Sinister Creativity: A Phenomenological Exploration of Some of the Experiences and Perceptions of Six Lefthanded Visual Artists.

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Abstract

Six lefthanded artist-educators were interviewed to attempt to discover any patterns to their perceptions and experiences. Artists have their own culture and priorities. According to the literature, lefthanded people appear more likely to suffer from dyslexia, allergies, asthma and other auto-immune diseases as well as machinery and equipment injuries. Patterns emerging suggested that lefthanded people indeed suffer more from dyslexia. More startling was the distinct possibility that many artists have traumatic childhood histories. This would commonly include negative school experiences, and for a significant number sexual assault, perceived or actual abandonment by parents, and/or consistently low self-esteem. The researcher discovered possible reasons why creative people frequently have problems at school, why they tend to be rebellious and anti-establishment oriented, how many of them perceive societal rules, and why they are more likely to be lefthanded. These characteristics all have significant implications for art school administrators.
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Finally, my thanks are due to those six remarkable artists who collaborated with me on this study. They were very generous with their time, their honesty, their trust, and their emotions. We had a wonderful time, but more importantly they helped me to be able to see artists in quite a different way. I now have considerably more admiration, more understanding, more empathy and more affection for these people in particular but also I think for creative people in general. I am also envious of their capacity for passion and excitement.
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CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

This is a study of some of the self-reported experiences and perceptions of several visual artists. Its intent was to discover whether they have similar experiences and think alike on a variety of topics as the lay person might expect of stereotypical "artists". It also explored the possibility that sinister (i.e., lefthanded) artists report as significant certain traits identified in the literature concerning lefthandedness.

Background of the Problem

Although I was raised in an artistic family I always thought that artists were people just like the rest of us who had the additional ability to make art. Those artists I knew were indeed often a little eccentric and tended to lead alternately a very relaxed and a very frenetic lifestyle, but I considered these to be personal idiosyncrasies. However, two seminal studies of well-established, creative artists (referred to initially as the "creative artists" and then as the "Berkeley artists") and of art students reported on by Winner and Casey (1992) made me think again.

The creative artists, as well as the most creative individuals in other fields, consistently emerged as strong, willful, controlling, and self-centred. They rejected authority, disregarded how others judged them, and were guided only by their own (high) internal standards. They were labeled highly autonomous, thought in new and original ways, and were characterized by
considerable ego strength. (p. 155)

A further study of students at a leading American art school was cited, finding these students to be...

...extremely self-sufficient and highly driven. Their motivation for art was more intense than that of students in academic disciplines, and the art students were highly intrinsically motivated. Like the Berkeley artists, the art students rejected the standard values of their culture. The Berkeley artists scored low on measures of affiliation, deference, socialization, responsibility, and self-control. Similarly, the art students rejected established morality, felt themselves to be alienated from society, and explicitly rejected the two dominant values of their culture: material well-being and sociability. Like theology students planning to devote themselves to religion, the art students were single-minded in their valuing of art as the only thing worth living for. Thus, artists' value system was shown to be a key aspect of their personality, and it proved critical in distinguishing artists from other individuals.

... These persons gained satisfaction not only from their identification as artists, but also in their avoidance of conventional roles - in their negative identification as atypical, unconventional members of their society.

... the most successful students in art school were distinguished most clearly by their questioning attitude. These most original students were ones who were problem finders, rather than simply clever problem
solvers. That is, the essence of their creative style lay in their tendency to
set challenges for themselves, to pose problems to which they did not
know the answer, and then to struggle to find a solution. (Winner & Casey,
1992, p. 156)

However, in a later follow up study Getzels (1987) reported “only a small
positive relationship between problem-finding and success as an artist” (cited in
possible that some of these researchers misunderstood their artist populations?
Is it possible to generalize about the culture of artists? Do all artists subscribe to
this value system, and are its values universal amongst artists? Working with
artists as I do every day, I felt that I needed to understand them better, so I
decided to undertake some research in order to suggest some answers to these
questions.

**Problem Statement**

Artists are often considered to belong to a culture of their own - to be
“different”. This study investigated whether visual artists tend to report similar
experiences or a common attitude towards the world and their experiences in it,
and perhaps an identifiable value system which sets them apart from non-artists.
It also attempted to discover through analysis of their own stories whether the
participants studied identify proudly with any typically artistic characteristics or
whether these appear to be unconscious attributes of their personality.
Sub Problem

This study further attempted to discover whether left-handed visual artists perceive that they differ significantly in their experiences and/or approach to the world compared with their righthanded colleagues.

Research questions

Within the context of these problem statements several research questions were formulated to help guide the research:

1. Why is art important and what does it mean to you?
2. How do you see the interaction between the artist and his/her culture?
3. How do you function as an artist?
4. What childhood experiences stand out most vividly for you?
5. What is being left-handed like for you?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to attempt to understand the world through the eyes of a number of visual artists, and from this narrative data further attempt to discover common emergent themes and patterns which may help to explain their lived experiences or perceptions. Or as Patton (1990) defines phenomenological inquiry, to discover “What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?” (p. 69). A subsidiary objective was to discover whether left-handed artists perceive themselves to be in any way different, either disadvantaged or having an extra advantage, because they have
to deal with a world designed for righthanded people.

Rationale

From an institutional point of view it is probable that the thought processes of artists and the way in which they choose to interact with their communities are not always well understood by those communities. The bureaucracy of any organization will expect a certain orderliness and linear thinking, which may not necessarily be qualities which the majority of artists can offer. What happens when an artist's value system does not coincide with those of his or her community? Sometimes this is of no real importance, but at others it can be a serious impediment to the running of that community. Artists working as art instructors for an institution, for example, clearly have to be part of that community with designated, and accepted, responsibilities and obligations. However, if the institution expects certain attitudes and behaviours from its employees and yet artists respond to the world differently from non-artists the result is likely to be to the detriment of the institution; at best inefficiency, with varying degrees of anarchy. In my experience there are many artists who are extremely supportive of their local communities, but there are also many who insist on playing the game by their own rules; artists who challenge authority on principle.

Many artists not only produce art but also teach art, both to generate scarce income and also because of their love for and dedication to their subject. By doing so, they are naturally passing on to some extent their views and
perceptions of society and their place within it, thus helping to shape the attitudes of future artists. How they interface with the world is therefore highly significant because they are not only participating in but are also perpetuating the artist culture. Participants in this study were chosen for this reason. As will be discussed in the review of the literature, the participants may also be of particular interest because lefthandedness may bring its own problems, not only in dealing with tools and machinery but also perhaps in relation to health and learning disabilities.

This study explored the perceptions of six visual artists and some of their experiences in their world in an attempt to discover a reported (although perhaps unconscious) common value system. It concentrated its focus by using participants who teach art in addition to being working artists in their own right. In addition, and as a sub-problem to the main focus, the parameters were further narrowed to those artists who are lefthanded, in an attempt to discover common participant perspectives or lived experiences which may be a direct result of a non-right dominance.

**Importance of the Study**

As a result of this study it should be possible to acquire a deeper understanding of the perceptions and experiences of these six lefthanded artists. Although such a phenomenological study cannot be assumed to be generalizable it may nevertheless offer some clues as to the perceptions and experiences of other such artists as well. Such an understanding is important,
because an institution like a large art school cannot function competently unless it recognizes to some extent, and comes to terms with, the way in which artists view their world. For cooperation and interaction between the institution and individual artist-instructors to be maximized both parties must understand and tolerate the other's perspective. They must be prepared to work together instead of against each other in pursuing common pedagogical and andragogical goals.

If art school administrators and artists (both art instructors and art students) espouse different and perhaps even mutually exclusive value systems, misunderstandings, resentment and non-cooperation will be inevitable. In a similar vein, if it is likely that lefthanded artists feel that they have to fight not only a righthanded world which every day presents them with physical difficulty and frustration but also an insensitive bureaucracy which does not understand their needs as artists, perhaps both the students and the institution as a whole have a problem which needs to be recognized and addressed.

A phenomenological study such as this cannot be generalized to a larger population, but it may very well shed some light on a subject to which educators appear to have given little consideration; the artist's perception and experience of his or her own world. Greater understanding of these perceptions and/or experiences by educators could lead to improved teaching methods and better communication with artists (and in particular with lefthanded art students or faculty) who otherwise may be at some risk of being marginalized and misunderstood. Both theory and practice may perhaps therefore be influenced by the results of this study, if only by encouraging both educators and artists to
communicate more effectively.

**Scope and Delimitation of the Study**

This study is not concerned with quantification, except perhaps with the degree of lefthandedness of the participants as measured on Annett's (1970) survey instrument. Neither does it seek to measure attitudes against any published rating scales; it is not a psychological study per se. Rather, it seeks to discover, using the participants' own words, whether they think differently or alike on a number of issues involving their interaction with the everyday world. It also seeks to discover whether lefthanded artists report experiences and perceptions which they have in common with each other.

**Limitations and Assumptions**

According to Patton (1990) the first and vital phase of phenomenological analysis is that of Epochè; the process of examining and attempting to deliberately set aside previous assumptions and prejudices in order to deal with the incoming data with a truly open mind.

I know some of these participants quite well, and others hardly at all. It must be stated that my position at the educational institution is in administrative management, in charge of health, safety, and security, while the participants are or have been faculty who sometimes feel that administrative controls impede the making of art. I recognize, therefore, that since I was not an unknown and neutral participant in this research our interaction was coloured by our various
roles within the institution. It would not be surprising in the circumstances to find an observer effect where some of the responses from these participants were guarded, or even slanted in a direction perceived by the participant to be appropriate in the circumstances. However, relatively little of this kind of behaviour was recognized. A good rapport was established and participants seemed to feel that they could trust me in the process of co-researching their stories, and in fact I was initially startled and somewhat taken aback at the candour with which many of them told their stories. However, it must be recognized that this study was very dependent on the willingness and ability of the participants to share their perceptions and experiences in an honest and useful way.

My father has been a professional artist (and occasional art teacher) all his life, and my siblings are or were all professional craftspeople. My mother is not artistic but is profoundly lefthanded. I share none of these characteristics, but have known a number of artists over the years. From these experiences I have therefore developed a number of observations on the general culture of artists which may, or may not, prove to be stereotypes. During the interview process care was taken not to put these concepts in the mouths of the participants. If they exist they were likely to emerge naturally, and if they do not exist that too is significant. Recognizing my inevitable subjectivity, I recorded those observations before the Pilot Study interviews to help me “bracket my biases” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) during the study, and these personal perceptions on the culture of artists follow.
I suspect that artists are often anti-establishment and rebellious, need to be seen as different, delight to shock or to be eccentric. They tend to be politically aware and left-wing, have an extreme aversion to business dealings, paperwork, legislation, and people in suits. They are casual and informal in dress, in manner and in lifestyle. Artists are often driven to make art as some kind of compulsion, and frequently work at strange hours, are poorly-nourished and sleep-deprived. Their work style alternates between days or weeks of working very hard (often for long hours) at their art, followed by days or weeks of artistic inaction. They have relatively few material possessions and are financially often below the poverty line. They frequently take outside jobs unrelated to their art so that they can subsidize what they really want to do. Finally, it is more common than I believe they realize for their health to be adversely affected by their art materials and processes. In addition to these assumptions, I suggest that it is reasonable to expect that lefthanded people may have had some difficulty learning to write (or even being allowed to write) lefthanded in a school of largely righthanded people.

This is a phenomenological study of six artists, and so is valid for only these six. Unlike a good quantitative study it will not be possible to generalize to a population of all lefthanded visual artists who are also part-time instructors. We all construct our worlds based on our perceptions and experiences, and so “truth” and “reality” are necessarily different constructions for all of us (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Statistically this study is not generalizable, but depending upon the patterns which emerge it may be possible to predict that some of them will be
common amongst artists. Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker & Mulderij (1983) suggest, "phenomenologists believe that in most cases there are very likely to be similarities in the reactions of different people to similar circumstances" (p. 62). The authoritative Glaser and Strauss (1967) remind us that "A single case can indicate a general conceptual category or property; a few more cases can confirm the indication" (p. 30).

Summary of Chapter One and Outline of Subsequent Chapters

This study attempted to discover through qualitative analysis of their narratives some common patterns and themes as to how visual artists view and experience some aspects of their world. A special focus is given to the relatively small proportion of the population who create art with a dominant left hand in order to ascertain whether they may have any particular handicaps or abilities resulting from their lefthandedness.

Chapter Two will review selected literature dealing with lefthanded people and with artists. In Chapter Three the methodology to be used in this study will be presented and discussed. The data analysis will be presented in Chapter Four, and finally in Chapter Five the results of the study will be summarized and discussed, and recommendations made for further research.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This study has two foci, the first being to discover something of the personal history and culture or value system of artists, as perceived by themselves. The second is to go beyond that and try to find whether there are any other perceptions or experiences which lefthanded people hold in common. The literature reviews are intended to summarize the research deemed to be significant and relevant to these topics.

