of one’s hands can be debilitating. Aging can have a degenerative effect on hand function, including declines in hand and finger strength. Bella, 89, is one of several participants who is worried that she will lose the use of her hands if she does not keep them active through her artwork. Bella states:

My hands feel better when I knit...and if I have to sit down...and I feel up tight...my whole body just feels better. I think my artwork keeps me healthy, especially the flexibility in my hands. [Bella continues] a lot of people my age can’t use their *hands at all*. They can’t feed themselves...I push people in their wheelchairs to Bible study. We have hymnals, and I turn the pages for them. A lot of them are younger than me...I have rheumatoid arthritis. And once in a while I’ll have a flare up, and then I can’t use my hands. The doctor has given me medicine, and I take it and then pretty soon I’m back to [woodcarving]. But if I thought...well my hands are so sore...but I take the medicine and try to get right back to using [my hands]... I think I would lose that [if I stopped].

Reba is also worried about the same thing. She states, “I have rheumatoid arthritis. It [knitting] has kept my fingers nimble.” She does ceramics, too, to keep her

hands engaged. She noted that if she was watching television and not keeping her hands very active, “sometimes my hands would fall asleep.”

Connie keeps her hands engaged through knitting and cross-stitch. She notes “when I get a massage...the girl will say, ‘you’re so flexible in your hands’...well that’s the reason [engaging in knitting & cross-stitch].” Connie feels that her hands are in good shape and she has several knitting projects lined-up to keep her fingers active.

Ruth, another participant, mentioned that her

Step-father wrote an article called your “Happiness is in your hands.” I think when you’re using your hands... involved in the process...whether it is baking a cake, putting a plant into the ground...making a painting or knitting a sweater.

Your hands are engaged and you feel better.

For Ruth, engaging in art has helped her both physically and emotionally. “My hands are very much my medium.”

Another benefit from engaging in art is that many of the participants stated that it relaxed them and they felt less stress and that art promoted relaxation.

Jesse, who volunteers teaching arts says he can see that painting can be very relaxing for his students. He states, “art is a great way to reduce stress. You create in your hands the dexterity. You hold a brush much more lightly. It relaxes people.”

Connie states: “I’m just relaxed when I’m doing knitting and doing counted-cross-stitch.

I am very much to myself and relaxed and happy.”

Tom: “I would feel somewhat high after I finish a painting. And when I was younger, that would often result in a romantic moment with the wife. You still have that feeling

with your art. Strangely sensual. Any kind of subject. The experience is very satisfactory.”

Reba also felt satisfied. She stated “for personal benefits, I would say my art relaxes me. I am just very relaxed”

Bella also said, “When I was working...I had back problems; on a regular basis I would go to a chiropractor. I had regular appointments.” After she retired, she has never gone back to the chiropractor. In woodworking, she found “no pressure...I am doing something I love [woodcarving].

For several of the participants, engaging in visual art relaxed them and led to stress reduction. The findings from engaging in art were that there were more positive impacts on health, than drawbacks. Even though many of these participants had suffered ailments, all participants maintained the ability to walk, drive and use all of their faculties. The findings point to positive impacts on aging, but a few participants indicated that engaging in art could also be a detriment.

### **Detriment to Health**

A few participants stated that sometimes, art was not conducive to their aging bodies. Some participants indicated that art was also a detriment to health. Tom states: “Depending on how you’re working, it might increase pain and joint aches, because you tend to forget you’re in an awkward position, like working on a computer too long.”

Detailed artwork can be difficult on the eyes, as well. Reba notes “I’ve done counted cross-stitch, but I can’t do it anymore. It’s very hard on the eyes.” Connie also experienced the same problem: “several years back I tried to teach counted cross-stitch [in the retirement community] but the ladies’ vision wasn’t good enough. It didn’t go

over big.” In addition, Rachel stated that there is “one negative with regard to my health. I had a hip replacement a couple of years ago which precluded me from doing sculpture. It’s heavy work...clay is heavy moving around 25 to 50 pound bags of clay [is difficult]. So, I stopped doing sculpture and I miss it.”

While a few disadvantages were mentioned to physical health, no downsides were mentioned to one’s emotional health. Most participants felt that art improved their emotional well-being.

### **Emotional Health**

Art impacted several participants’ emotional health in positive ways. Art helped to improve their mood and increase their self-esteem and made them feel better about themselves.

Tom states, “I think art and creativity has more of an effect on your mental health. And how you feel, because if you’re painting is successful...you feel better about yourself. It helps your self-image. I think there is more of an impact on your emotional well-being.”

Art is uplifting. “It is joyful. I love doing it” says Lauren. “I live for the compliments I receive for the displays and sketches I do.” Several participants have received awards and placed in statewide competitions. Their art is very good. As Rachel said, “who doesn’t like to get awards? It just makes you feel good.”

Jennifer: “winning an award made me feel so happy. I’m glad for the recognition!”

Engaging in visual art impacted several of the participants and made them have feelings of greater self-worth and more confidence in themselves. Jennifer stated:

My art has given me tremendous benefits, because it....I have always been feeling a little bit less than....I guess my hearing has done it to me. I have been deaf most of my life and I haven't participated in a lot of things. I don't go to the movies; I don't go anywhere, because I can't hear. But now that I have this [cochlear] implant, I am blossoming somewhat on a small scale. But you asked me how does art affect my....it's given me confidence, it's given me....well, it's makes me feel good. Most of the people here know me as the visiting artist I guess and it's nice. It's wonderful for the ego, because my ego has been around my ankles for a long time.

Jesse expresses similar sentiments:

Art opens up your mind. To more an extent of feelings; I'm sure there are other things that do that. If you're doing what you love the best [for me, it's art]...I mean as far as doing the rest of your life. That's the most enjoyment you get out of life because you're doing what you want to do. It's tough when you're in a job and you want to do something else, but it's not always easy. It [a job one doesn't enjoy] makes people deteriorate faster.

In addition, Henry stated: My artwork was a lift, because I've been so depressed and I was always thinking wow, now what [is] my fate going to be given my past history? I was down in the dumps depressed and then I started this [painting] and...I start to do pretty well, and I still paint.

Brad also felt that art made him feel better on many levels:

I think art has to [improve my mood and emotions], because if I am happy...if I am feeling the opposite of stress and tension...and I am doing something I enjoy

doing...since we are talking about art; some doctors say...that your body responds to your emotional and mental state. And it will cause [you to be happier] ...and healthier.

Being alone was also cited as a detriment to health by some participants, but most participants enjoyed the solitary activity that art brings. In addition, several participants stated, "I am a people person." So they enjoyed solitude and being with people. For some of the participants, the process of making art (staying in the same position for a long time) was the cause of the detriment. From the data, the positive benefits far outweigh the detriments. Benefits were derived from dexterity in their hands and having feelings of pleasure from the artwork they produced as well as the social aspects that the classes provided them.

### **Art as a Solitary and Social Activity**

A dichotomy was found between being alone and being with others when involved in art. As Jesse, who volunteers as an art teacher put it, "you have to spend hours and hours developing your craft" to be good at it. Several of the participants discussed relishing their alone time. However, at the same time they enjoyed art classes, where camaraderie, critique and friendships arose with few complaints. The only downside mentioned by four of the participants was the ongoing cost of the courses.

### **Solitude and Escape**

Art allows for participants to enjoy solitude and escape. Outside of class, some participants engaged in their artwork alone, and oftentimes, for several hours at a stretch. Many lost track of time and enjoyed being one with their art. Several spent hours being

solitary with their art. They need ‘alone time’ to create; but they also feel a need to share. Engaging in art can be time consuming and provides an ‘escape’ for some participants. For example, Lauren said, “art provides me with an escape.” This alone time seemed to be particularly important for her, because her husband had Alzheimer’s and had become institutionalized. Art provided her with a much needed escape from the feelings of loneliness and the loss of her spouse’s health. Her art became a coping mechanism.

Lauren stated:

When I first put him over there [Alzheimer’s unit], they told me not to visit for the first few weeks. I painted a lot then. But then, when I started visiting, I would go over and see him in the morning and he was not good at all. I would come back and just paint all afternoon and into the evening.

For Connie, who enjoyed knitting and cross-stitch, she stated, “I love to spend time alone and can be with it for hours...well it gives me ‘me time’. Because I enjoy curling up in this chair knitting or with cross-stitch or a project. I enjoy the time for me. And not being selfish me, but it’s things that I enjoy doing.” Time would pass quickly for Connie when she knits.

Another example comes from Rachel, who paints. She had a similar experience. “When I paint, I stand for 3 hours and 3 hours go by in a flash!” Time passed so quickly for her when she paints. Jesse is another case in point. When Jesse hikes to take pictures, it often takes him four or five hours, just to get a perfect nature scene. “I can spend hours alone on a hike. I enjoy looking for the right spot and the beauty of it.”

For at least three of the participants, engaging in art was merely something to do. Instead of art, the activity could have been any activity for two of the participants in

particular. Both Connie and Reba picked up knitting and craft work “as something to do.” Reba states: “I like to keep myself busy; the main thing [in retirement] is keep busy.”

Connie discusses further, “I just picked up the counted cross-stitch. I picked it up and enjoyed it. It was just for down time when I was working.” She taught herself at the age of 30 to do cross-stitch. However, Lauren indicated she enjoyed doing activities to create separate time from her husband to “just to get away.”

