Still a man's art world: The gendered experiences of women artists

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Abstract

The social organization of art and artistic reputation are imperative to one's success as an artist—but how does the current art world allow for women? Self-employed women pursuing artistic careers in the U.S. encounter gendered barriers both in the education/work world and from the family. I analyze interviews with 21 women artists, noting how as women became and began working as artists, they had to balance and negotiate constraints in these areas. Thus, gendered expectations appear in both personal and professional sectors of women's lives as they pursue artistic careers in contemporary society.

Keywords

gendered careers, women's studies, art, women artists, family

Introduction

Women are not often thought (by themselves or by others) to be legitimate cultural creators (Nochlin, 1989; Wolff, 1984), and women who have broken through the glass ceiling in the art world have also paid particularly dear and gendered prices through the life course. For example, in the documentary film, *Who Does She Think She Is?,* Pamela Tanner Boll (2008) notes that successful women artists across various mediums experience difficulty as they negotiate their artistic careers with the gendered expectations of becoming coupled and having children.

Historically, in the Western world, women pursuing artistic careers were often criticized as "bad women" for answering the creative call instead of devoting their full time and attention to more traditional roles of tending to family (see Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story, "The Yellow Wallpaper" [Schwartz, 1989]; also see Nochlin, 1989; Woolf, 1929). Most women who are engaged in creative endeavors in a paid work

situation face the divided consciousness brought about by frequent interruptions within the home (e.g., family and childcare demands) and the struggle to find time and other resources needed for their paid creative work.

Becoming and working as a woman artist remains a gendered issue. The social world of art is a gendered one, and can be understood as a gendered organization with multiple layers of intentional and unintentional inequality (Acker, 1990). As Christine Williams (1995b) finds that men benefit more than women, even when working in stereotypical feminine professions, I study how women fare in a career that in appearance is seemingly both woman- and family-friendly. Artistic careers are quite flexible, providing many freedoms to its workers including flexible schedules and workplaces, allowing some artists to work at home in a studio (see Bain, 2004, 2005, 2007). However, the family, as well as gendered expectations of women as primary caretakers of others, get in the way of women pursuing cultural production.

For example, women's writing is one of the most frequently studied forms of women's cultural production, and women writers emphasize their difficulties in gaining time, support and legitimacy to write (Aptheker, 1989; Bateson, 1990; Olsen, 1978; Russ, 1983; Wreyford, 2015), particularly in the face of familial duties. Olsen (1978, p.13) documents the centuries of loss in cultural production by women writers, what she terms the *silences* resulting from the missed opportunities to express themselves through creative acts. Women called to write often could pursue their passion only part-time. Ferriss (1999, p.55) supports this position, observing, "I have no time! It is the writer's—especially the women writer's—most frequent complaint." Women writers' reflec-

tions lend insight to other forms of women's cultural production. Most face the divided consciousness brought about by frequent interruptions within the home and the struggle to find time and other resources needed for their creative work. Do women face similar barriers as "women artists" in various mediums?

This paper is part of a larger body of research focused on the everyday life of men and women artists in two regions in the U.S., and I focus here on the twenty-one women in the larger study. The purpose of this research is to understand the gendered artistic career process for women artists, and in doing so, I center on the experience of the woman artist, regardless of her particular medium. I examine the gendered pathways toward artistic careers, and discuss potential barriers that women face as they pursue artistic careers (like family, education, and lack of career opportunity). My research questions include: Do gendered expectations affect career choice and success in "independent careers" such as artist? Does gender limit career choice and success for self-employed women artists?

The contribution of this work is threefold. First, I study the artistic career in a qualitative way, and center on the artists' experiences in an exploratory fashion. Second, this research is designed intentionally to include a variety of artistic mediums, to encourage the conceptualization of "artist" to have more commonalities within the career choice. Third, I focus only on women's experiences here, and I use qualitative methods. Others may have used large scale quantitative datasets from government and economic sources muddying the gendered experiences that I am interested in capturing. Therefore, I keep the woman artist at the center, allowing her to reveal both the positive and negative elements of becoming

a woman artist in contemporary U.S. society through interviews and participant observation. In other words, I conceptualize the process of becoming an artist to be a gendered one for all women (and men) pursuing this career choice.