Review of Selected Literature on the Culture of Artists

The literature was reviewed largely before the interviews took place, but I did not attempt to sort the reviews into subheadings until after the themes emerged and I began to write. Most of these subheadings therefore reflect the emergent themes.

The need to explore

For thirty years Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, one of the pioneers of creativity research, interviewed for his 1996 study Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention ninety-one eminent and successful creative people from around the world. By definition, he tells us, true creativity cannot be in the mind of one person but rather in a system comprising three components. “Domain” consists of a set of symbolic rules and procedures, such as mathematics or language each of which have sub-domains and which are shared by other human beings in a culture. Secondly, the “field” includes all the significant
gatekeepers to that domain, the people who recognize and bestow credibility or refuse to accept a departure from the norm. Finally, the individual "person" sparks the process of creativity. A new idea or departure from the norm imagined by an individual, using the symbols of a given domain such as music, art or architecture, is evaluated and accepted into that domain's body of knowledge by the appropriate field. Therefore, according to Csikszentmihalyi's definition "Creativity is any act, idea or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one" (p. 28). A creative person is "someone whose thoughts or actions change a domain, or establish a new domain" (p. 28). There are certainly other definitions of creativity (Guilford, 1977; Sternberg & Davidson, 1986; Vern, 1982) but I have chosen to use Csikszentmihalyi's because it seems to me that his broad concept of change, and of breaking away from the status quo, is an important one. Whether this happens on a global or a personal scale is for the purposes of this paper immaterial.

It follows then, that in order to be creative one must understand the language of one's domain in order to break free from it. Chimpanzees and elephants painting splashes of colour are not demonstrating creativity, however popular these productions may prove to be in the marketplace. An artist must understand painting technique and symbolism in order to truly transcend them and create an innovation. This implies a dynamic tension in one's membership of a field, to which one must be socialized and yet remain somewhat aloof and even marginalized in order to be able to break free of its
boundaries and explore knowledge and ideas outside that domain (or at least outside the individual's personal experience of that domain). In order to be creative one must learn the rules of the domain (thus demonstrating belief in its importance) and therefore in some senses be a traditionalist, and then become dissatisfied and rebel against that body of knowledge in order to explore new ideas which are not currently part of that domain.

Csikszentmihalyi identifies seven major elements in society which help promote creativity in individuals: "training, expectations, resources, recognition, hope, opportunity, and reward" (p. 330). These elements are interesting because he says the creative people he interviewed were oriented to the future rather than the past, which is what much of this list requires. He argues that in order to continue to enjoy something one needs to continually increase its complexity. This might help to explain the artist's constant drive to explore new art, to evolve and move on. It is rare to find an artist producing exactly the same kind of art he or she was doing several years ago. Hand in hand with this drive to explore new ideas is a necessary willingness to take risks which I would suggest artists usually demonstrate in some form or another.

However, he declares that the most important trait distinguishing creativity is complexity. By this he means that creative people have a tendency to contradictory extremes, and have the ability to move from one pole to another with equal intensity as the situation demands rather than maintaining a position in a neutral middle ground or a politically correct "good" attitude. He illustrates this with a list of traits which would appear to be mutually exclusive but which, he
says, can be demonstrated by most creative people. The list includes an abundance of physical energy but a need for quiet and rest, convergent versus divergent thinking, playfulness and discipline or dogged perseverance, childishness and wisdom, responsibility and irresponsibility, fantasy versus reality, the ability to be both aggressive and cooperative, sensitive yet also rigid, passionate and yet objective, and perhaps most importantly the ability to be open and receptive on one hand but focused and hard-driving on the other. Because they are open and sensitive, he says, creative people get much enjoyment from life, but also experience much pain and suffering. He used the term “psychological androgyne” (p. 71) when explaining that creative people often escape the gender stereotyping which requires males to be always tough and insensitive and females to be constantly submissive and nurturing.

Creative people tend to take dreams and hunches seriously, we are told, and have the ability to see situations holistically and to find patterns in confusion. However, while artists are visual people they are often not very good at text-based subjects. “Young artists, especially visual artists, are notoriously uninterested in academic subjects, and their scholastic records usually reflect this” (p. 178).

In any individual however energetic there is only a finite amount of energy and attention available. The stresses and challenges of daily living use up a great deal of this, and the rest is needed for the creative person’s major imperative, which is being creative. In order to protect himself or herself the creative person therefore has to prioritize activities and eliminate those which are
deemed to be non-essential. As Csikszentmihalyi says,

The only way to stay creative is to oppose the wear and tear of existence with techniques that organize time, space and activity to your advantage. It means developing schedules to protect your time and avoid distractions, arranging your surroundings to heighten concentration, cutting out meaningless chores that soak up psychic energy, and devoting the energy thus saved to what you really care about. (p. 358)

Artists are sometimes perceived as selfish, arrogant, eccentric or anti-social, but this may perhaps be their defence against the intruding world. There are many stories of artists, the late Glenn Gould being a local example, who live by their own clock, dress comfortably but perhaps idiosyncratically, interact only with people they find congenial, ignore the small niceties of social life and generally do only those things they consider important to them. The arrogance and selfishness may lie more in our perception than in the truth, although there are of course also creative people who are truly both selfish and arrogant. Being a constant rebel and on the cutting edge of society is a very isolating experience which can make one both insecure and defiant. Artists like anyone else need approval, and if this is withheld by society some individuals will respond with anti-social behaviour.

Csikszentmihalyi argues that the human race has been programmed in part for creativity. In order for the race to continue human beings have to be conservative, to go on doing those things which have been proven to succeed. However, if people only did what their ancestors did they could not move
forward, could not make discoveries, and could not explore their world. The species *homo sapiens* would fail. Most people follow rules, but a culture can only evolve if there are a few who push the envelope and do not play by those rules. Evolution has therefore programmed into human genes mutations which enable, and in fact drive, some humans to explore, to discover and to create. When these individuals discover something new they feel good about it, and so learn through operant conditioning to repeat the experience. “The process of discovery involved in creating something new appears to be one of the most enjoyable activities any human can be involved in” (p. 113). However, culture could not survive if it was constantly changing because its members were continually creating and discovering. In order to maintain a state of equilibrium society has to be conservative, which is why only a very small proportion of innovations actually survive and are accepted by their fields. Only a tiny proportion of artists worldwide will actually succeed in adding significant new dimensions to their domain, even though the evolutionary drive of all artists insists that they continue to be creative.

Even more powerful than the urge to create, Csikszentmihalyi tells us, is the force of entropy. The urge to relax, to sit back in comfort and not expend energy, is an important survival mechanism insisted upon by evolutionary pressures. Without it we would burn out quickly. “We could not afford to be creative all the time because we would soon stretch the limits of attention and collapse” (p. 367). Artists certainly demonstrate this all the time, alternately working very hard and often for long hours making art, and then taking what is
apparently a total break from it for days and sometimes weeks at a time. However, the break rarely is total, because creativity seems to function best in the unconscious mind. Playfulness and semi-automatic action such as jogging, chopping wood, wedging clay or showering seem to allow the unconscious mind to work best at resolving problems creatively. The artist cannot stop being an artist when the physical actions cease because the unconscious mind is always working, and creativity is very difficult to suppress.

Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) earlier reported on a phenomenological study of artists entitled The creative vision: A longitudinal study of problem finding in art, some of the findings of which Winner and Casey (1992) summarized in the opening pages of Chapter One of this thesis. They concluded as a result that for many artists making art was primarily an act of self-discovery and a way of controlling a potentially threatening world. The motives of one of their subjects, for example, was described as follows.

Basically unsocialized, lacking an adult with whom to identify, resentful of siblings and peers, stifled by authority, art became for Ed a symbol of rebellion, as well as a medium for working out his feelings and for establishing control over a hostile environment. (p. 225)

Elementary school was remembered by almost all their artists as an unhappy experience for which an ability at art was used as a defence. “Drawing became both a demonstration of competence and a defense against aggression. . . . The effect of the admiration of the other children and the requests of the teachers on the development of artistic skills can hardly be overstated” (p. 211). However, in
spite of this very commonly reported problem at school, they found that of the artists studied relatively few of them came from traumatic family backgrounds. Sixteen former students who several years after graduation from art school were still making art were compared to the fifteen who have left the field, and “Despite common belief to the contrary, family disruption through divorce, separation, or death of parents was three times more prevalent in the unsuccessful than in the successful group (40% versus 13%)” (p.165).

Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi, citing a number of personal reports from artists, maintained that their artists needed to work out how they fitted into society.

It is clear from these excerpts that discovery of self is one of the central goals of artists. . . . The discovery of how they relate to the rest of the world through the process of artistic creation is an important source of satisfaction for young artists. (p. 21)

Fitting into society was not always easy, partly because of the artistic personality which they discovered tends towards nonconformity. Using Cattell’s 16 Factor Personality Test they discovered that

Only 1 of the 16 personality factors is significantly related to success (in art): Students who became successful artists had lower self-sentiment scores than the unsuccessful ones. The meaning attributed to a high score on this factor is “conformity to socially accepted behavior”, “self control”, and “concern for social approval”. Clearly it is the lack of these characteristics that is related to success in art. (p. 168)
As the other researchers have also pointed out (Cross, Cattell & Butcher, 1967; Dutta Roy, 1996; Gotz & Gotz, 1979), these personality factors were important in allowing artists to break away from conventional lifestyles and establish an identity.

At a behavioral level, low economic value is adaptive to artists, who are risking careers in which the only thing they can count on is economic insecurity, and low social value is a necessity for working in the loneliness of a studio in this age of togetherness. At an ideological level, low economic and social values represent a rejection of two predominant values of our time, materialism and the cult of sociability—a rejection that helps establish the artist's identity. (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976, p. 33)

The artist has to see the world differently in order to be able to even begin to restructure it, and as Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi point out in the non-artist world, too often thinking is equated with rationality, with the methodical if unadventurous unfolding of symbolic links from given premises to known conclusions. Yet we know that creative thinking, in art as well as science, does not seem to follow this route. Instead of accepting the premises of a structured problem, it fashions a new problematic configuration. Instead of striving to reach a known solution, the cognitive efforts of a creative person are often aimed at results that had been unconceivable (sic) before. (p. 5)
In order to be creative, therefore, one is required to revolt against the established order as society recognizes it.

The cognitive task of restructuring old problems or discovering new ones is apparently embedded in a set of personality traits that facilitate this potentially deviant task. It takes a person who is cut off from others, who has an intense inner life, who does not depend on outside direction and support, to break away from the premises on which the majority bases its thinking. (p. 40)

According to Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi the act of making art can provide an important sense of control.

For a person who is lonely and helpless, the ability to create visual images is a sign that he exists, that he can change and control his environment. . . . . a child who feels threatened may turn to art as a way of reestablishing a feeling of competence. (p. 210)

This does not necessarily mean that children who make art have more talent as artists, but what it may mean is that creative people either have a greater need to manipulate their environment or a greater facility for it.

Most of the young artists insisted that although their first attempts were not substantially better than those of other children, their drawings were noticed more and praised more. . . . In this sense, the ability to draw becomes an adaptive skill for some children, just as for others physical toughness, intelligence or good looks become a preferred way of controlling the environment. (p. 209)
Control of one's materials and processes is important, but so is the freedom to exercise that control in whatever way one wants. This might explain why so many artists prefer to work for themselves rather than a fulltime employer, even though being an employee may be financially more advantageous.

Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi argue persuasively that human beings operate according to a paradigm which combines a homeostatic model of self maintenance and a tension or conflict reduction theory of behaviour.

According to this paradigm, the organism's optimum natural state is a form of equilibrium, and the organism always acts in such a way as to return to this state of balance. . . . Conscious or unconscious conflict produces tensions that lead the individual to seek resolution, and he or she ceases to seek it when the tension is alleviated. Mental activity, thinking, imagination, creative behavior always involve reduction of a drive, a diminution of conflict, a decrease in tension and stimulation. (p. 239)

However, once such conflict has been neutralized by action, the human being has to seek new challenges.

Few human impulses are as inexorable as the need for novelty. . . . normal people need to deal with problematic issues just as they need food and shelter, and they will seek out the problematic when they have reached a homeostatic balance. . . . They are not only stimulus-reducing and problem-solving, but also stimulus-seeking and problem-finding organisms. (p. 241, their emphasis)
These researchers summarize part of their theory by describing artistic creativity as follows:

It is a process by which an individual 1) experiences a conflict in perception, emotion or thought, 2) formulates a problem articulating the previously inarticulated conflict, 3) expresses the problem in visual form, 4) succeeds in resolving the conflict through symbolic means, 5) thereby achieving a new emotional and cognitive balance. The aim of the creative act is not to reduce a drive in order to restore a previous equilibrium, but to reach out for a new equilibrium. The key to creative achievement is the transformation of an intangible conflict into a tangible symbolic problem to which the creative solution will be the response. (p. 246)

The Drive to Create

In an earlier paper Csikszentmihalyi (1988) emphasized a very important prerequisite for artists. "To be original, one must to a certain extent be alienated" (p. 214). Making art consists largely of seeing new ways to combine patterns or objects, or of taking someone else's work and changing it, of tearing it down and rebuilding it. As Csikszentmihalyi notes, being totally new and original in the art world is very rare. Most artists manipulate and alter existing forms, just as scientists systematically explore a paradigm. "Art, like science, is largely redundant" (p. 218). This necessity to modify the status quo must surely pervade the artistic personality to a significant degree.