### **Being Around Others**

Several of the participants enrolled and stayed active in art classes. The art classes allowed participants the opportunity to be around others who were also working on art. Many of the classes were found through contacting an art center that usually puts out a flyer to advertise the courses. Several of the participants enjoyed the classes and took more than one class. For example, Jesse likes being around other people and describes himself as a people person:

But, in retirement, you are around less people. I like people. The [painting] classes that I have, they're kinda' like a social event. Everybody is talking, laughing watching everyone else do their type of art. And they're learning all the time. But, it's a social event for us. I kinda' keep it that way. I want to keep it fun.

Henry also enjoyed the jovialness and playfulness of art classes. He stated:

I enjoy the camaraderie from the other artists. They are all constructive critics! You don't meet the group of people like that you don't get constructive criticism and politics and things like that; we laugh! It is just a great group of people. Our

teacher...she [has] the class out to her place and she's got flowers everywhere and we will sit on chairs and we will paint the barn and paint flowers and will set up still life and paint old vases and we will paint and we have a picnic! It is fantastic!

Similarly, Bella also enjoyed being around others. She stated:

I've been going to a carving camp...It is so much fun to be with all these people! And we've met a woman who has a carving shop...it a cabin...and she invited us down to spend a whole day to spend wood carving...just 4 of us. It has brought me lots of good times. I am taking lessons...I'm still learning. I went up the first year... we went for 2 days; then last year 3 days...now we are going up and staying 4 days! I learn so much!

Some of the participants who enjoyed the camaraderie of the classes were the same ones who also enjoyed the alone time. Whether alone or in a class, being engaged in art is a time consuming process that all of the participants enjoy. Art provided both quality alone time and quality social time for many of the participants interviewed.

### **Art Creates a Space for New Learning**

When engaging in art, some participants enrolled in classes, and sought new learning opportunities. When these older learners sought out art class, the classroom was a very informal setting. The students in the class were also of the same age cohort, although several participants reported being mentored by the teacher. The teachers were younger, but more experienced as artists.

## Returning to the Classroom

Several participants returned to the classroom well into their 60s and 70s to continue learning for the purposes of learning art and staying engaged. Many of the classes involved art and creativity; others involved skill building activities. Henry is a great example. After medical school and retirement, he enrolled in art classes. He was 57 when he formally began taking classes. At his first class, he remembered feeling awkward, like back in kindergarten. He stated:

And then [the teacher asked me] do you know what a color wheel is? ...

and I said 'no' ...so then she instructed me on the color wheel, and I took out my paints and I was told what paints to buy before I started her class, and she had me label them, and I did that, and then a little while later she came over to me and said she put a green apple down in front of me and said 'try painting this.' ... as I graduated from apples to oranges and then the next class she did the darndest thing; she brought a pepper over to me and she sliced it tangentially crosswise, and I never knew how complicated the insides of a red pepper could be all the seeds and everything else! And she said, 'now, paint this!'

Henry felt that he was using parts of his brain that he had not used before.

Another participant similarly returned for an art class. At the age of 60, Rachel was accepted into the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA) in Philadelphia. She stated:

I commuted for 4 years going half time to school. Two of those years I was still working... I got a certificate. I didn't complete the studio part.

I took just the academic part... It's a never ending process of learning and exploring how to do it right...how to, how to do it better. How to capture something I felt couldn't capture previously.

Three additional students, Lauren, Bella and Jennifer, enrolled in creativity classes from jewelry making, woodworking and floral crafting. At 55, Lauren attended a silver-smithing class; which is making jewelry out of silver. She states:

Rings and earrings and broaches...it is a very tedious process. They are made from flat sheet and wire. This is a 3-dimensional one (broach). That's the one thing I wanted to do when I retired. [Take a jewelry making class]. We were given a project...something that depicts a flag. This is my flag (a silver piece of jewelry she made that had a red, white and blue stone...just a creative and amazing piece). Stars and stripes. And this was a project, too. (Referring to her ring)...very unique piece...it was dropped cast...melt the silver and put it into a mold.

Right after Bella retired, she found a wood-carving class. "So I drove to Somerset County from Johnstown, about 30 to 45 minutes each way. So I took six classes; one a week for six weeks. That just grabbed me!" At the age of 55, she began her first woodcarving classes.

Jennifer was interested in painting flowers. I wanted to buy four florals for that wall and I couldn't find them, not even one that I wanted. So I said I will just paint them myself, so that's when I started to take art seriously, those were some of the ones on my wall. At age 63, Jennifer enrolled in painting class for the first time!

There was a sense from some participants that creating art allowed them to experience newness and starting over. Engaging in art allowed some participants something refreshing and a sense of renewal.

Both Rachel and Tom discussed renewing a painting that they were disappointed in initially. As Tom points out, “if you mess up on a painting, you can paint over it, depending on the medium. With oil paint, I can roll it. I can roll it with an undercoat and start a new painting; it’s easy to start over.” Rachel agrees at the ease with which one can start over. Rachel said, “if I mess up on a painting, I can’t throw it away. It’s like throwing part of yourself away! I can’t do that, so I fix it up and make it new again!”

With continued learning, Jesse could relate wholeheartedly. He said:

Art is like a never ending learning process. Your whole life. You learn more and more and more. As far as art, it’s endless. There’s just art, art, art and everything is different. You have this open space just to hop in and do anything in the art world.

Sometimes, after feeling down, Brad would pick up his sewing. “For me, art is renewal; I get recharged...motivated; get a fresh look at things.” He enjoys the beginning process of every project. For Jesse, starting a new project or painting brought on similar feelings. He stated,

It is like hitting the reset button on your mind; ...goodness, joy... look at things optimistically; it’s not a dead end; it’s a clean slate looking at things with fresh eyes. With art, it’s newness. You never know when it’s going to happen.

Another participant agreed with the renewal process. Lauren likes the changes that the seasons bring that she depicts in her displays for the retirement center. She tries

to keep things fresh and new. “I keep the displays constantly changing to keep it fresh and updated...it’s easy with seasonal displays.”

Bella also associated with newness and continual learning that art infused in her life. “With regard to classes, I enjoy them. And I do learn something new all the time! I was down in Florida...I visited a wood carver and he taught me lots of new things!”

All participants found an importance to continued learning and enjoyed returning to the classroom. They indicated that continued learning gave them a “new outlook” and they could look at the world with “fresh eyes”. This aspect of learning was important to them.

### **Forging Mentoring Relationships**

Art classes provided most of the participants access to an art teacher; and the relationship that developed with that teacher was important in their continuation in art. When a relationship exists in which one person aids in the development and enhancement of skills of another, there is usually a mentor / protégé relationship. A mentor can aid in personal growth. The findings show that all of the teachers mentioned by these participants were younger than them. Usually these older adults were in the role of mentor; not protégé. The teacher -student relationship has been a mentoring one with positive outcomes for the participants. Participants stated that their teacher played an important role in their continuing to pursue art as a hobby.

Both Lauren and Henry, as examples, indicated that their primary reason for staying with art so long was because of the relationship they developed with their teachers. Henry says of his teacher, she is

My co-artist [and] also my teacher. She gives me tips. She encourages me. She has been my mentor ever since day one! And also the people in my class are very helpful they are quite good and they've been painting for many years.

Henry's teacher has won numerous awards and has been named 'Artist of the Year' in her community. She is a renowned artist, and has a close relationship with Henry. Lauren also indicates that she and her teacher have a tight-knit relationship. "I have made friends as a result [of the classes]. They are all painting; they are all involved in some respect. And of course, my dear teacher, she and I are very good friends. She has been teaching me for 19 years!" Typically, the protégé receives expertise and encouragement from an expert, and both teachers are certainly experts when it comes to teaching art.

Likewise, a mentoring relationship developed between Rachel and her teachers. She had numerous teachers over the years. She stated, "The classes are good for me. I always learn something new. I am a perennial student; I like to learn; every teacher has something new to give you...especially the younger ones..."

Since some of the participants even after many years, still do not see themselves as artists, they are returning to the same teacher to help guide them and improve their art.

### **Degrees of Generativity**

Generativity has several meanings. Generativity has aspects of self-expansion, expression and development. The opposite of generativity is stagnation which is also evident in the findings. Another aspect of generativity is about passing on knowledge and legacy to the younger generation. There are many phases and domains of generativity

including biological, parental, technical and cultural (Kotre, 1984). The participants involved seemed to be passing on the technical form, which refers to the teaching of skills, because the participants were engaged in teaching, donating, and sharing their art. Yet teaching art alone is not necessarily generative. Donating or preserving art as well as taking art public, i.e. sharing it with society may also be aspects of generativity.

### **Teaching Art**

Several of the participants volunteer their time teaching others. Two of the participants indicated that teaching brought them so much joy and happiness.

Jesse, for example, volunteers teaching painting at two senior centers. He stated: “Older people are so excited about learning! Each step they take is better and better and better. [I love] just being with the students; Love to see their reactions when they finally get it and finally see [the end result].”

Another participant who volunteers his time teaching is Tom. Tom taught a group of high school winners how to paint a cow for the cow parade in the Capitol city.