Literature Review

» Gendered Cultural Production

Culture scholars continue to imply that the production of culture is gender-neutral, rather than gender-laden. That is, scholars discuss artists' lives (Fine, 2004), or study art communities or the art world (Becker, 1982) using generic terms, and often defaulting to men's experiences but not explicitly stating so (Lingo & Tepper, 2013). This "men-as-default" language and analysis effectively clouds the possible gender benefits and inequalities that may exist in choosing an artistic career.

This gender-neutral trend is starting to change, with the earlier work of Lang and Lang (1988, 1990, 1993), who center on differences between men's and women's experiences in building and maintaining successful artistic reputations, and Tuchman (1984) and Tuchman and Fortin (1980, 1989), who explore the gendered patterns present historically in opportunities provided to men and women in the novel publishing industry. Bain (2007) studies heterosexual men who are negotiating fatherhood as visual artists, the importance of a private studio space to women artists (Bain, 2004), and the development of an artistic identity as it relates to their professional selves (Bain, 2005). Flisbäck (2013) notes in a census-level study of 20,000 Swedish artists that the artistic lifestyle burdens women in terms of work-life balance; Wreyford (2015) studies the gendered structure facing women

screenwriters in the UK; and Tamboukou's (2010) narrative analysis of UK women artists reveals that women are presented various "lines of flight" in order to leave an artistic career. Gendered expectations shape entry into the profession, training, (choice of) medium, and response by audiences (Dickie, 1996; Peterson, 1997). Recent work continues to examine the intersection between gender and culture, with an important focus on non-economic aspects of the culture industry (Schippers, 2002; Taylor & Littleton, 2008).

When scholars study privatized domains or leisure activities as sites of non-economic cultural production, the emphasis is typically on male-dominated activities, with women viewed as supporters of their families' sports and leisure interests (Chafetz & Kotarba, 1995; Thompson, 1999). Moreover, even more marginalized forms of cultural production, (e.g., "women's art" or non-economic cultural production) typically take place outside the public eye, through routine, everyday activities (Parker, 1984; Stalp, 2007, 2015; Stalp & Winge, 2008). While traditional women's work provides key sites for studying cultural production, little research centers on women as cultural producers in their own right, or men as cultural producers who create their art work through subjective rather than professional careers.

» Gendered Careers

The predominant focus of most gender and work scholars centers on how men and women fare comparatively within the workplace, and work/family balance issues (Moran, 2004; Stalp, 2015). As work is one of the most important social institutions in which both men and women interact, this research is crucial to identifying patterns of inequity and discrimination, both inten-

tional and unintentional (Acker, 1990). For example, Patricia Martin (2003) notes that the workplace is a gendered one. In her qualitative exploration of the corporate office, Martin (2003) reveals how both overt and covert sexism works to privilege men and disadvantage women, and how both men and women are somewhat unaware of the power of covert inequality. In Louise Roth's (2003) qualitative examination of women working on Wall Street, she finds that even when women are in the same positions as men, that the gendered workplace influences client base and salary compensation negatively for women; and that sex segregation prevents women from moving up the corporate ladder at the same rates as their male counterparts (Roth, 2004).

Careers have long been thought to benefit one gender or another, but men continue to out-earn women in the U.S. (American Association of University Women, 2015), even though women outnumber men in college and university (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2015). In the workplace, men advance faster than women even in traditionally female professions (C. Williams, 1992, 1995a, 1995b). Conversely, women entering the profession of male-dominated construction/carpentry do not feel as welcomed, having to deal with hostile climates and sometimes dangerous workplaces (Jurik & Halemba, 1984; Latack et al., 1987). Local, everyday practices in a corporate workplace often benefit men's life choices over women's life choices in sometimes very explicit, but most often in rather subtle ways (Acker, 1990; Martin, 2003). Sexism and sexist practices in the workplace are moving over time from overt to covert, and becoming even harder to see and to measure (Lorber, 2010; Martin, 2003; Moe & Shandy, 2010; Ridgeway, 2011; Tichenor, 2005; J. Williams, 2000). Despite Sheryl Sandberg

(2013) encouraging women to "lean in" to the workplace to take on more leadership opportunities, her individual-level approach to resolving hostile workplaces for women may mostly work for elite women like her. In practical terms, Sandberg's (2013) recommendations for women pursuing leadership in corporate America are not likely to trickle down to the U.S. arts communities in which I conducted my research.