Csikszentmihalyi identifies five major sources of inspiration in the work of
most artists, sometimes several at a time since they are not mutually exclusive. Memories of childhood, often suppressed, are an important element. Childhood is a source of pain, frustration, puzzlement and mystery, and he suggests that many artists, usually unconsciously, try to recreate this in what he terms "abreactive originality" in order to incorporate it into the more mature psyche of the adult which can better tolerate the pain and come to terms with it.

Similarly, current psychic pain caused by estrangement, stress, anger, or dislocation from a comfortable and familiar environment may be reflected unconsciously in the "cathartic originality" of an artist's work so that he or she can work through disquieting feelings (much as dreamwork also allows) to achieve a greater degree of inner peace. In direct contrast, however, he also quotes the philosopher Schopenhauer as saying "one of the most powerful motives that attracts people to science and art is the longing to escape everyday life" (p. 217). Every individual has had unique experiences and people react differently to these, so that it is quite possible for both these statements to be true for some people. Thirdly, social conflicts and issues such as racism, feminism, war, and gay rights are a frequent source of artistic inspiration, either to come to terms unconsciously with what is perceived as social chaos or alternatively to propagandize and provide a specific message. He terms the bringing together in meaningful ways of the various discordant elements of the artist's life "historical originality". "Formal originality" is the elaboration of visual impressions from the environment experienced by the artist as the fourth source of inspiration, who represents these according to the many existing art
paradigms. Finally, Csikszentmihalyi admits that most artists are not trying to obtain any catharsis but are influenced by, and trying to influence, the world of art. By using "stylistic originality" they extend their knowledge and experience of the art world by recombining various elements of art they have seen into what is, at least for them, novel and original composition.

Because artists tend to work very hard at what they do it might be instructive to look closely at the definitions of workaholism. Lynch (1996) in a one-page commentary discussed work addiction, as opposed to workaholism. She maintains that artists may expect to enjoy a state of "unrelaxed play" (from Thoreau) but never actually achieve this because they need to work, frequently at an unrelated job, in order to pay the rent and buy the necessities of life. The result of this unrequited relationship, she says, is that it becomes obsessional. She lists symptoms of work addiction, taken from B.E. Robinson in the Journal of Counseling and Development: translated to the art field, the artist puts working on his or her art ahead of all other priorities, frequently including personal life and relationships. A feeling of inadequacy and low self-esteem drives the artist to make art almost feverishly, she says, the results giving a temporary high and positive feelings of achievement and self-worth. The artist goes on work binges, "accompanied by an adrenaline high and followed by a work hangover, complete with withdrawal, anxiety and depression" (p. 5). Work addiction and work enthusiasm are distinguished by the presence or absence of "drivenness". She suggests that "Perhaps our very definition of a 'successful' artist is one who is driven " (p. 5).
The literature mostly appears to assume that workaholics work for corporations rather than for themselves, but there may still be many parallels between the business person working for a company and an artist making art alone. After an extensive literature review of the subject Seybold and Salomone (1994) were able to offer a number of possible definitions which, when applied to artists and their making of art, tend either to support or disprove the hypothesis that artists as a group may be workaholics. All the following citations quoted in the balance of this section on the Drive to Create are from Seybold and Salomone (1994). Oates (1971) in a seminal work defined a workaholic as “a person whose need for work has become so excessive that it creates noticeable disturbance or interference with his (sic) bodily health, personal happiness, and interpersonal relations, and with his smooth social functioning” (p. 4). If we accept, for the purposes of this argument, that artists often display less than smooth social functioning there is no evidence that this is caused by excess application to work rather than by an existing personality trait. For many artists, art is the most important thing in their lives, which sometimes means that family and social lives suffer. This does not automatically mean that the artist is a workaholic. For example, Bartolome (1983) distinguished according to their motives between the workaholic and those who simply may work too much. The former try to escape the trials and unpleasantness of their private lives by overworking, while the latter work so hard that their private lives are simply neglected. The fact that their private lives at that moment have a lower priority does not signal an active attempt to avoid them.
Definitions and descriptions of the workaholic which might be applied also to artists include the following. Minirth, Meier, Wichern, Brewer, & Skipper (1981) suggested the workaholic is a person whose dependence on work exhibits a "noticeable disturbance on the rest of his (or her) life" (p. 4). This would obviously apply to an artist, as may the observation that the workaholic demonstrates all the classic signs of addiction withdrawal, such as anxiety and depression, when confronted with a situation where they have no work (Morris & Charney, 1983). It was suggested by Klaft & Kleiner (1988) that workaholics are addicted to the process of work rather than the end results of it, which appears to be a fair description of many artists. This argument is unintentionally furthered by Spruell (1987) when he called workaholism "the addiction most rewarded in our culture". He was referring, of course, to the business person, and yet within the artist culture it is the norm to work hard and to be totally engrossed in one's art. To do so is to be accepted as an artist, which is part of the reward as Lynch (1996) suggests. Machlowitz (1980) says that the workaholic "craves constant stimulation and possesses an overabundance of energy . . . (and is) intense, energetic, competitive and driven" (p. 5), most of which might also apply to artists.

Klaft and Kleiner (1988) made the broad statement that workaholism "implies the escape or avoidance of problems" (p. 5), while the obsessive-compulsive worker (who has been described as very similar to a workaholic) has been characterized as one whose goal is not necessarily to get the job done but to be totally absorbed in it (Schwartz, 1982). Artists will readily volunteer that
they very much enjoy being totally absorbed in their work. Oates (1971) also cited the desire to escape fear, and even to escape death, as a cause of workaholism. These ideas may also have some relevance to the artist who may indeed have some aspirations to immortality through his or her work, but I prefer the suggestion that the process of making art may be a device for filtering, ordering and making explanatory patterns of life experiences. This is consistent with the hypothesis that workaholism is a reflection of the individual's need for control in his or her life (Cantarow, 1979; Machlowitz, 1980). In the case of the business person it may be control of external stimuli, people and events in that person's life, while in the case of the (perhaps more sensitive) artist it may be internal stimuli which he or she is struggling to make sense of and to control. It may also be the need to feel free of the control of other people or outside influences in a desperate search to find the time and energy to do what is most important—to create art.

More positively, Cantarow (1979) put forward the possibility of "joy in creativity" as part of the workaholic personality and stressed that they seek "passionate involvement and gratification" (p. 5) which certainly are also character traits of artists. In fact, as the researchers pointed out, Machlowitz (1980)

did not agree with others who claimed that workaholism is a disease. The addiction stems, she thought, not from the motivation to earn more money, but rather to earn what she referred to as 'psychic income,' defined as 'responsibility, meaning, opportunity, (and) recognition'. To the
workaholic, satisfaction on the job matters more than satisfaction at home. Work and leisure can be one and the same to workaholics: Work is how they have fun. (p. 5, emphasis theirs)

**Fine artists and applied artists**

Stohs (1992) sought to discover whether intrinsic motivation to make art can be sustained over time, and specifically whether the intrinsic motives for making art differed between fine artists and applied artists. The researcher hypothesized that fine artists were more likely to be intrinsically motivated than applied artists, partly because they could control the type of art they produced, where and when they did it, and because they made art because they enjoyed doing so as opposed to having to do it in order to make a living.

She interviewed a total of twelve subjects all of whom had been students at the Art Institute of Chicago two decades earlier, six of whom were identified at mid-life as fine artists in fluid careers (FFAs). That is, they worked at least 75% of their time on their fine art, but had held by mid-life a series of short non art-related jobs to help bring in income so that they could devote most of their time to making fine art. In contrast, the six artists who had held steady careers in applied art and earned a living doing so, were known as stable applied artists (SAAs).

Fine artists who had held fluid careers until mid-life did indeed give far more intrinsic reasons for making art than did the applied artists in stable careers. They had apparently not become convinced of the need for reliable
income to the point where making art had significantly diminished in importance for them. Stohs suggests that experiences of intrinsic motivation generate their own momentum and are thus self-perpetuating. She points out that while about half the FAAs appear to struggle with the need for recognition and validation by others, intrinsic motivation is claimed twice as much as extrinsic, with the latter usually mentioned only after talking about the intrinsic rewards of creating.

By contrast, the applied artists in the study did not link their art activities with higher states of consciousness or the same degree of pleasure and satisfaction. “It seems that independent art production has limited personal meaning for applied artists” (p. 251). It may also be that they are more conservative than fine artists and do not enjoy risk-taking to the same extent. The researcher points out that both groups achieve what they want from art. The FAAs need to produce art on their own terms and have given the highest priority to their attainment of intrinsic satisfaction, while the SAAs have deliberately chosen to design their art to conform to the needs of others.

The Artistic Personality

Cross, Cattell, and Butcher (1967) compared the personalities of 63 visual artists with those of 28 craft students and a matched control group using Cattell’s 16 PF (Personality Factor) test. Artists and controls were found to be significantly different on 12 factors. On 11 of these 12 the scores of the craft students were found to be intermediate between those of the artists and the controls, which is what one would expect.
Artists were found to be more withdrawn, more dominant or assertive, of lower emotional stability or ego strength, more suspicious, more apprehensive or prone to guilt, more casual and with less social self-discipline, more tense or driven, more imaginative or "bohemian", and less rule-bound or conscientious than the control group. These authors agree with other studies which found that artists are "basically stable people living under strain" (p. 297) who have autonomous characteristics which frequently make them less than socially acceptable or popular. "They are, in many ways, the exact opposite of the successful salesman" (p. 297).

Dutta Roy (1996) administered Cattell's 16 Personality Factor test individually to 51 artists and 51 non-artists who were selected randomly from a larger group, the results being subjected to a series of analyses. These showed, he maintained, that the differences between fine artists and non-artists could be determined with only three personality factors: artists are more introverted, independent and tender-minded than non-artists. The 51 fine artists were all male, well established, and living in a major Indian city. The 51 non-artists were selected randomly from amongst teachers, bank managers, and physicians living in the same four major cities as the artists, and who were not trained in art and did not practice art professionally. In another paper (in press) the researcher found that Indian artists were very similar to American artists in five personality factors of the Cattell 16 Personality Factor test including Introversion/Extroversion, Submissiveness/Dominance, and Toughmindedness/Tendermindedness. From this he concluded that he can
generalize across continents and cultures.

Dutta Roy also comments that his findings fit neatly with the artists’ lifestyle. They are introverted, and need to spend long periods of time alone in their studios. They are independent because they need to generate unconventional and innovative ideas. Being more sensitive or tender-minded (as opposed to tough-minded) Dutta Roy explains, “may allow artists to be more sensitive to the different interpretations of experience” (p. 393). The three personality factors discovered (Introversion, Independence, and Tendermindedness) are said to be strongly discriminating yet non-overlapping. The researcher maintains that they can be predicted from some of these other factors, yet they alone are sufficient to be able to discriminate artists from non-artists.

Dutta Roy found that artists are more introverted, independent and tenderminded than teachers, bank managers and physicians. I can understand him using professional people as his control group, but have to wonder about his choice of participants. Not only will these professions be better educated and more self-confident than most artists, but members of them may be more than usually extraverted, dependent on the views of their peers and/or tough-minded. They were also all male.

Gotz and Gotz (1979) used the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire on 257 male and female German professional artists (painters and sculptors) and compared them with a group of 300 non-artists. They found to their surprise that male artists were not only significantly more introverted than non-artists but also
more than the female artists. They interpreted this finding to mean that females who were introverted did not dare to enter the uncertain world of the professional artist, and therefore those who did tended to be more extraverted.