My job was to organize this group of young people to come up with a theme and it was fun....they were profound; and they wanted to save the world. And I said, no...no...no... it fun project...this is a cow parade...make it fun and satirical and relax! We came up with a theme: *One Herd* and nations of the world. And then we painted animals from all over the world on to the cow...and paint it from all over the world. I had them put some text on copy because I wanted them to learn how artist transfer copy to a finished piece...and in this case, a piece that wasn't flat. So they had to learn cut stencil and frisk it and it was going to be *One Herd*

in seven languages. So I assigned each one a language and they looked up the translation on the internet.

Similarly, Rachel stated, “I have an open studio at my house on Mondays.

Usually five people come.” They discuss techniques and instruct and assist each other.

Bella, on the other hand, shied away from teaching classes for health reasons.

She has been asked to teach woodworking on several occasions, but “at 89, I don’t feel comfortable teaching because you get cut a lot in the beginning, and I’m on Coumadin (a blood thinner that prevents clotting) and it can be dangerous. You bleed like crazy. I don’t want that responsibility.”

### **Donating or Preserving Art**

Many of the participants indicated that they gave their art away, mostly to family and friends. For example, Jennifer donated several pieces of art, but only when asked.

Connie is more generous. She stated:

I give a lot of my knitting away. I don’t give as much counted-cross-stitch away as my knitting, but the counted cross-stitch, I do give away as birthday gifts, or wedding gifts or whatever that comes up. Baby gifts... I give a lot of it away.

The village reaps my knitting for their village fair in the fall. I’m making a sweater right now for them.

Bella stated, “I donated some pins to the church and they sold them, but it’s more valuable for me to give it to my daughter or grand-daughter and now great grand-daughter.”

Henry, too, gives his art away to the American Heart Association for their auction. It helps raise money for a cause that is meaningful to him. Both he and Jesse have only one son and indicated the same thing. Their sons can have all of their art...any piece they want. Henry indicated, "When I left a five bedroom home to a two-bedroom apartment...my son has a lot of my art already." Jesse also stated, "my son can do whatever he wants...it's his."

One of the most prolific donors in the group was Tom, who has given away many pieces throughout the years. He stated, "I have donated more than 50 works of art to my church." Another participant, Jesse, felt similar altruistic feelings. Jesse stated, "I always think about giving back. I've always kinda given it away. Somebody I'm close to. [I give to] Ducks Unlimited. A lot of it at auction. Selling art to benefit waterfowl." He stated further,

All the photography to get in a contest; you're giving money just to enter a contest. Benefits the magazine. Audubon buys land and they use the money for saving land and preserve things

On the other hand, some felt the need to preserve their work. Reba said, "I just enjoy keeping what I have...I have a lot of it; It brings back lots of memories." Along the same lines, Rachel states, "I don't do a lot of that. [Give art away]. I have a great deal in storage...I have so much art that, it gets stashed away." Henry: I have a lot of [artwork] just laying around." Two participants even felt the need to obtain separate facilities to preserve their art. Jennifer, for example said, "I have too much art! I have a storage unit and keep a lot of it across the street."

## **Taking Art Public**

Many of the participants expressed the need to have their art be taken public after creating it. “Art seeks an audience,” says Tom.

One of the reasons for displaying art is so that society can share in the vastness of it. Several of the participants wanted others to see and enjoy their creations.

Connie, who paints, stated:

I made a picture of Santa Claus sitting in his seat with four dogs, relaxing. I wanted to share that so bad! And they made a spot for me in the Village (where she lives) so I could show it. It was so nice. I do...I enjoy just showing them [pieces of art] to everyone! They're beautiful, they're creative and I like other people to share it!

Lauren, who sets out art for the public to see on a regular basis, said, “When I assemble the displays for the community, it lets the community to know in a visual way what is going on.”

Three other participants similarly related the need for the publication of their art to an audience, Rachel said, “Someone needs to have a show for me...right now.”

Jennifer stated, “I like to see my art on display and leave it there for the community to enjoy.” Along the same path, Brad said,

I did festivals from 1979 when I came here until '91. These were freebie festivals. In fact, I was on welfare. Which is another reason my kids were not happy with me. I was obsessed with doing these festivals! And I would spend the welfare money to help do the festivals. But I met a lot of artists, sculptors,

designers and they were so successful and they were geared for kids and everybody wanted to participate. I wanted everyone to enjoy the art.

### **Art as Story**

Art as story is the individual story of the artist /owner's perspective of what the art represents to him or her. When I met the participants in their homes, many offered me something to drink and began to talk about the art that hung on their walls. I took pictures of some of the artwork and asked some questions relevant to the art I was seeing. This portion of the interview was not taped. For my field notes, after the taped interview, I left and wrote down the conversations (the same day) from memory. What I found was that each participant had favorite pieces of art that told a story; very elaborate stories emerged behind each piece. The artwork was extremely personal to each individual. These stories are from my field notes and they represent the communication of artist's inner space of creation. What the artist saw was their inner world being put on canvas. And what I was seeing was the painting in the physical world described by the artists.

An example of art as story is from Henry. He created an impressionistic painting of a locomotive train moving through thick, heavy fog. The light from the train was in the center, shining a way for it to come through. Henry said that this represented his retirement. He was on a journey and it was unclear where he was going, just as the train had an unclear destination. He had several other paintings that represented modes of transportation: boats, cars, trucks and trains (Henry, field notes, May 16, 2012). But this particular train painting was one of his favorites because what it represented to him. "My art is me," he said.

Another example is the wall mural Lauren painted at her daughter's house. This is very much her favorite piece of art because it represents the story of where they live and their personal history. Gettysburg is where they went to college, and it is depicted in the mural, as is their own home. Their dog and landscaping are all pictured. It represents such personal feelings of the happy times they have spent in their home (Lauren, field notes, March 7, 2012).

Storytelling in their art was also a similar theme for other participants. For Jennifer, the story is in the flowers that she paints. Jennifer has numerous paintings of different varieties of flowers: daisies, lilies, roses, magnolias, hydrangeas, violets and many others. She said she loved flowers and they represented how she felt about herself. The flowers she painted are in full bloom, blossoming. They give her a lift, and she likes to paint different varieties. When I went to her house, she had many fresh cut flowers in vases. They give her an emotional boost, but the blooms are short lived. This is why she paints them, to keep them fresh in her mind's eye, and to keep them in full bloom on her walls (Jennifer, field notes, April 6, 2012). "The flowers are a part of me. They are how I feel when I look at them...bright and cheery!"

Art as story was also present for Connie. Many of her creations held deep meaning for her. Connie had numerous angels that she cross-stitched adorning her walls. These angels keep watch over her. She feels like they tell the story of her Christian beliefs and upbringing, and they bring her comfort and peace; especially after her husband passed away. "They are my spirituality. I just love to look at them and feel comforted by them." She had 16 angels throughout her home, there were even two angels in her bathroom and two in her kitchen (Connie, field notes, April 4, 2012).

Another participant who felt that art was a part of her and told a story was Reba. One of Reba's favorite pieces is a picture of her home. She has a large, framed aerial photograph of the home where she and her husband lived. This picture tells part of the story of where she lived for almost 50 years. "You can see the garden I planted and the shingles on the windows my husband painted." The picture hangs in her small living room in her condo at the retirement community. Reba commissioned this picture when she had to put the home up for sale. "That was a sad day." She wanted to always have a picture of the home where she lived; it brings back memories for her. That home was part of who she is (Reba, field notes, April 20, 2012).

Another participant who related a deep connection to his art was Jesse. He feels very connected to nature and the outdoors. He moved back to Pennsylvania because he loves winter. One of Jesse's favorite pieces tells the story of a trapper. The trapper is cold, but has a fire going with all the skins and supplies he needs. It is a winterscape, and the trapper has been successful and that pleases Jesse (Jesse, field notes, May 22, 2012).

Brad, Ted, Bella, and Rachel also had personalized pieces of artwork that held special meaning for them. Several of the participants plan on giving these personal pieces to their children or other relatives.

### **Chapter Summary**

Several common themes emerged from the 10 participants engaged in art. These themes are early influences in art as well as family influencing their participation in art; several were uncertain of their identities as artists; that art has an impact on health; art can be both solitary and social; art allows for new learning, that there are degrees of

Generativity, including teaching art, donating art, and taking art public; that art is a self-created space of actualization; and that art tells a story.

The participants experience similar emotions concerning their art. All of them are enjoying retirement. They have navigated their way to art classes and are finding a path relevant to their lives. This path is leading many to seek learning or become teachers. Others still find a path to altruism or a way to preserve their art. Many others still found a path for self-actualization through their art. The next chapter will provide a discussion of the themes as they relate to the combined theoretical framework of successful aging, generativity and art as a way of knowing, as well as answering the research questions.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

“All great artists draw from the same resource: the human heart, which tells us all that we are more alike than we are unlike” (Angelou, 2009, p. 80).

The intent from the beginning of this study was to explore the role of visual arts and its impact on successful aging from the perspective of older adult learners in retirement. As part of the selection process, all participants indicated that they were retired and engaging in visual art. While they were not working for wages, they draw income from pensions or investments. They are financially stable and considered middle-class. The mean age of the participants is 77.1. The descriptions and reflections of their own lives have been examined using the qualitative methodology of narrative inquiry. Participants indicated that art had enriched their life in older adulthood.