Methods and Data

After securing IRB approval for the study, I spent the summer months of 2008 and 2010 in the field, conducting unstructured qualitative interviews with artists in the Midwestern and Southeastern U.S., engaging in participant observation, writing fieldnotes, and documenting artists' creative works and working spaces (e.g., studio space). As it works well with an inductive and feminist research approach, I used unstructured interviews to encourage participants to share with me what they felt was important about their artistic careers.

When I set up interviews with artists, they suggested meeting at their place of creative work, (studio space or home), and I was often given a tour before or after the interview. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to three hours. Spending time in the studio/creative space offered a view into artists' process and inspirations, as well as the opportunity to see, to an extent, how their work lives got interrupted by phone calls, and family and friends stopping by. Often the case with intensive unstructured interviews, participants discussed their creative work lives episodically rather than according to linear time (Stalp, 2007). I use pseudonyms for all study participants, as well as for the specific location of the research sites in the study.

Upon conducting an interview, and within 24 hours of it, I took elaborate field-notes to document the interview content, as well as any other observations made during the interview, including making connections to previous interview work. This "constant comparative method," also known as grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), helped me to build the study from the ground up, and keeping the artist (and her interests) central to the study. After all the interviews were conducted, and fieldnotes taken, I returned to my university and began transcribing interviews verbatim. As I analyzed each transcript, I kept in mind my field notes observations, and I began the coding process of both individual interview transcripts, and making connections between interviews.

As I analyzed the transcripts, I noted how the process of becoming an artist was important to these women artists. Women artists highlighted how they became involved in making art as a career, the importance of freedom over one's work, and also the larger economic pressures they faced as they worked creatively and somewhat independently. Repeatedly women discussed their impressions about how gender "mattered" in their line of work and throughout their lives. They noted difficulties in becoming and living as an artist, as well as negotiating career choice with family. Some women altered their career choices to include family, like teaching art while raising their children, while their spouses sought more extant and professional artistic (or other) careers. Overall, women artists stressed that trying to negotiate making art and having a family was a huge challenge.

I focus on meaning-making within the career process, so self-definition as an artist (regardless of medium) was the primary criteria for inclusion in the study. I am less concerned about differences between and within artistic media, and more interested in what artists have in common in relation to the larger definitions of career success. Some participants are currently making a living from the sale of their artwork, some are not, and some are in transition. I interviewed artists who work in the mediums of clay, fiber, glass, metal, painting, paper, photography, wood, and those supporting the industry in other ways (teaching, and store/gallery owners). In the group of 21 women interviewed (Table 1), the majority were white, heterosexual, and ranged in age from late 30s to late 70s. There were a small number of women of color, as well as bisexual and lesbian women. As my research already identifies artists by their medium, I do not reveal the race/ethnicity or sexual orientation of individuals to protect their identity and to ensure the confidentiality I promised study participants.

Findings

I conceptualize an artist to be someone who receives payment for his/her creative work (definition is not limited by medium), but may or may not rely on it as a primary source of income (Mishler, 1999). This broad definition permits the inclusion of different kinds of artists in this study, like those who may not be selling artwork right now, but have done so in the past, as well as those working part-time, and all experiences can lend insight into the working life of artists, regardless of medium. The National Endowment for the Arts estimates that there are two million artists in the U.S. (NEA, 2008a). However, this definition of artist would exclude most if not all of the participants in my study, for the NEA only consider full-time artists (with no other sup-

Table 1
Women Artist Demographic Information (N=21)