When comparing neuroticism the authors found that there is no apparent difference between the means of male and female artists, and of female non-artists, all of whom are more neurotic than male non-artists. Gotz and Gotz also measured 'psychoticism' which Eynsynck found had a considerable correlation with tough-mindedness. They explain that a high "psychoticism" scorer can be described as solitary, often troublesome, has problems fitting in to society, is insensitive, assertive, aggressive or hostile and has a reckless disregard for danger. This sounds like the portrait of a psychopath, and probably should be understood as a normal trait which is present in watered-down form to some extent in everybody. Male artists, apparently, are significantly higher in psychoticism scores than both male and female non-artists, and somewhat higher (although non-significantly) than female artists. The researchers interpret these results to mean that many artists may be somewhat more tough-minded than non-artists, which is directly contrary to the findings of Dutta Roy (1996). They point out that the artists used in the study are all middle aged with accepted international reputations and so may have mellowed somewhat with age, which implies that when they were younger they were even more extreme. It is unclear whether results of a German study can be generalized to North American artists.
Problems with Language

Artists are visual people, and it is possible that some of them tend to think in symbols and pictures rather than using language. Grow (1994) summarized many years of observation and research into why such visual thinkers have problems writing, offering three important factors. Visual thinkers, he says, suffer from a lack of precise vocabulary, feel that sequence of words is unimportant, and presume understanding of context. Those visual thinkers who have problems writing use words in an imprecise way because words really don’t matter to them. They have little relevance because thought is taking place in another dimension; they see a picture of the object with no label attached. Therefore they often do not name the things they are writing about, and in speaking may stop in mid sentence searching for the right word for an idea which they can see in their mind but not name. He did not mention whether they verbally stumble a lot while talking which might be a logical conclusion to make. Naming objects is a highly analytical process, and it appears that visual thinkers may not analyze concepts and structures of sentences mentally. It seems to me that this implies that if they do not mentally construct a sentence grammatically they would therefore make errors in verbal and adjectival or pronoun agreements all the time. He does not comment on this possibility which is unfortunate because if true it would be a useful clue to the observer. He hints that visual thinkers have small vocabularies, using words unimaginatively without considering the many nuances and shades of meaning available to the fluent user of language.
Visual thinkers often use words which appear cryptic, but are actually labels for private pictures. They know exactly what they mean, but the onlooker is left trying to find an explanation to an apparently logical idea which has little clear meaning in the context used. Words can be “packed” with meaning, which may be a useful technique for poetry but not necessarily for explanatory text.

Words can be feared, and so Grow suggests that a refusal or inability to use them may not be a defect so much as an achievement, a defence mechanism. Visual thinkers who are involved with movement or use of the hands may find that trying to use words at the same time inhibits them. “Words alone may not be the problem so much as words that trigger an invasive analytical consciousness which imposes combative categories upon activities which function much better as unverbalized skills or feelings” (p. 141). Thus people whose work focuses on such non-verbal activities and values as colour, line, texture, balance, proportion, manipulation of objects and emotion may find words extremely intrusive and difficult to use during (and perhaps even immediately after) these activities. This may be an important clue, perhaps, as to why creative people prefer to make art alone.

From personal observation it is interesting to note that a child brought up in a multimedia world tends to see on the page or computer screen the entire picture with many elements and is able to go immediately to individual elements, while those of us who are used to dealing with text laboriously read a page from top to bottom in order to extract what elements we need from it. Visual thinkers respond more like contemporary children and Grow suggests that these visual
thinkers may perform a lot better with graphical interfaces and page layout programs which allow for prose which is both verbal and visual. However, visual thinkers see the picture as a whole, and because their primary mode of thought is spatial they have difficulty relating one element precisely to other elements. Sequence is of less importance than individual details and overall patterns. “One thought doesn’t follow another or lead to anything; it just is” (p. 147, emphasis his).

Problems with School

Two studies by Westby and Dawson (1995) examined elementary school teachers’ perceptions of creative students. In the first, college psychology students rated twenty characteristics of creative and non-creative people from a list of fifty which had been established in several previous studies, the result being a list of characteristics considered by them to be most associated and least associated with creativity in an 8-year old child. These are listed in full in Table 1 as they may have a bearing on our later discussion about artists. The original list (Westby & Dawson, 1995) has been presented slightly differently in this table in order to clarify the findings, but the descending order from most to least typical has been preserved. It is important to note that Table 1 is really two lists, items 1 to 10 being the perceived characteristics of the most creative and items 11 to 20 being those of the least creative eight year old child.
Table 1

Characteristics of Creativity Rated by Psychology Students in Descending Order from Most to Least Typical of an Eight-year Old Child.

1. Makes up the rules as he or she goes along
2. Is impulsive
3. Is a nonconformist
4. Is emotional
5. Is progressive
6. Is determined
7. Is individualistic
8. Takes chances
9. Tends not to know own limitations and tries to do what others think is impossible
10. Likes to be alone when creating something new.
11. Is sincere
12. Is good-natured
13. Is appreciative
14. Is understanding
15. Is logical
16. Is responsible
17. Is dependable
18. Is reliable

(table continues)
19. Is practical
20. Is tolerant


*Items 11 to 20 are rated as least characteristic of creativity, i.e., there are thirty items between the first and second sets of ten items which are not shown.*
Sixteen female teachers were then asked to rate their favourite and least favourite eight-year old pupils against this list of creative and non-creative characteristics. It was discovered that there was a significant negative correlation between the favourite pupils and the characteristics of creativity, and similarly, the least favourite pupils were found to be the most creative. The writers commented that it had frequently been found in studies of creativity in the world of education that teachers disliked personality characteristics associated with creativity, preferring students who are conforming and obedient.

In the second study sixteen different female teachers of the same grades and from the same geographic area in New York state were then asked to rate the same twenty characteristics listed above by how accurate each was for a creative 8-year old child. The results, listed in Table 2 (to which has been added the ordinal number in Table 1 for each item for easy comparison) differ significantly from the opinions of the college students, indicating that the teachers had their own standards for creativity which appear to be more correlated with an appealing personality than with creative ability. From a comparison of the two tables it can be seen that only four items from the most important ten characteristics of the original list were considered by the teachers surveyed to indicate creativity. They maintained that they encouraged creativity, but it would appear that subconsciously they may have been ignoring or even suppressing their most creative pupils because they were also the most troublesome or unappealing.
### Table 2

Characteristics of Teacher-defined Creativity of Eight-year Old Children in Descending Order. (Table 1 ranking in brackets)

1. Is individualistic (7)
2. Takes chances (8)
3. Is progressive (5)
4. Is determined (6)
5. Is sincere (*11)
6. Is appreciative (13)
7. Is good-natured (12)
8. Is responsible (16)
9. Is logical (15)
10. Is reliable (18)
11. Is dependable (17)
12. Likes to be alone when creating something new (10)
13. Tends not to know own limitations and tries to do what others think is impossible (9)
14. Is a nonconformist (3)
15. Is impulsive (2)
16. Is tolerant (20)
17. Is understanding (14)
18. Is emotional (4)

(table continues)
19. Makes up the rules as he or she goes along (1)

19. Is practical (19)


Any ordinal number in brackets higher than 10 (from Table 1) indicates that this item was rated by psychology students as one of the ten least characteristic traits of creativity in eight year old children.
This possibility was strengthened when the researchers in a followup study as yet unpublished found evidence “that suggested that teachers’ concepts of creativity were particularly unlikely to match the personality profiles of spatially (as opposed to verbally) creative children.” (V. L. Dawson, personal communication, November 12, 1998).

**The challenged personality**

Therivel (1993) proposes a fascinating theory to explain creativity, arguing that we all develop cultural scripts which dictate the way we understand and experience the world, and which once adopted are very difficult to shake off. These cultural scripts are formed before adulthood, and can be significantly altered by major misfortune in youth. Examples might be loss of one or both parents, physical infirmity or deformity, lack of parental love, parental domination, physical or sexual abuse, parental professional/character failure or uprootedness.

However, along with experiencing a degree of misfortune, whether high or low, we also need assistance to counteract this and to provide a balance. Assistances, Therivel says, may be acquired from the support of family, friends, teachers or other authorities, as well as a good job, education, medical care, belonging to a supportive community or a medium to high cultural-socioeconomic group, or having free time to pursue personal interests. Such misfortunes and assistances, the author argues, can sometimes make one see the world in new and different ways, which is what is needed to encourage creativity. Indeed, he
states that "Being a challenged youth is a prerequisite for major adult creativity, particularly in the fields of philosophy, psychology, religion, politics, literature, poetry and music" (p. 416). He later softens this comment but maintains that although it would be wrong to say that only challenged personalities can be truly creative, the best creative people have their extraordinary energy and drive because they "can also derive energy from other sources, for example, the need to erase old insults or a sense of revenge against society" (p. 421).

Therivel classifies people into seven different categories.
1. **Conventional** people who received medium levels of assistances and low levels of misfortunes, and whose scripts see the world as normal without requiring any disturbance of the status quo.
2. **Simple** people who while young received low levels of both assistance and misfortune. They have little education and ambition, possessing only minimal scripts and are somewhat marginalized.
3. **Dedicated** persons received high levels of assistances and low levels of misfortunes. They are relatively conventional model citizens who keep the clockwork of society running smoothly.
4. **Different** people suffered major misfortunes with medium levels of assistances. They think differently, have unorthodox ideas, but do not have the drive, commitment and perhaps education or skills to carry them through.
5. **Challenged** people were shaped by major misfortunes but also had a high degree of assistances. They have creative and novel ideas and also the education and drive to carry them out. It is from this group, Therivel argues, that
many truly creative people come.

6. **Crushed** people have suffered major misfortunes and little assistance. They are marginalized and will never be able to escape from that condition.

7. **Pathological** persons have suffered from medium to very strong misfortunes but also have strong pathological tendencies and regardless of the assistances received are in need of psychological or psychiatric help.

Some people, Therivel says, undergo additional "pruning" as a result of additional misfortune in adult years and which forces their life or efforts in a particular direction. Many adult challenged personalities are not creative because they lack sufficient drive or persistence, financial means, time or other resources, or because of lack of pruning.

We are concerned here with those falling into category 5, the Challenged of the world. These people, Therivel maintains, know throughout their lives that they are different. They do not belong to the ordinary pack, and people constantly challenge their views and demand that they defend them. The interaction of strong misfortunes and strong assistances (such as education) makes the Challenged person independent, self-made, a loner who is unwilling to join in the common game but insists that people do it his or her way, with imagination, motivation and drive. "Creativity has its roots in the pains and disturbances of being challenged" (p. 419). His final point is a particularly important one for our discussion of artists, because he says of the Challenged that "Only through their work can they justify their difference to themselves and others" (p. 416). If artists, both intrinsically and through their artist culture, feel
different and at odds with the world, then they may feel the need to justify their own existence. They will therefore work very hard to do this. It should be noted that Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) found that relatively few of the artists they studied came from traumatic family backgrounds, which is in direct contradiction to this theory. However, they did suggest that creativity was more likely when an individual experiences a conflict previously inarticulated, formulating a solution in an attempt to achieve a new state of equilibrium. They also demonstrate that art can be used “for establishing control over a hostile environment.” (p. 225) which I would suggest is tantamount to feeling the need to justify one’s existence. These theories would therefore appear to support Therivel.

**The Assisted Personality**

Bloom (1985) in his *Developing Talent in Young People* surveyed some of the top people in America in six different disciplines in order to try to discover how they had achieved that status. He interviewed twenty to twenty-five people under the age of forty who were recognized by experts as being the best in America in each field and who had reached truly world class levels of accomplishment. These talent fields included swimmers, pianists, sculptors, mathematicians, tennis players, and research neurologists. The interviewees were all “clearly among the top persons in their fields” (p. 11), and although they all displayed some characteristics of interest to us, the sculptors are here particularly relevant as being perhaps most representative of artists. These
sculptors had all been awarded Guggenheim Fellowships and one of the senior National Endowment for the Arts awards and so had been acknowledged by experts in the field as possessing a very high degree of talent. The artists participating in my study, while talented, are not in this league. Nevertheless it may be instructive to examine his findings.

Bloom did not define "talent" as a natural gift but rather "an unusually high level of demonstrated ability, achievement, or skill in some special field of study or interest" (p. 5). It was his thesis that in most people given the right environment and opportunity it is possible to nurture and produce such exceptional levels of talent. "What any person in the world can learn, almost all persons can learn if provided with appropriate prior and current conditions of learning. . . . it applies most clearly to the middle 95% of a school population" (p. 4, his emphasis).

In this research Bloom assumed from the beginning that learning is usually an interpersonal activity, rather than a solitary one, and in summing up his results declared that "No-one reached the limits of learning in a talent field on his or her own. Families and teachers were crucial at every point along the way to excellence" (p. 509). The necessary conditions demonstrated by all six groups began with a serious interest in the talent field demonstrated by the parents of the child who were active in that field in some way. They rewarded the child's interest consistently until the child felt special for performing in that field, and in time was able to show an unusual ability. Bloom echoed Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi, (1976) in finding that it was not early evidence of unusual gifts
and qualities that spurred on these parents so much as continued interest from the child. The parents encouraged the child at every opportunity from a very young age, and it was the children's resultant small successes which motivated the parents to increase their support and encouragement of their children, searching for better teachers and quality learning experiences. When it became obvious to the parents that the child then demonstrated interest and special ability they went to great lengths to encourage it, and as Bloom reports “parents were willing to make the necessary changes in their lives in response to the child's development and to promote further growth” (p. 505, his emphasis). This in turn led to access to the highest quality teachers and to public arenas in which to demonstrate and test their skills and to learn further from adult role models.