This final chapter accomplishes several purposes. First, it is dedicated to examining the details of the interviews and interpreting the narratives of the participants and relating them back to the theories, concepts and literature which informed my efforts. A uniqueness of this study is that the overall framework includes a blending of three conceptual frameworks: successful aging, art as a way of knowing, and generativity. Each conceptual framework as well as the combined framework will be discussed, and relevance to existing literature will be highlighted as they as they relate to the findings from this study. There are also several items that do not fit within the frameworks, and those will be discussed as new concepts or ideas that have arisen out of the study. This chapter concludes with implications for adult educators for practice and recommendations for further research.

### **Successful Aging: Revisiting Rowe & Kahn**

The first overarching framework utilized was successful aging defined by Rowe and Kahn (1998) as the ability to maintain three components: (1) have a low risk of disease and disease-related disability; (2) maintain high mental and physical function; and (3) actively engage with life. A significant finding of this study was that artwork had an impact on the emotional and physical health of these participants. While each participant seemed robust and healthy, upon conversations, most of them had experienced physical or emotional ailments, some significantly. Some were not at optimal health; some with physical ailments and some with depression. As Rowe and Kahn (1998) state, “by calling people who are on the borderline of disease ‘normal,’ we underestimate their vulnerability and fail to take protective action on their behalf” (p. 53). These participants are in the process of “usual aging” a condition with Rowe and Kahn believe to be associated with significant risk of disease and premature death. The data shows that because these participants were engaging in art, the engagement has helped to ease some of that risk of disease or death. Engaging in art helped each participant in different ways. Sometimes, art helped deal with loss, it also helped to keep them engaged with life and have more control; as well as keep their mental and physical function in check. Art helping to transcend loss, keeping actively engaged with life and taking control and pushing limits are the next sections that will be discussed.

#### **Art Helps to Transcend Loss**

In relationship to the successful aging, art helped several of the participants in this study deal with and transcend loss; whether it was the loss through the death of their spouse, or through the loss of their career. The findings show that these participants,

through spending so much time with their art, that they were engaged in art to mask pain, or using art as a coping mechanism. An important finding from this study is that art can be used as a means of survival for some of the participants. They engaged in art to aid in their new approach to life after a significant loss. It appears that several of the participants used art as therapy in certain situations. For example, Connie, Jennifer, Reba, Bella, Henry and Brad all stated that they were experiencing feelings of depression and anxiety at times. They all began to engage in art for hours at a stretch, spending a great deal of time with their artwork. As Malchiodi (1998) describes, “Art therapists...believe that art making serves an existential purpose, helping us make sense of a world that seems filled with boredom, dysfunctional relationships, abuse, addictions, and purposelessness” (p.15).

My findings support what Malchiodi describes, but it also extends the thinking for loss. For example Henry and Brad, both of whom experienced the loss of their work, had to retire before they had planned - art became a saving grace. Henry stated, “it’s [art that] gives me the opportunity to be with people and share my thoughts.” Henry did not want to leave his career, and through that loss, he has struggled with depression, but it seems art has given him a lift in many ways. Similarly, Brad, too focused on his artwork after retirement. He was “down and somewhat depressed.” He stated, “I knew I had my design work to fall back on, though.” Brad began to engage more fully in his clothing design and fabric selections. He spent hours daily enjoying his ability to be creative. He felt as if he grew into himself. Each of these participants engaged in art and it seemed to ease the depression and anxiety that they were feeling.

Other examples are Bella, Reba, Connie and Jennifer who all indicated that their art aided in dealing with the loss of their husbands. Each woman began to engage in art more heavily after their spouse passed away. This is somewhat consistent with the literature (Cohen, 2001; Malchiodi, 1998), because even Grandma Moses, who began painting at age 67 until her death at 101, began painting and embroidering in response to her husband's death. Her husband had encouraged her to paint shortly before he died. Similarly, Bella said of her husband, "A few years ago, my husband didn't like me giving all my pieces [of woodworking] away. He liked them, and so he wanted to keep them for himself. He told me he wanted to keep a lot of my art, and he encouraged me." After he passed away, Bella began to spend more time on her woodworking. The data indicates that she spent more time with her art and was using it to cope or mask her feelings of sadness and pain.

For Reba, "my husband died so suddenly. It is good for me to have all my projects. It takes my mind off of him." Reba was utilizing her artwork to cope with the pain she is experiencing from her loss. She could also be using art as a diversion from thinking about the future without her husband. Similarly, Jennifer also used her artwork to cope with loss. For several months before her husband's death, she would visit him in the hospital in the morning, and then go home and paint all afternoon into the evening. After his death, she continued to paint for several hours a day. In this way, Jennifer was constantly changing her behavior to manage specific external and/or internal demands that were particularly taxing to her psyche with regard to being without her husband of 50 plus years.

A component of successful aging is maintaining a low risk of disease and disease related disability. The narratives yielded much data on the positive impact of the physical side of health. Dexterity in the hands of these participants, particularly in the women that had rheumatoid arthritis was an important finding. When several of these participants kept their hands engaged by holding brushes and painting, it appeared to stave off the arthritis and pain in the hands. The data suggests that engaging in art aided the participants in lowering their risk for certain disease and disease related disability. As Bella noted, “I think keeping my hands active...helps with my arthritis.” These pieces of information add to the existing body of scant literature on the use of art in adult education and hand / dexterity improvement and overall health.

The larger benefit of art overall was in stress reduction. The process of engaging in art helped participants to feel relaxed and less stressed-out. Engaging in art could help older adults by reducing stress-related illness, and possibly lower blood pressure. This finding of health improvement and feeling valued was very much present when these participants engaged in art. Two of the participants had already experienced heart attacks, and their ability to artistically create helped ease an intense demeanor and to become more relaxed and helped keep their stress level down. As Bella stated, “my art relaxes me.” In addition, Rachel also felt very relaxed when engaging in art. This finding also adds to the literature to support that art has a positive effect on health.

### **Keeping Actively Engaged with Life**

Another component of successful aging is keeping actively engaged with life. The findings confirmed this component, which can occur by remaining involved with activities that are meaningful and purposeful. In addition, active engagement is also

defined as maintaining close relationships with others and maintaining regular activities. Creating artwork was the primary source of keeping engaged with life for some of these participants. This manifests itself through several activities: painting, finding items to paint, going to class, sharing their art with friends and displaying their work in shows. But Tom, Bella, Connie, Rachel, Jesse and Lauren engaged in many activities, not just the artwork, and a combination of all these undertakings kept these participants engaged with life. For example, many of the participants continued to travel well into older adulthood. Even on their travels several participants kept personal journals with extensive drawings and sketches of what they had seen. They were using personal reflection and recalling scenes from their mind and what they were actually seeing and getting it down on paper. For example, Tom took a trip to Russia and shared his drawings of the trip. The drawings were in a large notebook full of notations and reactions to what Tom had seen. As these participants engaged in art, the data suggests that they were finding their own potential, that art gave them an understanding of themselves and that they had greater self-assurance and self-esteem. Art allowed participants to put a piece of themselves out there. To display their artwork, get over the shyness, insecurity or whatever else they may have been feeling; art helped several participants to break down a barrier. They had to get past feelings of not being good enough and to squelch any self-doubt they may have had. As Jennifer pointed out, “my self-esteem has been down around my ankles for some time.” It was her artwork that brought her out of that slump and helped to raise her self-esteem.

### **Pushing Limits with Imagination and Taking Control**

Some of the participants, through creating art were pushing the limits of their imagination; the data suggests they did so to have more control in their lives. Most of the participants in this study were well-educated and displayed high mental and physical function. Several participants had new ideas and formed new images and sensations which they did not perceive through sight; yet the images were visual in their minds. Creating art “involves taking risks, breaking boundaries, pushing limits and inventing new ideas” (Machiodi, 1998, p.69). Several of the participants pushed limits and had new ideas. Tom for example, when he led a group of teens in designing a cow for the cow parade, he came up with a theme and displayed spontaneity, originality, inventiveness, divergent thinking. He led and taught a group of teens to his way of thinking. Tom allowed the teens to see things in a new light.

Similarly Brad, with the faux furs and very sexy design of his clothing is taking a risk. While he was creating for fun, he has found a niche market, but what if no one liked his design or if his friends were extremely critical? The fabrics were not mainstream, and Brad seemed to have little or no concern for what others might think of his designs and fabrics. He no longer felt the need to satisfy the needs of others and was satisfying himself. He was taking control of his own needs, and in having control, he was taking a risk with his art, and that was a risk work taking for him. He used designs and fabrics that could be considered flamboyant and flashy. These were not typical or ordinary creations; Brad was going out on a limb and pushing limits with his imagination.

The data indicates that focusing on something the participants can take control over can make a difference in the way they feel. The participants cannot change some

things, such as being forced to retire; but they can control the activities in their lives. They chose to fill their days with creative, artistic activity in addition to activities that required high mental function. As Jesse said with regard to mental function:

You have to cultivate your internal self...link yourself to your spiritual connection. Let go of your external body... you are more than your image...stop resisting the aging process...don't lie about your age; don't deny your existence...you need to take your place in society.

When people plan for retirement, they are using a great deal of their mental function – once they find themselves without one of the cornerstones of their identity – their work - they must decide what meaning their life has (Jarvis, 2001). For several of these participants they knew who they were and shared of themselves through their art.