Artist	Medium	Marital Status	Full Time/ Part Time	Kids	Some Art School
Patricia	Photography	Divorced	FT	Y	Y
Elizabeth	Fiber	Married	FT	Y	Y
Susan	Fiber	Single	FT	N	Y
Margaret	Clay	Married	PT	N	Y
Dorothy	Wood	Married	FT	N	Y
Lisa	Paper and Fiber	Single	FT	N	Y
Karen	Fiber	Married	PT	N	Y
Helen	Clay	Single	PT	N	Y
Sandra	Painting	Married	FT	N	Y
Donna	Metal	Single	FT	N	Y
Ruth	Clay	Married	FT	Y	Y
Sharon	Clay	Married	FT	Y	Y
Michelle	Painting	Married	FT	Y	Y
Trisha	Fiber	Married	PT	Y	Y
Gina	Painting	Single	PT	N	Y
Diane	Gallery Owner	Married	FT	N	Y
Carol	Fiber	Married	PT	N	Y
Jane	Metal	Married	PT	Y	Y
Audrey	Fiber	Married	PT	Y	Y
Laura	Metal	Married	PT	N	Y
Sarah	Fiber	Married	PT	N	Y

plementary income) as part of the two million. This conceptualization of artist neglects to understand how many artists actually live and work in the U.S.

To continue to focus only on the "success" stories in art, or one type of artwork, neglects to understand fully the complexity of the art world, including barriers to success. Some artists define creative work on their own terms outside the measures of economic or reputational success, focusing on what are often termed "subjective careers" in the sociological literature (Evetts, 1996; Stalp, 2006).

Some define artists more narrowly, focusing on one art medium or a particular region of the country or world (Adams, 2006; Causey, 2003; Chibnik, 2003; Taylor, 2004), noting the art/craft divide in the greater art world (Racz, 2009), driven by both consumer and producer (Becker, 1982; Peterson, 1976). I highlight the commonalities within artistic careers, rather than the differences.

Out of the 21 women interviewed, 15 (71%) were married/partnered/coupled at time of interview, with seven (53%) of these married women also having step/children.

These women were more coupled than the national trends demonstrated in a recent NEA report, indicating, "In 2003-2005, 54 percent of women artists and 53 percent of all women workers were married" (2008b, p.2). The NEA report suggests that most U.S. women artists do not have children under the age of 18: "Twenty-nine percent of women artists had children under age 18, almost six percentage points lower than for women workers in general" (NEA, 2008b, p.2). Participants negotiated the demands of paid work and having a family at rates above the national level for U.S. women artists. Despite this apparent "success" of having both work and family, participants discuss the difficulties of becoming and working as artists, and blending paid work with family demands.

» Gender and Artistic Careers

Women live gendered lives as artists. All but one woman in the study indicated that she had fallen prey to the simultaneously confining and empowering moniker of "woman artist." The standard, or default gender for the career of artist seems to be male, although the noted feminist artist awareness group, the Guerilla Girls, indicate:

> There have been lots of women artists throughout Western history…. But even after overcoming incredible obstacles, women artists were usually ignored by critics and art historians—who claimed that art made by white women and people of color didn't meet their "impartial" criteria for "quality." These impartial standards place a high value on art that expresses white male experience and a low value on everything else. (Guerilla Girls, 1998, p. 8-9)

As is the case within a patriarchal society, men's experiences are considered normal, and women's not of the norm. Donna (in her 40s) is a metalworker who makes indus-

trial furniture from scrap metal, recounts a typical interaction with a less-than-ideal client based on such stereotypical gendered assumptions:

> When I first got started I heard it commonly all the time. I would see people in front of my booth, they would scan my work, they would look for the artist, and they would pass over me four or five times and then finally when they ran out of options, unless they glommed on to a person that was a man in my booth, they would say, "Well, are you the artist? I was expecting a big man!" So my patent response was that, "Well there must be a big man trapped on the inside" (laughter).

Donna's glib comment reveals her coping mechanism for constantly being overlooked as an artist, for two reasons: first, she is a woman, and women are not always thought to be artists; and second, her work in industrial furniture is not thought to be a "girly" medium. Even though Donna has succeeded as an artist, as she participates in national and regional juried shows, and enjoys regular commissions, she is still reduced to being invisible based on consumers' gendered biases about what an artist should look like.