The artists as children began to be recognized at school for being good at art and gained prestige for being able to do something their peers could not. They were special, and this was their area. “The power of the special label seems enormous, even though it had very little to do with art as the sculptors know it today or even as knowledgeable outsiders know art” (p. 110). They began to be known as artists, establishing their own identity and a sense of competence, of ability, and of adequacy. “Being good at something, and being better at something than others their age, became strong incentives for intensifying their work” (p. 486). He says of the musicians (for which we could probably safely substitute artists and art) “They used music in their search for parental and teacher approval and reward, personal meaning, and a place for themselves in society” (p. 489).
The parents of the children who later became sculptors all appear to have had similar values, enjoying the arts and demonstrating that enjoyment regularly, expecting their children to do the same. The parents invariably insisted on their children doing their best, on high standards and good work ethic, and on learning and doing rather than being non-participants. They showed their pride in their children's accomplishments and encouraged them all the way, often going to great lengths to ensure that they had the right opportunities to learn. Bloom calls these "child-centered homes . . . homes where children were special: homes where trying to do the best for one's child was a matter of daily practice, not just ideology; homes where no sacrifice was too great for a child's potential success" (p. 503). Bloom is insistent that excellent teachers were vital to the development of these world-class sculptors.

We probably cannot overemphasize how important the artist-teachers were to the process of exceptional development. They not only created a context of successful learning (inspiring, modelling, setting high standards), but they also provided individual assistance and encouragement in many different ways. (p. 122)

In summarizing his findings, Bloom found that general qualities present in all talent fields and presumably therefore necessary for achievement of extreme recognition in those fields, included

- strong interest and emotional commitment to a particular talent field
- desire to reach a high level of attainment in the talent field
- willingness to put in the great amounts of time and effort needed to
reach the very high levels of achievement in the talent field. (p. 544)

Also important was the ability to learn rapidly and well, but this was always accompanied by the interest and encouragement of parents who often went to extraordinary lengths to ensure that their child received the best possible teaching and exposure to that talent field. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) was merely confirming Bloom's findings when the former argued that creativity in individuals could be promoted by "training, expectations, resources, recognition, hope, opportunity, and reward" (p. 330).

Rebellion

Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1968) studied four types of art students: industrial artists, advertising artists, fine artists and art educators, in an attempt to discover whether the students who had chosen these career categories possessed the innate values best suited for them. They defined the fine artist's role as being to maintain and to change creatively the patterns of his own system and in so doing to affect the values of society at large by transforming fleeting, personal experience and the "spirit" of his time into artifacts which build a "culture" for the present and a "heritage" for the future. (p. 518)

They further divided artist personalities into "conforming", "innovating", "retreating", "ritualizing" or "rebelling" depending upon their attitudes towards the established world of art. The conforming artist is important in that he accepts and maintains the existing artistic methods, symbols and goals. He has a vital role
because not all artists can be rebels: unless there are people who are prepared to imitate and to make a form of art “mainstream” there would be no existing culture and heritage. This is an important point which is not often made. But culture does not progress without rebels. If the artistic rebel succeeds in having his work recognized by society he will become a creative genius accepted by others and the conforming artists will have another model to follow. Rebellion is here defined as being against the established artistic world, rather than the non-artist world. If he is not accepted by the artistic world he will be seen as an artistic (and social) failure, a “retreatist” who rejected the cultural norms but produced nothing of worth in their place. Innovating artists accept the contemporary goals of their art world while experimenting and changing the technical style. By contrast, ritualizing artists reject the prevailing goals but continue to use the traditional style with no technical novelty.

The authors found that art students are dedicated to their role of creators, but had very low social and economic values. They comment that on a personal level art students must have low economic values if they are going to commit their lives to a career in which the only certainty is financial insecurity, and they must have low social values if they have to spend long hours working alone in their studios. Industrial and advertising art students tended to have higher economic values as predicted for artists who would be working within the normal world of industry and commerce. Fine artists showed greater aesthetic values, and art educators displayed higher social values as would be expected. Fine art and art education students with higher economic values tended to have lower art
grades, but fine art students with higher social values also tended to have lower art grades, while art education students with higher social values tended to have higher art grades. It appeared to be true, therefore, that fine art students identified with the perceived rebellious qualities of creative people and rejected society, while the socially-responsible art educators were prepared to accept society’s mores. The authors noted a pronounced tendency that “individuals preparing for a career in art identify more or less with the rebellious role—the role which seems most nearly to promise outstanding achievement in creative work” Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi, (1976, p. 526).

Review of the Literature on Lefthandedness

The literature on handedness has slowed down somewhat in the last few years after considerable debate about what is termed the GBG model concerning the hypotheses of Geschwind, Behan and Galaburda (Geschwind & Behan, 1982; Geschwind & Behan, 1984; Geschwind & Galaburda, 1985) about the possible neurological and hormonal origins of handedness. Annett (1994b) comments that “The report that a major neuropsychological journal is currently refusing to consider papers on handedness must be welcomed if it stems the tide of poor work but I am sorry that this is, I believe, part of Geschwind’s legacy” (p. 240). The GBG theory of the origins of handedness does not concern us in this paper, but this may explain the relative dearth of handedness literature in recent years.
Artists are More Likely to be Lefthanded.

In the psychological literature research has shown that an average of 8 - 10% of a normal population is lefthanded (Betancur, Vélez, Cabanieu, Le Moal, & Neveu, 1990; Coren, 1989; Harburg, 1981; Levander & Schalling, 1988; Peterson, 1979; Segal, 1984). However, this does not mean that everyone uses only the left or the right hand; Annett (1970) comments that referring to handedness in terms of left and right may be like talking about height in terms of “tall” and “short”. Handedness is actually a J-shaped continuum with most people stacked on or close to the right-hand side, a few on the left and a significant number distributed in between (Levander & Schalling, 1988). One of the problems of handedness research is that there are no established and uniform criteria for its measurement, and it has been pointed out that estimates of the incidence of lefthandedness in a sample could vary from 3 to 30 per cent depending upon the criterion used (Annett, 1970, p. 319). Lefthandedness should more properly be termed “non-righthandedness” although most studies do not use this term, so this paper will continue to refer to “lefthanded” for the sake of continuity. A number of authors (Peters & Servos, 1989; Peters, 1990; Snyder & Harris, 1993) have decided that left-handers can be divided into two subgroups, which they termed CLH (consistent lefthanded) and ILH (inconsistent lefthanded). The latter do not switch hands for the same task but prefer the right hand for one activity and the left for another and are what much of the literature calls “mixed-handed”, although with a decided and consistent sinistral preference for most fine motor skills such as writing, drawing and hammering.
Since the left hand is thought to be in most people controlled by the right brain, which also controls visual, spacial and creative abilities, it is widely accepted in the literature that lefthanded people may be attracted to the creative professions. It is further claimed that because artists, musicians, and other creative people possess well-developed right-hemispheric skills they do indeed display an increased level of lefthandedness (Fry, 1990; Mebert & Michel, 1980; Petersen, 1979). Winner and Casey (1992) while studying reading disorders and spelling deficits amongst artists and others administered the standard Edinburgh Handedness Inventory both in this study and also in Winner, Casey, DaSilva and Hayes (1991) but in neither paper did they report amongst the data the percentage of left-handedness in their populations. Thus although they cited Mebert and Michel (1980) three times as having shown that artists are more lefthanded than others, they failed to report on any proof (or refutation) of their own. Mebert and Michel (1980) suggested that there is a possibility that lefthanded artists differ from righthanded ones in some aspects of their artistic work "either the type of art work they do or the ways in which they do it" (p. 278) which is certainly relevant to my study.

Because they are also visually creative the handedness of architects and architecture students has been well-researched (Gotestam, 1990; Petersen & Lansky, 1974, 1977, 1980; Schachter & Ransil, 1996) and these were found to have a high incidence of lefthandedness with a reported extreme of 29.4% in the case of architecture faculty at a university (Petersen & Lansky, 1974)

These findings have been disputed, however, by Shettel-Neuber and
O'Reilly (1983) who examined the handedness of university faculty members in four professions, finding the least lefthanded in architecture and art and the most in law. Neither could Wood and Aggelton (1991) demonstrate an increased incidence of lefthandedness in a study of 236 fully qualified male architects and 78 male architecture students, suggesting methodological flaws in previous research. Finally, a large sample of 16,590 prospective undergraduate students who applied to Brazilian universities in 37 different professional courses which included fine arts and architecture exhibited no statistically significant difference in handedness (Cosenza & Mingoti, 1993).

**Personality of the Lefthanded.**

The temperament of lefthanded people has been studied (Harburg, Roeper, Ozgoren & Feldstein, 1981), lefthanded individuals being found to exhibit more Emotionality (in terms of fear and anger) and Neuroticism than right-handers, with levels which were significantly higher under the age of forty. Lefthanded males of this age group also appeared to be less extroverted and social, although paradoxically older lefthanded females were found to be more extroverted than their righthanded counterparts. The authors speculate that the pressures of growing up lefthanded in a righthanded world might induce more emotional and anti-social responses, but that by mid-life an adult learns to adapt somewhat so these negative responses are diminished. The disclaimer was made that the numbers studied were small and so may not be generalizable, but there was also another problem with this study. Handedness was assessed by
writing hand, so a natural left-hander who had been forced to switch hands would therefore have been classed as a right-hander. Not only would this have confounded the statistics, but the act of forcing this person to switch may very likely have negatively affected his or her Emotionality and Sociability ratings. Nevertheless, their hypothesis is an interesting one, particularly since a personnel consultant (Milne, 1989) reported that 60% of his troubled clientele were lefthanded, speculating that they had problems fitting into their jobs and perhaps the righthanded world in general. This does not imply any particular form of mental instability. In a study of 138 social science students of whom 16% wrote with their left hand a test of irrational thinking showed no association with lefthandedness (Lester, 1995), and tests on anxiety disorder patients revealed no apparent connection between anxiety and lefthandedness. (Merckelbach, de Ruiter & Olff, 1989).

Lefthanded people were found to react somewhat more quickly than right-handers to affective stimuli, although the sample was small and the reaction times considerably smaller (Everhart, Harrison & Crews, 1996). Intriguingly, lefthanded adults in this study identified neutral affective stimuli as angry more often in the right than in the left visual field, while righthanded adults were consistent across both fields. Is it possible, therefore, that lefthanded people subconsciously perceive the right side of the visual field less positively? This perhaps should not be surprising given the long tradition amongst the righthanded population of the world which has often equated lefthanded with “sinister” (i.e., evil). The implications for visual art could be interesting.
Dyslexia and Learning Disabilities.

There are also studies demonstrating that lefthanded people are more likely to suffer from varying degrees of dyslexia and learning disabilities (Coren, 1992; Eglinton & Annett, 1994; Geschwind & Behan, 1984; Geschwind & Galaburda, 1985; Gotestam, 1990; Temple, 1990; Tonnessen, Lokken, Hoien & Lundberg, 1993; Winner et al., 1991; Wood & Cooper, 1992). Annett (1994a) in a meta-analysis of the better studies over the last fifty years concluded that there is indeed a small but significant increase in dyslexia problems amongst left-handers. However, she decided (Annett, 1994b) that dyslectics should include more than the normal proportion of left- and mixed-handers only if they had weak phonological processing, finding a link between verbal and written language. It is interesting to note that Fitzgerald (1990) detected little extreme lefthandedness amongst dyslectics but a very high degree of mixed handedness. Annett and Kilshaw (1984) also discovered higher lefthandedness amongst dyslectics but significantly higher mixed handedness. Levander and Schalling (1988) found a self-reported elevated frequency of difficulties in learning to write only amongst female mixed-handers. Winner et al. (1991) discovered that while non-righthanded undergraduates in maths/science and art performed spacial visualization tests with no greater ability than did right-handers in those fields, they had significantly more problems reading. In fact 37% (7 out of 19) non-righthanded art students self-reported more than one reading problem compared with 6% of non-righthanders in maths/science and 5% of non-righthanders in verbal fields. The authors suggested a default hypothesis, later echoed in
Winner and Casey (1992), that in the face of reading and writing difficulties displayed by lefthanded artists these individuals may have deliberately chosen to major in art partly in order to avoid disciplines which require extensive work with academic texts. This may be a promising avenue of inquiry which should be pursued; there is certainly anecdotal evidence that many art students at the institution where I work have made this deliberate choice.