With regard to physical function, two of the participants knew each other, and had discussed their participation in this study. Connie and Lauren had become friends because they attend the same water-aerobics class. They were the only two participants who indicated that they exercised on a regular basis and who did not have any physical or health issues or problems. They both mentioned that they were attempting to stave off disease and as Lauren put it, “stay healthy!” Connie was concerned about her weight, but she did not appear to be overweight. They both exercised and also engaged in different visual arts. They were taking control over their own well-being by following an exercise regime.

Engaging in art allowed these participants to utilize their imaginations and mental as well as their physical function. And the high mental function leads in and blends with the theoretical framework of art as a way of knowing. Engaging in art can lead to self-

awareness, growth and change. As Henry stated, “once I started painting, I was hooked. I knew this was for me.” And as Brad demonstrates with this statement, “I was okay with having to retire, because I knew I would have my [art] fashion design to fall back on...and I have been wanting to do it more.”

These older adults were able to conceptualize new things and create anew. A typical stereotype of individuals this age is that they are set in their ways and do not use much creativity (Rowe & Kahn, 1998); that they prefer stability and avoid change. However several participants looked for new ways within their art to express themselves. In fact, even with ailments and setbacks, they still continued to be engaged. They adapted in order to continue their artwork.

One item of note that did not fit within any of the conceptual frameworks was the detriment to health that engaging in art for long periods of time could bring. Standing for long periods of time was difficult for some participants. Some participants had surgeries or injuries that precluded them from engaging in certain types of art, and the deterioration of vision was also cited as an issue in creating art. This finding brings something new to the body of literature.

In summary, for several of these participants, engaging in art had a significant impact on successful aging in many ways. It helped them to deal with loss; keep them engaged and lift their self-esteem. The area where this extends the literature is that several participants found art relaxing and the data indicate that art was a major source of stress reduction. The detrimental impact of art on the physically aging body is an area where this adds to the literature, because only benefits of art to health are found in the literature (Atchley, 2000; Butler, 2008; Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2011).

### **Finding One's Self Through Art: Art as a Way of Knowing Revisited**

Visual art as a way of knowing is a way of knowing that is complex and subtle (Eisner, 2002a; Gardner, 2011). It is as a way of knowing that allows individuals to transform their consciousness by making sense of what they see (Damasio, 1999; Eisner 2002a). Many participants stated that they felt as if they had “found themselves” through their art. “Making art is a tool for personal growth and has nothing to do with artistic ability. It has everything to do with learning to understand yourself through a different medium” (Lattuga, 2011, p.1). Several participants stated that through their art, they better understood who they were. Often times words could not fully convey or express how participants felt or perhaps because it was the physical appearance of something in the visual form (art) that they could more easily and readily understand. Art as a way of knowing is a complex concept and is difficult to articulate. The conversations with these older adult learners in retirement extend the concept of art as a way of knowing. Currently, there is a gap in the literature with regard to knowing self as well as finding harmony and deep satisfaction through art.

Art can stimulate “excitement, exhilaration, and inspiration and, at times from more peaceful and deeper places within ourselves” (Machiodi, 1998, p.76). Art as a way of knowing is a way of knowing what exists as we push our understanding of what is, through art. Art serves many functions: it can bring about social change; art can heal, and art has power and beauty (Eisner, 2002a; Gardner, 2011; Lawrence, 2005). The findings show that some of the participants in this study described feelings of harmony and deep satisfaction when they engaged in art. Examples are given below. These occasions were

marked by feelings of a self-created space of flow and deep meaning. Some participants reported feeling at one with the universe, stronger and calmer than ever before, filled with joy and letting themselves go into a wonderful escape. Each participant described feeling of calm and not knowing where they were. For example, Rachel stated:

I disappear into. I become the process...I don't have feelings about it. I experience of learning how to make something happen. I feel intense. You become the process. The parts of the body that do all the worrying gets turned off and the parts that are in touch with the rest of the universe gets turned on.

Another person who felt flow through this art was Brad. He said:

If you can find something that you enjoy doing: the Buddhist would say something that gives you 'bliss'; that brings joy and that brings happiness that can't be bought with money. And that is what I got and what I am still getting every time I sit down to do some sewing. It's like reaching a pinnacle...if you can get out of your mind, out of your head. Away from your ego...that's what blocks our true essence from coming forth. Through meditating...and when I am doing art, that is my meditation.

For Brad, when he felt his true essence to come forth, for him, that was art as a way of knowing. Other participants who made statements reflecting this process were Jesse, Tom and Lauren. When engaging in art, Jesse said, "It's like unlimited; and I am really in another place. I don't know what word to describe it. Another world. It's your world ...you created it. But you're using what's been created." Similarly, Tom stated when engaged in art, he feels: "Transformed; focused. [Art provides a] wonderful

escape. When I'm painting and it's going well. I don't know where I am. It's a great way to take yourself out of yourself and I'm involved in the painting.

Meaning is not universal, but individual. Engaging in art and art as story plays so well to this. "My art is me" is a common theme I heard from several participants. They knew who they were in part because of their art; it had become the fabric of who they were. But in seeing a piece of art, it doesn't mean the same thing to the observer as it does to the person who created it. So these very personal pieces of art that the participants created and that they are passing down have deep personal meaning to the creators, but it will not mean the same thing to the person receiving the art.

#### **Passing Art On: Is it Generativity? Generosity? Or Selfishness?**

Generativity is the seventh stage of Erik Erikson's eight-stage theory of life cycle development. Erikson (1963) defined generativity as "...the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation" (p. 267). Many of the participants in this study did show interest and concern for their younger family members, and several did give their art away to family and friends. But what is the purpose of passing their artwork on? Was it to be generative? To be generous? Or was it selfishness or selfish expression? Westermeyer (2004) suggests generativity was not only beneficial to those family members who received the care and concern of the older relative, but in fact was beneficial to the older individual who showed the care and concern.

In this study, the data suggests a link between generativity and successful aging. Some of the participants who were less inclined to give their art away were also the ones with ailments. And the participants who freely gave their art away were the ones without ailments or illness. Several of the participants gave away their art by passing it on to

family, friends or charitable organizations. While a few did not give away their art, they made sure it was stored and kept it for memories. Generativity, generosity and selfishness will be explored in the next sections.

### **Generativity**

Generativity is exhibited in several ways and can have aspects of self-expansion, development, and expression (Klieber & Nimrod, 2007). It is most typically associated with producing something of value that can be passed on to the next generation, usually, although not exclusively, involving parental sharing of tangible or intangible gifts to offspring. It can also be motivated by the desire to create a better place in society for others (McAdams & DeSt.Aubin, 1998). Generativity was chosen as a framework to see if there was a relationship to successful aging and art as a way of knowing. Are these concepts interconnected? Is there a relationship between being a generative person and aging well?

The data indicate interconnectedness between generativity and aging well. The data also show that there can be generativity in being alone. This is a new area and adds to the interpretation of generativity. While one might not associate generativity with a solitary lifestyle, these participants spent a lot of time alone, and were somewhat self-absorbed in their craft. And in that self-absorption, they were not a burden to others or society because they were independent and caring for themselves. They were busy. All of the participants had at least one child. Half of them were widowed and currently living alone. Many of the participants had the belief that through their hard work in their working years, they had already spent a great deal of time and energy in their careers, in teaching, and in raising a family...that they had already been generative. And for

themselves, this time in retirement, was their time to be a bit more selfish. As one Jesse stated: “I want to do things just for myself ...” as well as Connie: “this is a time in my life when I can just relax and be alone.” One interpretation is through living alone and engaging in art, these participants are not a burden on society, on the health care system or on their adult children. Perhaps their art helped to engage them and keep them happily occupied and not be a burden to others. This is an area in the generativity literature (Cole, Ray, & Kastenbaum, 2010; Erikson, 1963; McAdams, 1998; Okun & Michel, 2006) that has been overlooked, and does not explore the relationship between self-absorption and being generative in this same way, and thus this represents a new concept that adds value to the research literature.

This idea of not being a burden to others extends the thinking on generativity, and broadens the definition. Little to no research on generativity and self-care exists. It should be noted that while many participants enjoyed the social connectedness that a class could provide, many of the participants also loved being alone. The data also suggests that the aloneness and not being a burden to others was occurring outside the conscious awareness of the participants. More data and research is needed about generativity and not being burdensome to others.

Examples of the aloneness were exhibited by Jennifer, Bella, Connie, Brad and Reba. They all lost their spouses, and they try not to rely on their children for material or emotional support. Although their families were extremely important to them, as Brad said of his grandchildren, “they make life worth living.” Several seem to give the impression they would like to spend more time with their children, but yet they understand the busy lives their adult children lead. As Reba stated “my son comes over

about once a week.” So there is a lot of alone time that she needs to fill so that she will not become a burden to him or others. The fact that she is not a burden or causing a hardship could be considered generative. She is giving to society by not requiring support from the social service or becoming a drain on the system.

All of the participants in this study enjoyed engaging in art, both in classes and in a solitary way. This could be explained by Erikson’s stage before generativity vs. stagnation, the stage is titled, ‘intimacy vs. isolation’ in early adulthood, in which if intimacy is not achieved, then the person feels alone and isolated. Reading between the lines of the theory, it is implied that both isolation and self-absorption are both negative. What the findings in this study show is that this was not true for any of these participants. Some participants could not wait to be alone. As Connie demonstrates, “I just love when I can be alone with my projects...”