Much in line with gender research on various social institutions, women are more likely than men to see gender disparities in everyday life and in the workplace. This research was no different, for women participants repeatedly (and without prompting from me as I used an unstructured interviewing format) noticed gender differences, and pointed out both perceived (and real) gender inequality more often than men. From my fieldnotes, Helen, a woman artist in her 30s, shared that:

> As a woman, she feels that people believe she is wasting her time, that she isn't doing anything important, that this isn't "real" work, and that she has to constantly prove herself

through her work to others. Her family is worried/nervous that she is an artist, but more worried that she is not married and not having babies. When I asked her what her art life would look like with a spouse and kids, she said that it scared her to even think about not having time to spend in the studio, and that although she might have insurance and benefits from a spouse's job if she were married, that not making art would be awful. She has to make art. If she works regularly, she is fine, when she is out of town it gets into her head and bothers her. (Fieldnotes, 2008)

These comments reveal a number of concerns, including the "artist is not a career" discussion that many artists have faced and continue to encounter. Helen's family considers her a potential wage earner, which is certainly a sign of progress from the early to mid-20th century notions regarding women's paid work. Yet, her family also envisions her as a potential mother—their concerns center on her perhaps not having children *because* she is an artist.

This implies an inherent incongruity between these two roles. It seems that there is an assumption that one cannot be both an artist and part of a family, as a partner and/or a mother—are these roles incompatible? For example, in the documentary film *Who Does She Think She Is?*, Boll (2008) juxtaposes women artists within the tangible double constraints of artistic career and family obligations, noting that putting one's career in a place of importance challenges the family. Despite the presumed flexibility, the artistic career demands time and attention that might be devoted to family, putting a woman artist in a difficult position.

» Choosing Art as a Career

Choosing art as a career is daunting, especially for those who are presented limited choices to begin with (most often women

and the working-class), and who are not advised that higher education is realistic option. Dorothy, a woodworker now in her 60s, discusses the guidance she received in high school regarding her career:

I wasn't encouraged in school. I just thought I was an ordinary person, nothing that special, so up to like 12th year of school, I was thinking I would have to choose between hairdresser, waitress and what else was there—secretary. Any one of them I could not have survived and so it was just really lucky for me that the world starting opening up. It was this older looking woman who was the guidance counselor who asked me about half-way through my senior year, "Are you going to school? Are you going to college?" And I said, "College? Y'know I'm poor." We didn't go to college when you were poor and I just thought, "Oh if I could only go to college, she says you can!" And she talked me into it and from then on it was like lifting a house off your shoulder. Wow, I don't have to fight so much. I can actually do what I want to do, and be what I want to be.

Fortunately, Dorothy eventually received encouragement to attend college from an influential guidance counselor. Support for becoming an artist can also come from other social institutions, like family. And, family, like other social institutions, has gendered biases present. Here Dorothy shares that her older brother, an artist, was encouraged constantly by her family to be an artist, but she was not:

My older brother is an artist. Yeah, I did sort of have a model, of course it was a guy, it was easy for him, everybody accepted it, he could swim downstream, and I had to swim upstream, and I had to fight for everything I could get. My brother is very unique, he was not supportive of me, like a lot of artists he was incredibly self-absorbed and I just admired him.

Dorothy points out some very clear gendered differences within her family regarding the career choice of artist. Although her family members readily accepted her brother for pursuing art, she was not supported in her choice to become an artist. Dorothy states that her brother did not support her, either—even though he was pursuing an artistic career himself. As Dorothy indicates, "I had to swim upstream, and I had to fight for everything I could get," she notes the differential and unfair treatment her family placed upon her and her brother in choosing the same career.

Similarly, Helen is in her mid-30s, and she saw her artist uncle as a role model as she worked to become an artist. Helen attended college for ceramics, and after graduation, she began trying to make it as an artist. She started working a few part-time jobs along with making and selling art, and over time, she increased her creative work and reduced the number of side jobs. Although Helen considers herself a successful artist at this point (at time of interview, Helen was "only working one part-time job" in addition to making/selling work full-time), she says this about familial support: "I think they're [family] still nervous because I think it's this thing… I'm not married. They're nervous because I'm unmarried and I'm an artist…. I just laugh…and actually I'm in love with my life." Despite having an artist in the family as an example of a successful career choice, Helen has had to work against her family's gendered expectations of marriage/children, with the career choice of artist coming last.