Auto-immune Diseases

There is both speculation and evidence in the literature that lefthanded people tend to suffer more from allergies (Fry, 1990; Geschwind & Behan, 1982, 1984; Geschwind & Galaburda, 1985) as well as asthma and other auto-immune diseases (Tonnessen et al., 1993; Wood & Cooper, 1992). The last-mentioned research team discovered that mixed-handed people were significantly more affected than were the strongly lefthanded. The incidence of severe headaches (deemed to be largely migraine) in lefthanded schoolchildren was studied by Kilty, Charney and Leviton (1987) who discovered that mixed-handers (erroneously identified as “ambidextrous”, which actually means “equally dextrous with either hand” and is a very rare phenomenon) were fifty per cent more likely to suffer from severe headaches than either left- or righthanders. Fitzgerald (1990) also made a weak positive association between lefthandedness, auto-immune deficits and dyslexia, while Rich and McKeever (1990) concluded that there was a very interesting association between spacial performance, familial sinistrality (FS) and immune disorder susceptibility (ID).
Specifically, “superior spacial performance was associated with the conjoint presence or absence of FS and ID, and inferior spatial performance was associated with the presence of one factor and the absence of the other” (p. 67, emphasis in original.) This means that if the hypothesis is correct, and assuming the established artist-educators who are participants of my study to have superior spacial performance, those who have first degree relatives who were also lefthanded will probably display evidence of immune deficiency problems, while those who do not have familial sinistrality are unlikely to present with these symptoms.

In dispute, any connection between lefthandedness and auto-immune diseases has been challenged by Bryden, McManus and Steenhuis (1991) and Temple (1990) who were unable to find evidence of this. Little evidence was found by Betancur at al. (1990) either, but they did discover that their French lefthanded sample tended to exhibit symptoms of allergy in the early years of life compared with right-handers who suffered later.

**Increased Accident Risk**

There has been a long debate as to whether lefthanded people actually have a diminished life-expectancy, initiated by Halpern and Coren (1988) when they showed that there is a reduced incidence of lefthandedness amongst elderly people. Annett (1993) argued that these researchers failed to distinguish between different criteria used to define lefthandedness in early and later studies, the most probable explanation for a decline in lefthanded writers with
increasing age being that people who are now elderly were prevented from using their left hand because of societal pressures. There are, notwithstanding this plausible argument, suggestions that lefthanded people suffer more from accidents, at least partly caused by machinery and equipment built for the righthanded majority (Coren, 1989; Coren, 1992; Coren & Halpern, 1991; McCann, 1992; Merriman, 1990; Paul, 1990a, 1990b; Wallersteiner, 1993). “A left-hander is 89% more likely to have an accident-related injury requiring medical attention than a right-hander” (Coren, 1992, p. 252). Coren’s (1989) raw data which were originally divided into left- and righthanded were reanalysed by Daniel and Yeo (1991) who trichotomized them into left-, mixed- and righthanded. In spite of the fact that they erroneously used the term “ambidextrous” when they meant “mixed-handed” they were able to show that “tests, also controlling for gender, revealed that more accidents occurred in ambidextrous than in either righthanded subjects . . . or lefthanded subjects . . . but that lefthanded vs. righthanded subjects did not differ with respect to accident history” (p. 1346). This finding led Coren to concede in the same journal (Coren, 1991) that “Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that nonrighthanded subjects are more susceptible to accident related injuries than are consistently righthanded individuals” (p. 1347). In formulating his reply he reanalyzed his data to discover that “. . . only 13.3% of the right-handers are mixed-handed as compared to 46.5% of the left-handers . . . . Thus left-handers are about three times more likely to be mixed-handed than right-handers” (p. 1347). Like Daniel and Yeo (1991), Hicks, Pass, Freeman, Bautista and
Johnson (1993) found that it was mixed-handed rather than lefthanded people who suffered more accidents, observing that Coren (1989) "may have confounded his lefthanded group by electing not to draw a distinction between left- and mixed-handed individuals" (p. 1121).

Graham, David, Rickert and Glenn (1993) found less dramatic but nevertheless significant evidence in support of the hypothesis that non-righthanded individuals have more accidents, although like most researchers they failed to draw the distinction between left- and mixed-handed. Amongst American children aged 6 to 18 years in an emergency department suffering from unintentional injury 18.1% were lefthanded compared to 10.5% lefthanders in an non-injured control group, and 20% of the lefthanded children (in both trauma and control groups) had been previously hospitalized for injury compared with 12% of the righthanded children. Wright, Williams, Currie and Beattie (1996) surveyed Scottish children, finding the lefthanded slightly more likely on average to have accidents requiring medical attention. However, these were more severe with 20.6% of lefthanded children compared to 14% of right-handers having to spend at least one night in hospital as the result of an accident. These severity figures are remarkably similar to those of the previous survey two years earlier on a different continent. Perhaps surprisingly, Wright et al (1996) found that lefthanded adolescent girls were 32% more likely to be injured than their righthanded peers, leading the authors to suggest that adolescent girls may be at particular risk because of the substantial physical and psychological changes which occur at puberty. I suspect that another possible factor is that girls are less
familiar with the operation of tools and machinery, most of which are designed for righthanded users.

In contrast, Peters and Perry (1991) claim to have found no support for the claim that left-handers have an elevated risk of accidents. However, their study is badly flawed because their single question appeared to be “Were you involved in a traffic accident in the last two years (bicycle, motor bike, car), where you were the driver? This refers to any accident where there was damage to a person or vehicle” (p. 1258). Traffic accidents involve other parties and the lefthanded driver may in some cases have been a totally innocent victim who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, while the question avoids the potential problems with machinery and lack of righthanded dexterity. Merckelbach, Muris and Kop (1994) also could not find any evidence in a sample of 285 Dutch undergraduate students and university employees that lefthanded individuals report more health problems or accidents.

The literature on handedness, with the exception of Coren (1992) and the lefthanded Paul (1990b), tells us virtually nothing about the experience of being lefthanded. What is easy, what is difficult, what increases stress and frustration, what requires effort and creativity in order to adapt to machinery and equipment built for the righthanded majority? There are many and varying measures of lefthanded populations, but very little information to allow those of us who are righthanded to even begin to understand the experiences of people who live every day of their lives lefthanded in an overwhelmingly righthanded world. One of the purposes of this study is to illuminate some of these questions.
Summary of the Review of the Literature

The description of the culture of artists cited in the Introduction was partly confirmed with considerable clarity during the Pilot Interviews, but it was also in part denied. A number of interesting concepts were introduced during a review of some of the artist-related literature. It was suggested that creative people are those who go out of their way to find problems, and then provide solutions to them. However, in order to continue to enjoy something the complexity must be continually increased to avoid boredom. Making art may be an act of self-discovery and a rationalization of where the artist fits into his or her society, and it may also be a way of controlling one's environment. This can be most important as a child, and many artistic children are unhappy at school where art can be a form of defence. Creative children are not always looked upon favourably by teachers, who may view the characteristics of such a non-conformist child as less than desirable. Some of the major sources of artistic inspiration for adults may in fact be painful childhood memories, psychic distress and discomfort, or a need to come to terms with present or past perceived wrongs in the world. People who have suffered seriously from traumatic misfortune when young but were still supported by adults or peers are likely to be the most creative, according to Therivel (1993). They know that they are different, and they are driven to justify themselves through their creative work. Alternatively, Bloom (1985) studied highly creative and successful people and discovered that their creativity had invariably been carefully nurtured by their parents and teachers. They came from "child-centred" homes where their
families went out of their way to provide every opportunity for advancement in their fields.

Artists look at things differently and are often less linear and more intuitive and holistic than non-creative people. Their creative imperative may require them to protect themselves from the continual demands of society and everyday life by withdrawing or becoming apparently anti-social. Visual thinkers may have problems with language, partly because they see ideas as pictures without labelling them using words and then have difficulty communicating these ideas to others. Creative people tend to have complex personalities and experience both the highs and lows of life, which can sometimes mean much psychic pain. Making art is of paramount importance to most artists, and they may experience work addiction or workaholism. However, one researcher found that applied artists did not exhibit the same degree of drive or pleasure obtained from making art as did fine artists who were more intrinsically motivated. Whatever the costs, both groups continued to do their own kind of art because they received what they needed from their careers. Fine artists needed to produce their own art on their own terms while applied artists used their creativity within the more constrained parameters required by their clientele. Being creative usually means tearing down what exists and rebuilding it in new configurations, a mindset which would naturally make one rebellious in relation to the established order. Creative people therefore can be only loosely connected to the mores of society in order to be able to break away. This is a necessity for creativity to blossom.

Personality studies tend to show that artists are very low in scores of socially-
accepted behaviour, and indeed one pair of researchers found that art students deliberately identified with rebellious roles because this was perceived to be the necessary route to successful creativity.

An extensive review was made of the literature on lefthandedness, the consensus being that artists tend to be more lefthanded than the average population. It is thought by many researchers that lefthanded people may be at greater risk of auto-immune diseases such as allergies and asthma, and may also suffer more from dyslexia and learning disabilities. They may also be more accident-prone. Interesting data is beginning to emerge indicating that it is perhaps the mixed-handed rather than the extreme lefthanded who are more at risk of these various perils. This could be a very significant issue for artists who may be better at using both hands than most of the population because they use their hands a lot, and possibly because of enhanced spatial abilities. Lefthanded people are also more likely to be "mixed-handers" than the righthanded are because of the everyday pressures on them to use the non-dominant hand. Thus many artists might be classified as mixed-handers either by birth or training, and could therefore be in a high-risk category. Furthermore, a population which may have a higher incidence of asthma and allergies, some of which may have trouble reading, is clearly at greater risk in an art school where the air is frequently far too polluted with chemicals some of which trigger asthma and allergies (McCann, 1992), and where the ability to read safety instructions and procedures is important. These potential problems were explored during the artist interviews.
Chapter Three will lay out in detail the methodology and the procedures used for this study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Restatement of the Problem

This study investigated whether a number of visual artists tended to think alike on a variety of topics which could be characterized as belonging to an artist culture, and had similar experiences possibly as a result of being lefthanded.

Profiles of Participants

Six participants were chosen from the ranks of artists who are lefthanded and who are or have been instructors in visual art or design at a major Canadian art school. The fact that they are both working artists and have taught at the institution gave us all a common interest or base, although they did not know the identity of their fellow participants. Purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) ensured that they were chosen according to their willingness to participate, their time constraints, and their disciplines. The sexes are equally represented, but all proper names have been changed or otherwise avoided in order to protect their anonymity. Similarly, their disciplines have not been specifically described in order to protect their identities, but they include three-dimensional and two-dimensional art, as well as teaching theory. Detailed physical descriptions and any elaboration on exactly what these participants teach must unfortunately be kept to a minimum in order to protect their identities in what is a relatively small art community. I have chosen a short quotation or two from each which I feel best personifies their characters. The reader will be meeting these participants
again and again (under their pseudonyms and always in the same sequence) as we explore the various overlapping emerging themes, and by the end of the paper a much better picture will emerge of each person’s experience of being an artist.

Albert

A two- and three-dimensional artist who has achieved a significant degree of recognition in his professional career, Albert has arranged his whole life around his wide-ranging interest in art. Virtually all his waking hours are devoted to creative activities of some kind, amongst which he would include serving on committees of various arts organizations. He struggles constantly with a significant degree of dyslexia, which is relatively common amongst lefthanded people. Very much a philosopher and a people-watcher, he pursues his many interests with a passion and single-minded determination which earns him the undisputed label of “driven” artist. He delights in looking at his world with a different perspective.

I do like to complain. Because in the complaint process it causes me to inevitably come up with a new solution. That’s problem-solving. I don’t think complaining is a bad thing. I think it is a good thing.

David

An applied artist by profession, David professes to be equally at home with painting or printmaking both of which he does frequently for relaxation.
Painting a picture is a way of expressing yourself and getting certain emotions out, and for me it's not really for anybody else. It is a rather selfish act and if other people can enjoy it, fine, and I've never really cared whether other people cared about my work or not. I did it strictly for myself.

He is articulate and obviously experienced in explaining his work to non-artists, often speaking with a fierce emphasis. David is particularly entrepreneurial and multi-skilled even in sports, in which he is still active. He was probably the most multi-disciplinary member of the group and is incessantly tinkering with tools, models and art materials in a variety of media. Creating and experimenting constantly, even in his spare time, he admits cheerfully to being a "driven" artist. He loves to learn and to experiment technically. "I feel the biggest handicap is to not be able to do things for yourself--to have to rely on others or to not be able to express yourself because you are missing some simple technical skill."

Harry

A three-dimensional artist who has grown exceedingly tired of the rat race, Harry is very emphatic that he is no longer prepared to compete. "I don't have to prove anything to anybody anymore." Over the last year or so his creation of sculptural art has been replaced by a total obsession with the sport of windsurfing. His lyrical descriptions of how this sport fits into his creative life leave no doubt that it can be considered choreography or dance; performance
art elevated to a high degree of skill and risk-taking. This dedication to his performance art has taken over his life to the point where he has willingly unencumbered himself of most of his possessions and has difficulty maintaining serious relationships because his life is to a large extent controlled by the presence or absence of fair sailing weather. He embraces life with a cheerful enthusiasm and an unrepentant minimum of engagement.