In addition, two participants indicated that after being alone with their art and finishing a piece; the feeling of wanting to engage in “a romantic moment” with their partner. The data indicates that this is an extension of intimacy vs. isolation. The intimacy phase focuses on forming loving, close relationships as opposed to having isolation and being alone. Most of the participants had recently lost a spouse, so this could lead to revisiting the balance between isolation vs. intimacy, and perhaps art has become a vehicle to re-establish close relationships through the classes and being social. For both Reba and Jennifer, attending classes has been a saving grace. After their husbands passed away, they began to attend classes more frequently.

Giving “appropriate expressions of ongoing affection and concern between generations” (Erikson, Erikson & Kivnick, 1986, p. 90) which is also an extension of

generativity, was evidenced by my participants. While Henry and Jesse gave their artwork freely to their sons, some participants gave much more. Connie gave her son a vacation home. Henry felt close to his children who were both artists. He felt that he had “passed that onto them.”

These findings broadened the traditional definition of generativity to include solitary and independent activity so as the older individual will not be a burden to the next generation. Self-absorption is normally defined as a binary opposite of generativity, while this study contends that it is not the opposite; i.e., that self-absorption can be in and of itself, generative in older adults who are independent and not a burden to others.

### **Generosity**

Several participants were simply generous, not necessarily generative. Generosity is defined as:

the habit of giving freely without expecting anything in return. It can involve offering time, assets or talents to aid someone in need. Often equated with charity as a virtue, generosity is widely accepted in society as a desirable trait.

(Generosity, n.d.).

This was observed by some participants offering to give me the artwork that I admired. The conversation went like this. Me: Wow! That is a great depiction...so nice! The participant: “Oh, you like it. You can have it!” I always declined the offer. But my sense was that they had so much art, that giving away one piece of it would not make a difference to them. Or it could also be because the participant was generous. It leads me to believe that a difference exists between *generativity* and *being generous*. Simply giving art away because these participants have too much – that is not

generativity. In addition, for these individuals, who were predominantly financially secure, it was potentially easier to be generous. However, ironically, the participants in this study who appeared to be the most well off were the least inclined to give any art away. They were also more likely to suffer from ailments. The participants who generously offered their artwork were among the healthier individuals of the group. This may or may not be related, but it lends itself to further study. The two participants who were less inclined to give their art away had arthritis and the other had severe back pain and needed surgery. While several of the participants were secure economically, they were all on fixed incomes. Even the retired physician, Henry, who was probably better off financially than most noted, "I don't get anything framed anymore; it's just too expensive." Yet he did give most of his art to his son and to charity, so he did exhibit generativity.

Several of the participants were very much involved in self-development and self-expression as evidenced by the sheer amount of hours they spent on their craft. To that end, as evidenced in art as a way of knowing, several participants were so engrossed in their art that they ignored other things. As Brad said "I don't know what time it is...I lose track of time." This could be considered selfish and/or self-absorbing behavior. Potentially indicative of Erikson's binary opposite of generativity is stagnation and/or self-absorption.

This was not an attempt to leave a legacy or pass something to the next generation; it was their attempt to give something freely without expecting anything in return. Some of these participants were generous, plain and simple. Conceivably it made

them feel better to share. This is something that I had not expected to find. One participant quipped the old adage “it is better to give than to receive.”

### **Selfishness and Self-Absorption**

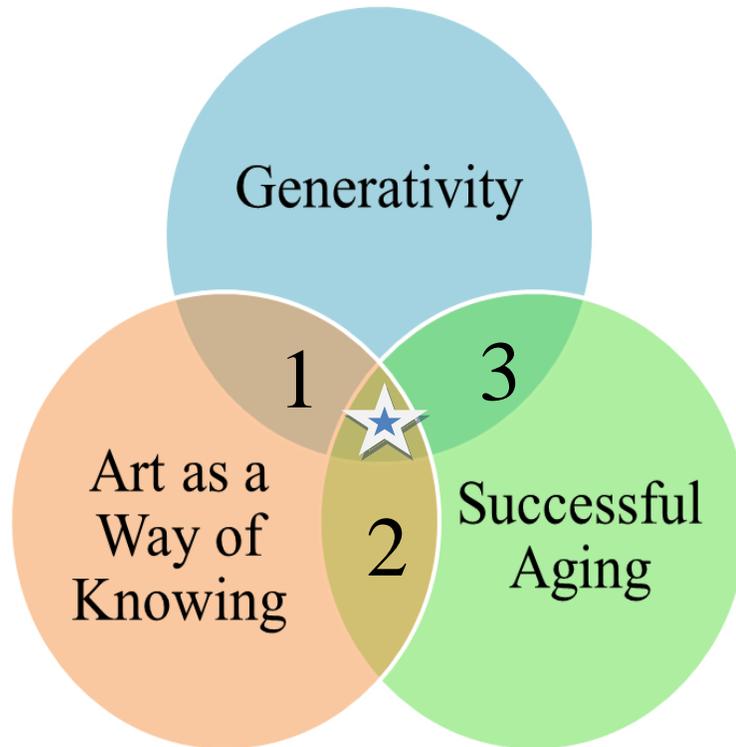
The findings revealed for some participants that engagement in art promoted selfishness and self-absorption. The relationship to generativity is that selfishness and self-absorption should not be considered binary opposites when older adults are either directly or indirectly engaging in self-care. Teaching and donating are activities that can equate to generativity, but not in all cases. It appeared with this group of participants that the teaching function served two purposes. One purpose was to give of themselves through teaching and to pass on their craft. The other purpose was for self-development and self-gratification and possibly because they were self-absorbed. Self-absorption can be defined as doing things primarily for the benefit of themselves and putting their feelings first. To some extent, most of us can be self-absorbed at particular times in our lives, to lesser or greater degrees (Izzi, 2012). While self-absorption for some of these participants can be considered a positive aspect of their artwork, it can also be a negative. When individuals are engaged in putting their needs and feelings before those of others, they are not displaying generativity. One way to interpret these findings is to view self-absorptions on a continuum. On one end of the spectrum, it encompasses those who are giving and generous and on the other, those who are less inclined to give and who might be considered selfish. Generativity would be at the opposite end of the spectrum.

This research concurs that generativity is not only part of midlife, but it is very much displayed by older adults. This is consistent with the literature, that generativity is significant across one's life (McAdams & DeSt.Aubin, 1998). Several participants, well

into their 70s and 80s were very giving to the next generation. An area that adds to the literature is that there is generativity in aloneness. The data reveal that these participants were alone and to a certain extent when engaging in art, self-absorbed. Most participants stated that they did not “want to be a burden” on anyone. To this end, these participants took care of themselves, not only did they financially plan for their retirement, but they strategized and thought of future generations so as not to rely on them for any type of support.

### **Interconnectedness of the Frameworks**

In using three frameworks to analyze data, each component provided a valuable lens from which to view my participants, but the three frameworks taken together give a sharper picture as to what is actually occurring with the participants in this study. Successful aging, art as a way of knowing and generativity are the three components that are represented in the Venn diagram below. They are intertwined and interconnected where each factor is important in itself and to some extent independent of the others. The diagram below assists in the analysis and offers a holistic perspective of the participants experience with art. Some components were experienced individually, and sometimes in different combinations. The combined framework provided a useful way to frame the data analysis. While this was the primary lens that was utilized to look at the data, it revealed some areas that fell outside the framework.



The pinnacle of being in the center of the Venn diagram is to be participating in and experiencing all three components: successful aging, generativity, and art as a way of knowing simultaneously. If an individual reaches this, they would be experiencing flow and a deep concentration that lets them forget what time it is or where they are.

Art as a way of knowing is demonstrated through the participants who are still learning more about themselves through art. It is a connection of self-knowing, learning and growing and understanding themselves. The interconnectedness of the section of number (1) where generativity and art as a way of knowing converge represent some of the participants were generative, and had a concern for the next generation, or they cared about a cause and donated their artwork for research for a cure. The area where (1) is overlapped does not have a component of successful aging. There were no participants in

this study who fit this category. This area would represent individuals who for whatever reason, were not necessarily successfully aging. This area would include individuals who knew themselves, and had a sense of understanding of self through their art, and they were generative to some extent, but not successfully aging necessarily. In order to move to the flow represented by the star in the center, an individual would have to improve their health and get back to successful aging.

Looking at category number two in the Venn diagram, only a few of the participants fell into this category, where they were successfully aging and experiencing art as a way of knowing, but they were not necessarily generative or concerned for future generations. These were the participants who kept their artwork, and were much less inclined to volunteer or give any of their time or talent. Rachel is an example of a participant who fell into category (2). While Rachel did not fit into the classic definition of what it means to be generative (Erickson, 1993), perhaps an implication is that further research is needed to explore other ways in which generativity is expressed. In order for these participants to move to the center, represented by the star, generative practices would be in order.

Individuals falling into this category could move to the area in the center of the diagram if they experience flow

Another area where individuals could fall is only into the circle part of art as a way of knowing and not into the shared parts of (1) or (2). This means that they were not successfully aging nor were they generative, however they were very much engaged in art and finding meaning about retirement and about their lives and understanding themselves more fully through their craft. I did not have any participants in this category.