All respondents found themselves studying art in college, either in formal ways (such as attending an art school), by majoring in art at university (not necessarily matriculating), or taking art classes on the side. The majority of participants faced important decisions: Can I make a living from this career choice, and can I be an artist and have a family too? Additionally, participants note how they faced double pressures. In addition to making a living many were expected to work as teachers, not artists, by their family and friends, in order to make ends meet. Women discussed how their families also expected them to have a traditional life of marriage and family, feeling the traditional gender expectations placed upon them.

According to those participants who received formal instruction (e.g., art school), higher education was a gendered place where women felt they were being treated unequally by their peers and professors. When Lisa studied art in the 1970s, she noticed how unequal things were in terms of women being considered legitimate art students as compared to their male counterparts:

> I just remember when I was in art school, the classes were like 90 percent female but the few guys that were in the class that I was in—you'd go out to the bar and there would be the professor and the male students sitting there having a beer and the professor's like, "I can get you in this gallery out in NYC" and I mean they just figured that was a serious artist because he was a guy and all of us were there for an "M-R-S" and we'd dabble in art while we were doing it and they were just being taken seriously.

Arts communities continue to have different expectations for artists and non-artists, although perhaps not as strictly defined as Lisa experienced in her art school education, the seemingly different tracks for women and men in the same program. However, in his rich ethnographic study of the Chicago Wicker Park artistic neighborhood, Lloyd notes in similar ways that gender can still matter in today's arts communities. For example, Lloyd (2006, p.174) points out that recognized artists in Chicago's Wicker Park neighborhood characterized the not-yet-rec-

ognized artists or non-artists as "artsluts." Artsluts were people who hung around artists in arts communities, willing to do the boring work that artists either did not want to do, or did not have time to do—in other words, wanna-bes or hang-ons or fans. It is unclear whether or not this term is applied to both men and women non-artists, but the term certainly carries with it a power differential, and a gendered connotation, and matches well with Lisa's descriptions of "serious artist" versus those who "dabbled in" art as having some hint of gendered nuance to it.

Importantly, the majority of women in this study engaged in teaching art (usually to children) before or in conjunction with pursuing an artistic career. For example, Lisa is in her 60s and works in paper and fiber. When Lisa pursued art in college, her family was supportive that she was going to college, but not necessarily that she was studying art as they would have preferred she studied something more useful. While in college, Lisa's family strongly suggested she take a "safe" route of studying education so that she could work as a teacher in the K-12 system, and she did so. Lisa began her artistic career teaching children art in the K-12 system, while her peers were pursuing their own art-making careers. Even though Lisa has supported herself as an artist for many years (and not as a teacher as she began her career doing), her family members still continue to evaluate her career solely on economic success:

> I got discouraged from being an artist in my family even though my role model was an uncle, he was a commercial artist and he made good money but they just told me that I would starve (and I kinda did). But they said okay you can take art in college but you've got to get a teaching degree, which is fine because I love teaching and I taught

art for many years. There was no encouragement at all, it was considered a frivolous thing, and not a real thing, and even now if I got a "real job" they'd be a lot more proud of me or something. I think if I told them that I was making $100K a year then they'd be impressed but they know I'm struggling financially so it's not a real job.

Lisa's situation is not unusual if you consider she came from a working-class background. As Morris and Grimes (1996) suggest in their research, working class parents are leery of their children's collegiate pursuits if they veer from "practical."

Sharon's situation is similar to Lisa's in that she began her art career teaching children, then went on to pursue her own interests. Sharon's college training was in art education, and after teaching art in the K-12 education system while raising kids, she retired and began her second career as a ceramicist. With careful negotiation with her husband about how their retirement would include her second career as an artist, Sharon (now in her late 50s) considers his and her family's response to be very positive:

> They were ecstatic. Well, very supportive. My husband could have been ugly about it and he wasn't. He's been extremely supportive. I think we were both a little nervous about how things were going to be, and it was kind of a little rough there initially. But once I got here and I got settled in a routine that was comfortable for me and he saw that I was still coming home when I said I was going to. I think he was relieved. He settled into it.