I really find that being an artist has nothing to do with making money. Doesn’t have a single thing to do with making money. . . . I think art is a reality of life, and I think that society has tried to shut it off into one corner, and alienate it. . . . It’s sort of like we have set up this system where we go to work at nine o’clock and we come home at five. Well is that reality or is that not? It’s been set up to make society run the way it is, but it might be that we have been put here to play all the time, and because we are caught in this we can’t do it. And I think that because I am an artist, that is reality and that’s the way life should be. For everybody.

Kathleen

Kathleen reported an unhappy childhood which included physical and sexual abuse. After many years of therapy she finds that her three-dimensional artwork is an essential tool for learning about and expressing her anger, fears and other powerful feelings. “Art is my mouth.” Her sculpture is always in some way either autobiographical or speaking to the precarious nature of the human condition and the masks which people wear to hide their inner feelings. She is
articulate and intense, driven to make art constantly.

Oh it's an absolute drive . . . it's a need that has to be fulfilled or I get very frustrated. . . . during the time that I was held up with various health problems, even then I took stuff into hospital with me and was making things while I was there because I couldn't sit there, no matter how much pain I was in, and not make something. So that's a pretty big drive.

Maggie

Maggie also reported an unhappy childhood of sexual abuse and neglect. She is well educated and eloquent, and after some years of therapy is open and matter-of-fact about her negative experiences. She is a caring and humane person who all her life has been a community and social activist, and is a passionate feminist. Her academic studies in art history and philosophy and her two- and three-dimensional art disciplines have reflected these interests and have included a considerable amount of ephemeral and guerilla art.

I think that artists are communicators. That a large part of their artistic impulse is, besides that need to create whatever, mess around with materials, and just the sheer sensuous pleasure of it . . . is this almost excruciating imperative to communicate. That is definitely a large part of it for me.

Sally

Applied artist Sally is a quiet-spoken and thoughtful person who prefers to
be an observer rather than in the forefront of activity. Interestingly, considering her chosen field which involves the presentation of words and images, she has a significant problem with dyslexia. She is probably the least "driven" of my participants in terms of the imperative to create, although in her non-professional life she is enthusiastic about domestic creativity. Having a structure to her life and being in control are very important to her. Being a creative person, she says, has given her some advantages.

Being a creative thinker I guess I can see opportunities. I can perhaps see where there are opportunities where someone else may not. You may be more open-minded . . . being able to see how this person can do this, his skill could in tandem create something else, you know, do something interesting with putting disparate things together.

Data Collection Procedures

"Reality" as Lancy (1993) says "is constantly changing" (p. 9). I am well aware that there are alternative constructions of reality, and of truth, and that there can be many possible explanations for phenomena. Initially I was somewhat taken aback at the blunt assertion by Bogdan and Taylor (1975) that participants of this study will not tell the truth. "Accept as a fundamental premise the concept that there is no truth, only perspectives and deceptions" (p. 91). On reflection, however, it becomes evident that while we all have our own perspectives many people play roles for a variety of reasons, and some artists may well be *poseurs par excellence*, intent on deceiving their publics if not
themselves as well. As Seidman (1991) tells us, when people tell their stories they select details from their stream of consciousness, deciding consciously or subconsciously what details to include. A phenomenological study must tell the stories of the participants as they report them, and apart from some gentle probing I had no right to question their truthfulness or to pry into their untold histories. Nevertheless, it is in order to examine some of these “perspectives and deceptions” to the extent possible and to increase understanding of the artistic experience that I have undertaken a phenomenological study. As Lancy (1993) says, “the qualitative paradigm is ideal for phenomena that are patently complex and about which little is known with certainty” (p. 9). A quantitative study could have been used to gather statistics on both health and attitudes, but cannot begin to capture the subjective side of human nature, which is exactly what this study investigates (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). A qualitative research study (Cobb & Hagemaster, 1987), and in particular a phenomenological study was therefore deemed to be the most appropriate form of qualitative research for this investigation.

This study is an emerging design, and in fact has already changed direction somewhat several times during the course of the interviews and their subsequent analysis. What was important was that my participants told their stories in their own words, and beyond a certain gentle probing to encourage elaboration I had to work with the material which emerged. My task was to try to find patterns and common themes in the material offered to me rather than to wrestle it into convenient categories to fit preconceived theories.
The procedures were standardized as much as possible, with open-ended semi-structured interviews being tape-recorded (Seidman, 1991) with the full permission of participants and then transcribed. Field notes were made both during the interview and while I was transcribing the tapes. Participants were given copies of transcripts and encouraged to comment further or edit as they saw fit before giving their approval, with only their agreed-upon version being used for this study (see Informed Consent form in the Appendix) thus ensuring as much as possible a shared understanding of their perspectives. Quotations used are verbatim, although they may have been edited for brevity. Nothing has been added or deliberately put into the mouths of the participants, who were promised anonymity at all times and so pseudonyms have been used throughout. Miles and Huberman (1984) in their Qualitative Data Analysis as cited in Pitman and Maxwell (1992) worry about the “betrayal” involved in making participants’ private constructions public. However, my view is that if the participant (who has the benefit of a nom-de-plume) is given every opportunity to review, edit and approve the copy before final analysis and publication they have sufficient protection. They all approved the transcripts, and several of the participants said in effect “What I had said, I have said, and you can go ahead and use my name.” Participants were advised that at the end of the project process I would be happy to share my insights with them, either verbally or in written form.

An authoritative and well-used handedness questionnaire (Annett, 1970) was administered to ascertain the degree of lefthandedness and included in the
study as an Appendix. This was slightly adapted with the permission of Marian Annett, the original British designer, in order to make it more easily understood in North America. There are no published figures for reliability and validity for this instrument since as Annett points out, lefthandedness is a continuum rather than a discrete difference. Of the major study in which she evolved these instrument questions she says:

Estimates of the incidence of lefthandedness in this sample could vary between about 3 and 30 per cent, depending on whether complete consistency of left preference or any left preference is the criterion; the incidence would be even higher if "either" responses were counted as evidence of left tendencies. (Annett, 1970, p. 319)

Pilot Study Interviews

A Pilot Study was undertaken with one participant being interviewed for a total of two hours. A lot of rich data were obtained, valuable lessons were learned and important refinements were made to my interview techniques. These interviews with David were so rich that he was included as one of the six artists in the study. I was most encouraged by the wealth of good, solid data emerging which confirmed to me that the phenomenological approach to this investigation was indeed the correct one.

Interview Procedure

Interviews usually took place in a small quiet meeting room at the
institution where I work, or failing this in my office or a location of the participant's
choice. Most participants were interviewed three times for a total of
approximately three to four hours over a period of several weeks during the
summer of 1997 and the following academic year. With two of the participants
the data was deemed to be sufficiently complete after the second interview. The
five basic research questions were:

1. Why is art important and what does it mean to you?
2. How do you see the interaction between the artist and his/her culture?
3. How do you function as an artist?
4. What childhood experiences stand out most vividly for you?
5. What is being left-handed like for you?

The first interview was largely unstructured except that it concentrated on
discussion of these questions. The participant-interviewer relationship was
intended to be one of co-researchers (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) exploring topics of
interest to both while guided by these general research questions. In the second
and third interviews I used probing questions to uncover emerging topics of
interest and to encourage elaboration. Both general and particular questions
were naturally refined and reformulated during the research depending upon the
emerging data, because as the qualitative researcher I used the study to learn
what the important questions were (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Given the
emergent design of the study important concerns had to be allowed to surface
rather than be predetermined, but once they had emerged it was sometimes
necessary to direct the conversation so that they could be further explored. It
was discovered during the Pilot Study interviews that the participant volunteered information which led naturally into the next question and which, in turn, allowed the interview to flow more like a conversation. Some significant questions were therefore held back unless they were obviously not going to come up spontaneously in conversation, since it was preferable not to suggest concepts or themes. Nevertheless a list of broad question topics used to keep the interview on track had to be kept in mind, to be used cautiously (Seidman, 1991) and altered according to the tone of the interview, being refined with probing questions when necessary.

Research for a phenomenological study is supposed to be impartial and to allow the data to emerge without providing direction to it. This study certainly began that way, but the participants and the process itself conspired to make it far more personal. I had known all of these participants for some years, although not intimately. It may have been this common base, or the fact that I invited them to become co-researchers in the project, but I quickly sensed a mutual warmth and closeness towards each of these artists which was quite unexpected. Most of them showed little hesitation in sharing details of their lives that I would never have asked for, and on many occasions the interview became simply a conversation. I tried to keep silent as much as possible in order to allow the other person to talk, but I had no hesitation in asking probing questions which at times might be construed as leading the discussion in a particular direction but in fact appeared to be the path in which the participant was taking it. I was using the study to learn what the important questions were, and so my questions were also
emergent and were appropriate for the context and the warm co-researcher relationship with my participants. Most of the themes emerged only after I analyzed and compared the written transcripts, so our conversations followed lines of mutual interest and my general quest to learn more about lefthanded artists, guided by the research questions.

Data Analysis Procedures

Transcripts of tape-recorded interviews were produced on a word processor and given to participants for comment and approval. These approved versions, edited as necessary to reflect the participant’s wishes, were used for the final analysis. The recordings, transcripts, questionnaires and signed permissions were kept on file in my home office as hard copy and will be destroyed two years after publication of this thesis.

Since I do not have a special program for coding data I created my own by using the sorting capability of WordPerfect 6.1 for Windows. Every paragraph was coded with as many descriptive phrases as necessary in order to describe the possible themes emerging from the content. The paragraphs with these coding headers were then duplicated on the word processor and the descriptive phrases rotated within the set so that each of the duplicated paragraphs started with a different descriptive phrase from the set. The paragraphs with their coding headers were then sorted alphabetically by the first three words using the Sort function of the program, which had the effect of bringing together all the paragraphs described by the first descriptive phrase of the set. The coding
header of the paragraph might, for example, have read: "rebellion / art as therapy / drive to create / meaning and importance of art //D16b". In this case, all the paragraphs containing material coded as "rebellion" were printed consecutively and therefore examined together and the content analyzed for "recurring regularities" (Patton, 1990, p. 403), patterns and possible emergent themes. This strategy worked well when analyzing the data from the Pilot Study interviews, and it was not until some time later that I discovered that Patton (1990, p. 383) had described an almost identical process using a computer program. He advised that "Such a complex system with multiple coders categorizing every paragraph in every interview represents an extreme form of coding, one that would not be used for small-scale formative or action research projects" (p. 384.) This system did, of course, produce many "recurring regularities" which are not used in the final analysis because I found that I acquired far too much rich material. However, until the options are laid out for comparison and priorities are established the coding still had to be done since laying out the options on paper clarified the procedure for me. Patton (1990) reminds us that the process of Epochè in which personal biases are recognized and set aside is an ongoing analytical one as well as necessary at the very beginning of the research project. Setting the priorities of patterns and themes were nevertheless my priorities, and so it is inevitable that my interests were reflected. The essential task was to make sure that the emergent patterns and themes flowed naturally from the data, rather than the data being manipulated to fit them. Interpretation is allowable, but description, interpretation and conjecture
must be carefully and clearly separated and identified (Patton, 1990). As he pointed out (citing Guba, 1981) while it is not possible to be objective the researcher has a responsibility to be "balanced, fair and conscientious in taking account of multiple perspectives, multiple interests, and multiple realities" (p. 481). By bracketing my biases in the Limitations and Assumptions section I hope that I was able to achieve this goal while producing analysis which will offer such a balanced and fair snapshot of a few of the lived experiences of these lefthanded artists.

The themes emerging from the interviews are listed in Appendix A, although this list changed dramatically as the research progressed and content analysis was done at the same time (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I finally realized that in a thesis of this size I could only deal with a limited number of themes so most of them were regretfully abandoned.

Summary of Chapter Three.

Six lefthanded artists who also teach art were the subjects of this study. This study of emergent design used semi-structured interviews to encourage the participants to reconstruct various experiences as lefthanded artists, and gave them every opportunity to participate fully in member checks of the individual interview transcripts. A Pilot Study was undertaken and yielded much rich data which were sorted into broad categories or "recurring patterns". From this a tentative list of research questions was drafted as a guide for further interviews, with the full understanding that these questions must be varied according to the
emerging data.

Chapter Three has described the participants, the methodology and the procedures. Chapter Four will present the results of the data analysis.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

This is a phenomenological study, which means that the perceptions and experiences of the participants are of paramount importance. All of them spoke with enthusiasm and passion, and some of them were highly articulate. The quotations are therefore necessarily long, but I make no apologies for that. Their personalities and experiences must be allowed to come through to the reader, who in the process will come to know these artists a lot better. Of the many themes which emerged I chose only six to explore because of space constraints. I broke these down into two categories: Emerging themes, and Emerging themes connected to theory. Concepts and theories from the literature could be applied to all the emergent themes explored, but in the latter category I wanted particularly to explore emergent themes which might be connected to theories such as Therivel’s (1993) Challenged Personality theory and to some of the concepts related to lefthandedness.