Everyone in this study, while some had ailments; no one rose to the level of unsuccessful aging. In fact, participants adapted themselves and their artwork to accommodate for their physical limitations. This is a prime example of Baltes and Baltes (1990b) selective optimization and compensation (SOC) model. This model explains that as age-related changes occur, that individuals may lose some function, yet react to optimize what they have and minimize losses associated with aging. An example of this would be Rachel, who could no longer do sculpture because of her hip replacement. Yet, Rachel continued to paint and make jewelry. Another example is Reba, who could no longer do fine needlepoint work because of her deteriorating eye sight, yet she continued to make plastic artwork with larger needles. This is another example of the SOC model. The selective optimization with compensation aids in promoting successful development and aging (Baltes & Baltes, 1990b).

Some of my participants fell into the overlap of number (3) where they were successfully aging and generative, but only engaged in art as something to do. They perhaps did not rise to the level of knowing through art. This is not to say that they did not have fun or enjoy their art. They did. Reba falls into this category. She was healthy for the most part, and gave her art away for future generations, but she did not seem to have the deep level of understanding through art the way that some other participants did. She could reach the star in the center of the Venn diagram by more fully engaging in art, and reaching a knowing through her art.

Although I did not find any participants who only occupied the generativity section and not art as a way of knowing or successfully aging, individuals who are

concerned for future generations and not necessarily aging well or engaged in art could fit into this category of generativity.

It is when a combination of the components, represented by star in the center of the diagram, that represents when all three of these components are present within an individual, that they experience flow and a heightened sense of happiness through their art. They are generative and aging successfully. Henry, Brad, Jesse, Bella and Lauren appeared to fit this category. The new insight provided by the Venn diagram is that when an individual only fits within a certain area of the diagram, that individual has the ability to make changes and move to the center. It is not impossible or insurmountable to reach.

### **Implications for Practice**

What does this mean for adult education, older adults and their instructors? This study offers implications for adult educators and for practitioners working in the field. Building up the curriculum of offerings for older adults, not just in academic settings, but taking art therapy to the masses; and including art classes for stress management in the workplace; for rehabilitation and relaxation for individuals enrolled in anger management and for violent offenders in prisons are just some of the recommendations for practice that arise from the data from this study.

### **Build up Art Curriculum**

Because several of the participants enjoyed both solitude and working on their artwork in classes, there are several opportunities that adult educators can provide. Educators and administrators need to explore and make available cohort models and possibly give home-based projects; and design more courses in visual arts and arts-based courses in general to support cohorts. Since some participants enjoyed the classes and

especially the social aspects they offered, the new courses could provide social hours to display art work on a scheduled basis. In addition, for those who relished in the solitude to perfect their craft outside of class, offering classes that provide home-based projects will allow new learners the solitary opportunity. As Jesse stated, “the classes are like one big social event. It’s just fun to be around people that want to learn!” Therefore offering courses with the opportunity to provide solitude should be examined.

Because of the lack of curriculum and art programs available, many of the participants formed groups and began teaching others. One person went so far as to construct an addition on to her home. This implies that there is a gap or lack of courses and not enough offerings to satisfy a growing population. Perhaps there is only a lack of course offerings in Pennsylvania. As one participant noted, “I go down to Florida to take classes...they have so much available down there.” This comment was surprising, because one would think that more would be available to these individuals. Maybe there are courses, but the marketing of such courses or lack of communication regarding these courses could be combated by adult educators helping to market and promote such courses.

It should also be noted that this group of participants were of a middle class socioeconomic status. They were able to enjoy retirement because they had saved a substantial amount of resources. They were able to afford art supplies, art classes and spend a significant amount of money on their craft. Other retired individuals who are lacking retirement savings may not be able to afford engagement in art.

Jesse decided to begin teaching and volunteered his time and talent because he saw a lack of courses being offered, so he “stepped-up” and now teaches several classes a

week. As is recommended from the literature, “practitioners would do well to prepare themselves for the shifts that will emerge by designing programs that stimulate, challenge and allow for development of affective and cognitive growth” (Fisher & Wolf, 1998, p. 21). The evidence from the data in this study confirms this. Practitioners in areas with a high older adult population would do well to survey what courses are available. They should also note locations, times and cost of the courses.

In addition to the price and convenience of the course, several participants wanted to be challenged and were looking for growth and development. As Jennifer stated, “I am always interested in learning how to improve my technique.” Another participant, Reba, felt the class pushed her to achieve more. She said, “It was out of my comfort zone, but I really grew and I’m proud...” What this implies for adult educators is that older adults want to be challenged and aided in the growth and learning process. Providing opportunities for these learners will be a challenge moving forward for adult educators.

Another issue is that those educators in higher education will need to begin to redefine art curriculum for retirees (Dychtwald, 2005; Manheimer, 1994; Purcell, 2008). Older learners will likely desire a more varied curriculum from colleges and universities similar to the painting classes these participants were enrolled in. “Lifelong-learning programs at colleges and universities, churches, and community centers and on cable TV and the Internet” (Dychtwald, 2005, p.18) will need to provide more offerings. These online classes could include art and painting podcasts or similar offerings. Several of the participants had websites depicting some of their art. Brad, Rachel, Tom and Lauren used the internet a great deal. A recommendation for older adult learners would be some

online courses. Especially if older adults are homebound, they could benefit a great deal from online courses. An implication—e.g., more broad based integrated public/private partnerships could allow for the growth of online courses for older adults. For example, the success of both the proprietary University of Phoenix and the nonprofit Elderhostel (Mills, 1993) shows that the private sector can play a prominent and constructive role in lifelong learning. Online curriculum for these learners would allow for “the global aspect of learning and the increased use of the Internet in learning as well as ongoing usage by the baby boomers will play into lifelong learning and the arts (Sherman, 2006, p. 45). Online offerings could provide solitude and some social aspects as well.

### **Art Therapy and Relaxation**

The implications for the benefit found from engaging in art was the impact on emotional health; conceivably people in anger management or prisoners would benefit from engaging in art. This study has demonstrated, through the experiences of these older adult learners, that engaging in art can be very relaxing. For individuals to create and draw from their own imaginations, they are opening their eyes to their inner world, their inner psyche to develop something new.

Offering workers stress management classes that include the ability to create artwork; the offerings might benefit a great deal of people that feel stress to have a more relaxed outlook. The findings are very much in line with what Lawrence (2005) states “there is little written that addresses using artistic expression in mainstream adult and higher education... [she surmises] that the paucity of literature is because we are not incorporating the arts into our practice to any great degree” (p. 8). If we put art classes or

incorporate arts-based learning into practice we will fill the need and gap; and possibly see more of a mainstream occurrence in adult education.

Across the country, arts based offerings at senior centers, Shepherd Centers and several College and University based Learning in Retirement Centers have a great demand and enrollment is high by older adults who are making meaning of retirement through arts based ways of knowing. Demand is likely outpacing availability of these types of courses. Art should have more of a focus within these centers.

### **Future Research**

The findings from this study offer valuable insights into potential future research. While this study offers much understanding into the experiences of older adult learners in retirement, it is limited in scope. In addition, by design, a small, qualitative sample size of only 10 was used because saturation occurred at 10. Larger, and perhaps, quantitative or mixed methods studies could be designed to investigate older adult learners which could add different perspective to the existing literature. A much bigger sample using a survey could be done to help capture what the artists are experiencing based upon the qualitative data displayed here. Future longitudinal studies on art and the impact of health on retirees should be examined. Trend and longitudinal data are lacking in the area of engagement in visual arts and retirement. One might want to study additional activities in retirement and look at more diverse populations, not just retirees. In addition, varying frameworks could also be utilized to study retirees engaging in art. Two other recommendations also come out of this research: 1) that additional activities in retirement need to be explored and 2) that a more diverse sample should be examined.

### **Additional Activities in Retirement**

Older adult learners are involved in additional activities in retirement; art was only one activity. While this study looked at only visual art, art can be defined on a much broader spectrum and most everyone sees art differently. Other types of art, such as performing arts or other types of art could be an area for further study. These adult learners were using personal reflection to create visual art. As we are reminded by Merriam and Clark (2006) that significant learning in adulthood is most likely to occur informally through making sense of life experiences. Another study might have older adults apply personal reflection to other learning activities, or other interests such as sports or other leisure activities; even volunteering could be examined. Even though some studies have been done, creative writing and the introspection that brings to retirement could also be useful research with implications for retirees.

### **Look at a More Diverse Sample**

More diversity needs to be examined. Individuals with diverse ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientation, social classes and more studies exclusively on men or exclusively on women could all be explored. In addition, the participants in this study are married, widowed or divorced. No unmarried, single participants were examined. There is a gap on research of singles engaged in art. With regard to studying women, this is in line with the literature. A recent study on retirement noted that “there is a need to look more directly at the unique retirement experiences of women and document how they redefine their lives” (Price & Nesteruk, 2010, p. 137). In addition, this research looked at successful aging, perhaps engaging in art can aid those with dementia or autism. An analysis of how this research can help autistic or Alzheimer’s patients could

be an area of further study. And while this study examined retirees, due to the current economy and research that demonstrates that retirement will be delayed and many individuals will not retire at all (Lloyd, 2012), it may be beneficial to look at older adults who are still in the workforce. In addition, studies on intergenerational groups, and different age cohorts could also be examined.