Sharon was able to have a family and work in art education, then devote her full attention to making artwork upon retirement. As for multiple artists in this study, the development of her artistic career came later in life.

» Negotiating Art with Life

Regarding issues of marriage and family among study participants, marriage/partnership was prevalent with the majority of participants having been coupled at some point in their adult lives. Less than half of the participants had either biological or adopted children, yet this was still higher than what is represented at the national level for the average U.S. woman artist: "Only 29% had children under age 18" (NEA, 2008b, p.2). To the extent that other artists share Helen's belief that women artists are "fine" if they work regularly, then traditional family models that include spouses and children might not be conducive to an artistic lifestyle in regards to time. Helen's fears of how family may interfere with artistic production might be justified. Additionally, Patricia, in her late 70s, describes her long-term artistic career as something she did amongst working additional jobs while raising her family: "I worked off and on in photography, in various ways. But I've also had to do other work in order to support my kids. They are of course grown now and gone and on their own."

Putting the artistic career first (and above other life course choices) is important for many of the women in the study, both for those who have chosen to not have children, and for those who have. Here Ruth suggests that putting career first is important in living as a successful artist:

> I still think our creative…I mean you hear it all the time, you see it in these kinds of magazines, women who are wanting to do their art but maybe they don't. And it does take a passion and a drive. I mean you have to be willing to put it above everything. It's not an hourly thing.

Another factor weighing in on women artists' lives is, of course, the pressure to have a traditional family. Helen discusses how much more difficult working as an artist would be with the addition of family:

> Helen: It's hard when you're married and have kids. If you have no dependents you're like, okay, I can do this. When you get kids and…
>
> *I: So how hard would this be for you to do— have a partner and kids?*
>
> Helen: I don't know. I don't even want to think about it. Scares me to death…and I know that your perspective sort of changes when you become a mother and you know, sort of the myths we think it's going to suck and actually it's not so bad but I do dread it and I guess it depends where you're at.

Helen's fears about complicating her life with a partner and children indicate that she puts her career first, as many other artists do.

Ruth is in her late 50s, and studied ceramics at an expensive art school when she was younger. She dropped out of art school partly because of lack of family support: "It was not okay to do art because you're going to starve…. My family were just not supportive. I mean, 'Go learn to be a receptionist or beautician or secretary.' …I couldn't wait to get out of that environment." In comparison, Audrey is in her 30s and she works in clay and fiber, and is trying to get support for the arts started in her small community. Here Audrey discusses how she feels pulled between working as an artist, and her family:

> It was coming to terms with what I thought I wanted and what I really wanted and realizing that even as a local studio artist it was going to be really hard to have time for my work, and have time for my family, and that there is this part of art that makes you throw your entire being into it that can be really exclusive of thinking about anyone else… but here I am with two little kids, and so I just put it on the back burner again. I tend

to get overwhelmed and I put it on the back burner.

Sharon started her artistic education in similar ways as the other women in the study, but chose to marry and have kids after meeting her husband in art school. Near the end of each interview, I asked participants what advice (if any) they would give to someone considering art as a career. From this interview transcript, Sharon talks about what it was like to be an artist:

> Sharon: It's a real exciting adventure. It's like a whole other life, a whole other face that you know I thought might be possible when I was younger but I was never… because I had a family I could never, I was never comfortable with just cutting loose and just being an artist full time.
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> I: What do you think it would have been like to try to do this and raise kids at the same time?
>
> Sharon: I think it would have been very scary. It was very important for me for my children to feel safe and secure. My husband and I were both working to make you know a comfortable environment for our kids to grow up in. So you know, I did the Scout leader thing here and I was in charge of the arts and the crafts part of it. I mean so it was incorporated into our daily living and my husband and I met in art school. And so for a lot of things that we did, our life was just full of art-related experiences. So it wasn't like I was going to a job where I was you know just doing something mundane just every day and hating it because I feel like I had the best of both worlds really. I feel very, very fortunate. Now I feel even more fortunate.