### Researcher Reflections

At 43, I have been saving for retirement for over 20 years. But I don't know what I will do, or where I will be when I actually get there. Will my generation ever be able to retire? And as far as the arts, I have a very good friend who is a music teacher in elementary schools. She has taught music off of carts. The arts get short shrift in schools. I save much of the art work done by my children. And as I have undertaken and talked to retirees engaged in art, it has given me a new perspective. I appreciate art much more now and I have so enjoyed listening to stories and sitting down with retirees who have the beauty of perspective looking back on life.

The invention of photography in 1850 made it unnecessary, at that point, to be a Realistic, representational painter. Yet artists explored different ways of recording reality where the mind, and what one saw was changed, and the result was a different image. For me, I will take multiple perspectives and looking at nature from more than one view, with more than one lens, and something new will result.

Toward the end of my dissertation, in the summer of 2012, as I attempted to drive to my office at the College of Business, where I teach, I hit the worst traffic jam I have ever encountered in my life! A 30 minute drive was never completed. It took me over 3 hours to go 16 miles. In Central Pennsylvania, where I currently live, my routine drive is South and West, and I see part of the Appalachian Mountains. Mostly they are high hills.



On that frustrating day, I stared a lot at those hills, just waiting. When I was finally detoured and decided to head back home, I realized I was hungry and there was a Chinese restaurant at an intersection, so I pulled off and had a bite to eat. At the end of my meal, I got a fortune cookie. The message inside read, “Over every mountain there is a path, although it may not be seen from the valley.”

And the dissertation has been a huge climb to the top of a mountain. At the beginning of this process, a friend gave me a book titled, “The Dissertation Journey;” the cover shows a woman at the base of what appears to be Mount Everest. I have felt like I have been in a valley trying to complete this dissertation, climbing that mountain, and the retirees I have talked to have been shining a light on my path. Not just toward the end of this dissertation journey, but the journey for the rest of my life. They have given me a zest for life and more appreciation of the arts. I know they have given me a perspective that lives in me. Their stories are a part of me. I hope this work will be transferable to others looking toward retirement.



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## APPENDIX A




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 Implied Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research
 

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 The Pennsylvania State University **IRB#** 35989

**Title of Project:** **Creative Arts and Learning in Adulthood: Retirement and Continued Learning**

**Principal Investigator:** Irma Hunt, Graduate Student

717-791-9598  
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**Advisor:**

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1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research is to explore the role of visual arts and its impact on successful aging and older adult learners in retirement.
2. **Procedures to be followed:** You will receive a list of the questions to be asked in advance of the interview. You will be asked the questions during the interview. Other questions may be asked during the interview that are prompted by something you shared that the interviewer wishes to know more about. The interview will be audio-taped. **Additionally, you will be asked to share an art form (poem, story, photograph, sculpture, visual art) that represents their retirement.** These representations may be photographed and included in my dissertation.
3. **Benefits:** The benefits of participation in this study to you include the opportunity to share how art has impacted your life. Little research has been done on how adults make meaning through art, and your participation in this study may be of interest to several fields of study including adult education, psychology, art, and gerontology.
4. **Duration/Time:** If you agree to be contacted for further questions, I will meet with you face to face in a conference or meeting room at an art center; Penn State Harrisburg; or in your home. I could also conduct the interview by phone. We will meet only the one time, and possibly a second if a follow up meeting is agreed to. The interview will last anywhere from 60 minutes to two hours.
5. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. No personally identifiable information will be shared because your name is in no way linked to your responses. All meetings and interviews will be audio recorded so that I can ensure accuracy in analysis of conversations. Any feedback given in my dissertation will be

summarized and confidential. I will store the audio-tape in a locked file in my home office and keep the tape for 3 years. At the end of the three years, I will destroy the tape (Fall 2014). The data gathered from your individual interview will be stored and secured in my home in a password protected computer file. My advisor, and a transcriptionist will be the only other people having access to the data collected for this study, including the audio-tapes. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

6. **Right to Ask Questions:** You can ask questions about this research. Please contact Irma Hunt at (717) 791-9598 or email [Ilh105@psu.edu](mailto:Ilh105@psu.edu) with questions or concerns about this study.
7. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be retired and engaging in visual art to take part in this research study.

If you agree to take part in the research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below

\_\_\_\_\_ I **give** my permission to be Audio taped.

\_\_\_\_\_ I **do not give** my permission to be Audio taped.

\_\_\_\_\_ I **give** my permission for my artwork to be included in Irma Hunt's dissertation.

\_\_\_\_\_ I **do not give** my permission for my artwork to be included in Irma Hunt's dissertation.

Printed Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of Researcher: Irma Hunt (Principal Investigator)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please sign both copies. Retain one for your records or future reference and hand the other one to Irma Hunt, the principal investigator at the time of the interview.

## APPENDIX B

### Sample Questions:

**I am preparing a simple script that I will use to start off with everyone with a reminder of what my research is about; I will add they don't need to answer any particular question if they don't want to; that I want it to be somewhat informal; not particularly interested in "quantifying" things but more in getting their insights and perspectives; etc.**

**Before we delve more into the arts focus or this course I'm wondering if you could mention the type of work (not in much detail) you did, and when you retired. After that, I will say that retirement means lots of things to different people, but "how would you define what it means for you?"**

1. What are some recreation activities that you have done since you have retired? Did you do these things before you retired? How often (weekly, monthly, yearly?) Where any of these in the arts?
2. Can you briefly tell me about the any classes or workshops you are taking? ...what prompted you to sign up for it? Here I can also explore how involved (or interested) someone might have been in similar initiatives prior to retirement-because part of what I am interested in exploring is any change facilitated by or as a result of retirement.
3. Have you been involved in art, music, or theatre your whole life? Have you been a supporter or participant in fine arts activities? What role does art play in your life?

4. Do you think of yourself as creative? What would it take to view yourself as creative?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. How did taking an art class (or engaging in art) come about for you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. Is this something that you do by yourself, or do you sign up with friends?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. How does creating art make you feel? Or something like “give me three adjectives that describe how you feel when you are engaged with creating art.” Positive response; proceed to question 8 OR moderate to negative response skip to question 13.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. What are the personal benefits are you deriving from taking an art class from your perspective?



15. Do you share your art that you create with anyone? Can you think about a time when you shared your art with someone? What were the circumstances, and how did doing so make you feel?
  
16. Have you ever thought about or could you see yourself someday selling art?
  
17. Have you ever donated your work to charity or to benefit others?
  
18. What piece of artwork do you like best and why?
  
19. Have you experienced any drawbacks or downsides to taking art classes?
  
20. What does retirement mean to you?
  
21. What is your metaphor for aging?

22. Can you share an art piece that represents your retirement? Since I'm not sure that the art they have created would necessarily have anything to do with retirement as a topic/subject, perhaps something like: "If someone asked you to create a piece of art that symbolizes what retirement means for you, what might you imagine creating?"

Please complete the following questions regarding demographics. You may decline to answer any question by leaving it blank.

1. What is your age?

- Under 50
- 50-55
- 56-60
- 61-70
- 71-80
- 80 or older

2. What is your sex?

- Male
- Female

3. What is your marital status?

- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Living with a friend or relative
- Living with Domestic Partner

5. Which one of the following best describes your race? Please check all that apply.

- Asian
- American Indian or Native American
- Black/African American
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. How many years did you spend in the workforce before retiring?

- Less than 10
- 10-15
- 16-20
- 21-29
- 30-35
- More than 35

7. How many years have you been fully retired from employment?

- 0
- 1-4
- 5-10
- More than 10

8. How long have you been engaged in art?

0

1-4

5-10

More than 10

Describe: \_\_\_\_\_

**IRMA HUNT**  
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**EDUCATION**

**Doctorate in Education, Ed.D.** Penn State University  
**Master of Business Administration**, The American University, Washington, DC  
**Master of Library and Information Science** University of Texas at Austin  
**Bachelor of Arts Degree**, University of Texas at Austin

**TEACHING/EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

<b>Assistant Professor</b> , Shippensburg University	2011- Present
<b>Graduate Research Assistant</b> , Penn State University	2009 –2011
<b>Teacher</b> , Mechanicsburg Area School District	2007 –2010
<b>Adjunct Faculty</b> , Harrisburg Area Community College	2005 - 2006; 2007- 2008
<b>Interim Library Director (Gettysburg campus)</b> Harrisburg Area Community College, Harrisburg, PA	2006 - 2007
<b>Senior Project Manager /Corporate Librarian</b> Fannie Mae, Washington, DC	1997 - 2003
<b>Research Librarian</b> , Library of Congress, Washington, DC	1996- 1997
<b>Visiting Reference Librarian / Assistant Professor</b> Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey	1996 - 1996
<b>Assistant Professor / Reference Librarian</b> <b>Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa</b>	1994 – 1996
<b>Adjunct Professor / Reference Librarian</b> Des Moines Area Community College, Des Moines, Iowa	1994 – 1995
<b>Assistant Professor / Science and Technology Reference Librarian</b> Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa	1992 – 1994

**LANGUAGES**

Fluent in Spanish.