These women artists' experiences demonstrate the difficulty of negotiating career and family, and they also indicate that even becoming and working as an artist is somewhat difficult. Adding gendered family expectations to these women's lives results in careers that must be measured subjectively. For many women the artistic career is shoved amidst family duties, while for others it is put away and taken back out after they have finished raising their children. Although the workplace is not as traditional for these self-employed women, the traditions of gender remain.

Discussion

Interviewing women artists within and across mediums in two arts communities in the U.S. reveals that they are collectively facing similar barriers in terms of becoming and being considered artists. The artistic career is difficult for women to build and manage regardless of medium and can be understood as a gendered career (Acker, 1990). These women artists in multiple age cohorts universally encountered gendered barriers to becoming artists, including resistance from family members, within formal artistic training, making decisions about marriage and family, and negotiating already-made decisions regarding marriage and family. And for some of these women, all of these gendered barriers were present at some point in their lives. Women at all ages participating in the study easily volunteered information about gender inequality in their paid work lives and were able to point out multiple negative gendered experiences as they pursued artistic careers. Certainly this is not surprising to gender scholars, as those in the lesser position in the gender binary are more likely to "see" gender, to see it as an unequal situation, and perhaps to develop coping strategies.

Women artists deal with the conflict of choosing to make a living in art against the larger definitions of work and success, which are further negotiations with gendered ex-

pectations of women in contemporary society. Gender becomes a notable component to women artists' lives, with women noticing gender differences (i.e., inequalities) in terms of being considered an artist. Women's experiences and perspectives discussed here demonstrate clearly that an art career is still a man's world, for gendered expectations appear in both the personal and professional sectors of women's lives as they pursue artistic careers.

Working as an artist, women who had not yet married or had children experienced significant pressures from family who indicated more comfort with a traditional career and lifestyle. Some talked about their fears regarding living a traditional life, as it would interfere with their artistic career. Highlighting what Helen said earlier about marriage and kids: "I don't even want to think about it. Scares me to death," the artistic career requests a great deal of time, attention, and focus, and as it is not an hourly career, the artist must make art when they can. Women artists also discuss the challenges of balancing work and family life—most participants who do participate in traditional family activities have done so at the expense of their artistic development, for as Audrey stated, "But here I am with two little kids, and so I just put it [my artistic career] on the back burner again."

The career trajectory for all the women in the study included some exposure to formal art education as a way in which to enter the art world on a professional basis, and for some women in the study, this meant majoring in art education instead of art, to prepare for an initial career of teaching children art in schools before pursuing art on one's own. The pervasiveness of gender inequality as these women pursued higher education was noticeable. For example, Lisa felt her professors thought she was in college

not to obtain a degree like a serious artist would, but instead was there to dabble in art to pursue an M-R-S degree. A number of women obtained a more practical degree like arts education so that they could work (or marry and have children) before working successfully as artists. Women are choosing in their younger years to fit family and children into their lives, thus the arts education degree serves such a purpose.

While conceptualizing an art career in a broad context (e.g., including high and low art, as well as full- and part-time workers), it might appear to be a woman-friendly career. The majority of art students in the U.S. are women (as are most college students on campus in the U.S.) (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2015), art can be done in a part-time fashion, and one usually has a great deal of control over work hours, especially if one has continual studio or workspace access (Bain, 2004, 2005, 2007). On paper it seems that one can manage an art career relatively easily along with managing a family. However, women artists revealed a number of barriers and disadvantages, including lacking family support to pursue an artistic career, and experiencing discrimination in education and training. Once identified as artists, women experienced regular dismissal of their work, limiting their professional development, and supporting themselves with (sometimes multiple) better paying jobs as they strove to build a viable client base. Study participants discuss the difficulties of how their seemingly workable choice of artist actually conflicted with family demands, revealing that the artistic career remains a gendered one.

Artistic careers present themselves to workers as providing great freedoms such as flexible schedules, the ability to work from home, and the like. However, in this research study participants reveal that artistic

careers are unfortunately laden with barriers, and these barriers matter especially for women who are trying to "make it work" in what still seems very much to be a man's world. Artistic careers share great similarities to what we consider more traditional careers (e.g., office work) in that there are stages of gendered stops that women must encounter and overcome throughout the course of their careers. ■

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