Emerging Themes

Meaning, Importance of Art

Participants were asked why they wanted to make art (and by that term the participants and I agreed that we meant “creativity” in all forms) and why it was important to them. The answers seemed to fall into two broad categories which could be termed “Philosophical” and “Personal”, but within these included a wide variety of reasons. In the former category, three of the six were quick to
justify art in terms of human society and culture, the other three being more personal in their responses.

**Albert (Meaning, Importance of Art)**

The opening question about the importance of art elicited from every one of the participants what may be an essential truth about the meaning of art. Every one of them declared without my prompting that art is all about communication. Albert had a very personal relationship with art which he believed was an absolute necessity, arguing that it was a means of expressing emotions which for one reason or another could not be expressed in more conventional ways. "I think that most artists actually confront the world in their art--and it's a way of dealing with that, that for one reason or another you are not dealing with it in any other way." He insisted that the emotion was what he was trying to communicate.

I respond to my world very emotionally. I feel my world as much as I see it. And I find that I can't really--as I now am attempting to verbalize this to you--I can't really put it into words, otherwise I would be a writer. But I can put it into a colour, shape, form. I can use all those elements to create a feeling in you.

I offered as an alternative the example of Ken Danby's "realism" school of art which has been described as "carefully posed, snapshotlike views, often of rural Ontario seen in a strong light" (Murray, 1986). Albert voiced the opinion of a number of the participants when he said

To me it's not art. It has no life. It has no excitement. From a technical
point of view it is amazing, and I must applaud the technique. But technique is not enough, for me, for art. Art has to go beyond the technique--there has to be something more there.

Albert wanted his work to be inviting, to be understood but also appreciated and enjoyed. His art, he said, looked attractive but also included "barbs" of meaning, both consciously and unconsciously. In other words he often included subtle messages as well as making pieces which could be enjoyed for themselves. Being a very tactile person he explained that colour, light values and having physical contact with his materials were all vital parts of his world of art.

I could never understand why, as much as I was getting on well with painting, why I wasn’t getting full satisfaction. And after a long period of analysis I realized that when you paint--what is it when you are painting?

You have a canvas or a piece of paper or whatever, you’ve got some pigment in some kind of suspension, you’ve got some bristle, you’ve got a metal cap, you’ve got a piece of wood, and then comes you. And when you face it that way you suddenly realize that you are actually quite well removed from the act of painting.

David (Meaning, Importance of Art)

David explained the need for art in very similar terms to Albert’s. “As somebody who has always drawn I’ve found that painting and drawing has been a method of expressing things that weren’t normally expressible through other media.”

Being someone who designed for others, his personal art was therefore perhaps a therapeutic escape from the coldly detached and somewhat restrictive world of
the design client who made specific demands on his artistic talents. He too felt that the inclusion of an emotional component was essential:

What I'm really trying to get to is the expressionism (sic) and mood that hides behind the art. So, if the feeling behind the piece is anger that should come through—if it's happiness that should come through—if it's comedy that should come through. And I feel that the success is based on that showing through rather than the image itself. I like to experiment with the balance of the image, the colours, whatever, but behind that is a constant feeling of some sort. Without that I find that, for me, art doesn't have much meaning.

He, as well as several of the others, showed a general feeling of disdain for people who might be technically good but lacked both that necessary emotional component but also artistic growth.

There are people who can technically paint photo-realistically, but who never turned out any artwork that actually says anything, any legitimate value or actually contains any of this emotion, in that honest manner. . . . once they start abusing the system then they are no longer in my books an artist. They're an entrepreneur who is taking advantage of a retail opportunity.

When I offered the Canadian artist Ken Danby as an illustration of this he agreed immediately, but added rather more charitably that this particular artist was probably constrained by his public who expected from him a certain type of work. Since all artists have to continue to grow, he argued, there was probably a side
of Danby not seen in public.

I think everybody grows—you can’t stop that. . . . I wouldn’t be surprised if a person like Ken Danby has another art collection, a secret art collection which is very different from what the public sees normally but is maybe not acceptable to his marketing people.

**Harry (Meaning, Importance of Art)**

Harry insisted that artists are the intellectual leaders of society and “are the thinkers and the see-ers and the experimenters . . . and without that I don’t think that society can exist.” This implies, as most of the participants suggested, that artists had to change and grow, and Harry felt very strongly that it was important to “take the next step”.

This artist is heavily involved with windsurfing these days, perhaps to the point of obsession. “Yeah, I would call it an addiction.” He simply did what he wanted to with no concern about what others thought, and although he did not try to categorize his sport as any form of art it was clear to me that he was actually participating in a form of dance or performance art. He was very comfortable about concentrating on his solo performance art, and talked with evident satisfaction about the artist’s feeling of being connected to his body, of being totally open to sensory input and interpreting that and manipulating the body accordingly, and of feeling supremely content and confident as he did so. This artist who had apparently suffered considerably from low self-esteem in the past was now doing performance art at a highly advanced level and feeling really content with himself. He did, however, insist that what he was doing was a form
of communication.

Because it's knowledge. It's knowing, it's feeling content inside, feeling strong about who you are, and being able to say "Yeah, I can go out there and I can do all of those things." . . . A lot of really good things have started to happen to me. I got sponsored to windsurf. People are going to give me probably ten to fifteen thousand dollars worth of equipment just to go out and sail their boards. They give this to twenty-two year olds, and I'm forty-five years old, and for me that's really great. Because I'm non-competitive and yet I'm good enough that this is starting to happen.

It was Harry's hope that his apparently carefree and hedonistic lifestyle would convey the following message to his art students:

"Look, you know, I'm an artist. I went through high school, didn't know what the hell I was doing, finally came to art college and found something that I really like. And look at me now, I'm teaching this class now and I do it really well. And what you feel inside me--this bubbliness, is through all of this stuff around, and that I was able to do it." . . . And I think that's the energy that we should be putting across, and you can only do that through really, really enjoying who you are and what you do. And every single day I'm going to try to find new ways of doing that.

Enjoying yourself and being the very best you could be while being creative was for Harry a lot more important than making art which sells. This brought us spontaneously back to the "realist" art versus emotion debate, and Harry's opinion was no surprise.
I really find that being an artist has nothing to do with making money. Doesn't have a single thing to do with making money. . . . Somebody who makes watercolours and has a Gallery up North--as far as the public's opinion of them, they are an artist. My opinion is that they are not an artist. Because they have found a little niche and they are not progressing past that niche. They found something that makes them money and they hold onto that and they work it until it's bone dry. And they don't move past that, a lot of them. And I think a true artist finds ways to move past it.

**Kathleen (Meaning, Importance of Art)**

Kathleen took the question about the meaning and importance of art personally, as she does with her creativity, pointing out that all her art reflects her perceptions of life and human relationships. They are very deliberately a mirror of human interactions, often revealing their inadequacies and lack of equity. As an incest survivor, she makes art about abuse and about the darker and more fragile side of humanity, admitting that there was almost always an autobiographical element in what she created. There had to be a message. Kathleen talked about themes of alienation and abandonment. And rebellion as well. I mean I did a whole series of pieces and their relationships, and rebelling against an overpowering relationship. I see it in my own life, I see it all around me, and it definitely manifests itself in my artwork. No question about that.

So for her creating is an important means of communicating, both to the world and to herself, of uncovering and expressing deep and often dark emotions, and
therefore an essential therapeutic tool in her growth and development.

At times it's a way of visually expressing something I couldn't possibly say verbally. And for a very long period of time I couldn't say anything easily verbally. . . . I remember one time my therapist saying to me, when I was having terrible problems with a relationship, that art was my mouth.

**Maggie (Meaning, Importance of Art)**

Art for Maggie is a vital part of society and an important means to better our collective human condition. She observed, as did several others, that every manufactured thing we see around us has been designed, which means that it conveys a deliberate message.

I think creativity is one of the wonderful things about being human. Our creative potential. And also our sensuous esthetic appreciation of things, which I am convinced is 50% of why we are where we are now . . . that's a large part of the impetus for us in the way we invent and design and create and try to make our lives better. . . . I think that artists are absolutely crucial to culture and society. There is no culture and society without arts. . . . and everything you see around you has been designed by somebody, or created by somebody.

Maggie felt that art and human beings are inextricably linked, but she was uncomfortable about wearing the label of "artist", arguing that

I guess I really do think that everything that humans do is connected and informed by other kinds of social practices and human practices, and I can't see art outside of that process. It's a social practice like others, and
as such it's informed by our attitudes or our experiences and interpretations of the meanings of events in our lives or whatever. I can't see it outside that process.

Because it is a social practice, Maggie explained, art is all about communication.

I think (what) is really important to understand about art, for me anyway, art-making and art, production and art, the object, is fundamentally about communication. You are communicating an idea, a feeling, you are sharing. . . . Why would you just make something for the hell of making? I mean, I do make for the pleasure of making, but--and I enjoy the process of making things. But there has to be for me a connectivity with the rest of humanity.

Maggie is a very political person and saw the importance of art as a vehicle for political, feminist and other socially conscious messages, being equally enthusiastic about street graffiti and private art making both sweeping and personal statements about perceived injustices. She too is an incest survivor with a very unhappy childhood, although she made a point of saying that her art was never autobiographical. But making art could certainly be for internal reasons, and she suggested in response to my probing question "Why do you make art?" that the necessary communication may be to oneself. "Because it is a focussed way of explaining things to myself, for one thing. I mean it is a way of working out problems." Working out problems was important and she, like every one of the participants, observed that it was also important to explore, to grow, to learn and to continue to move forward. "I don't believe in change for change's
sake, but I do think there is a problem with not growing and not developing.”

Conceptual art was important to her, but so was making things with her hands, and Maggie made many references to the sensuousness of textiles and to the importance of colour:

> When I’m working with something the actual material I’m working with has to be sensual and seductive. I think seduction is a big part of what’s important to me about the textile work I do. The materials draw you in because they are so seductive.

_Sally (Meaning, Importance of Art)_

Sally was one of those with a global, analytical view, and she (as well as several other of the participants) considered art to be vital in expressing the values of the culture, not only in design but as a commentary on its problems, issues, and judgements. “Whether it’s fine art or design--it’s holding a mirror up to who we are and what our values are. And maybe with comments about that too--judgements about it.” She offered the example of Eli Langer, an artist who was recently charged in Toronto for exhibiting drawings of children being sexually abused. “He was holding up--what he was expressing was something deeply embedded in our culture. I mean it’s--the issue of sexual abuse is something that’s coming out of the closet.”

The belief that art must express emotion was mentioned by all except Sally who in her professional life tends to design commercial items which usually leave little possibility for such emotion or personal messages. Even so, her goal was to be creative with the material with which she had to work so that the result
was as inviting and accessible as possible to the viewer.

**Discussion and Summary (Meaning, Importance of Art)**

Many interesting ideas emerged from this first question, some of which will be discussed later in the paper. It must be remembered that many of these emerging themes overlap and so will be revisited to some extent. Some of the histories and perceptions of these six participants will continue to emerge with the themes so that by the end of the paper the reader will have a rather more cohesive picture of the way these artists think.

It is natural that the participants would all consider art to have a vital importance, whether universally, personally or both. There was a unanimous feeling that art had to communicate and that it (including design and other forms of creativity) reflects the culture of the times. What is particularly important to communicate is emotion, and art can be used by the individual to express the otherwise inexpressible. There was a generally articulated view that it is more important for artists to continue to grow and to be creative than it is for them to make mindless art for money. All of these artists except one volunteered the fact that it was vital to be physically in touch with their materials, to be in tune with their sensory feedback and to be able to react appropriately.

**Drive to Create**

We had explored the importance of creating art. How had they experienced the need to create? Were they driven to create, and if so why? Most explained that they had an urgent imperative to create art even though some of
them could not really explain it. Sometimes they were attempting to clarify their own thoughts and feelings, and essentially trying to communicate with themselves. Others were communicating with a wider audience, and usually with a message or an emotion rather than simply an artistic statement based on colour or form. It appeared that the drive to create could probably be further refined and recognized as a drive to communicate.

Albert (Drive to Create)

Albert is fiercely driven by his creative interests, and when asked “What drives you?” responded “The first word that pops into my head is ‘passion’, I find that a lot of things that I see and that I’m involved with I’m very passionate about.” This is evident from the way he talks about art, which pervades almost every aspect of his life.

In recent years there isn’t much of my life that is not art. But when I go back to other interests I’ve had over the years, if I am going to get involved with something I get involved up to the eyeballs. I don’t pussyfoot. The other one that jumps out at me is that I was a figure skater for years. I was competing nationally before I quit. I finally put it aside because I was at that stage in my life when I had to make a decision. Was I going to pursue that or was I going to pursue my art career . . . I either go all the way or I don’t do it. . . . Otherwise I can’t be bothered.

Albert considered this ability to focus on one’s goals to be so important that he had some special advice for his students, delivered with a wry humour.

One thing I often tell my students, is that one thing you need more than
skill, talent, or anything else, is drive. If you haven't got that drive, I don't care how talented you are, it won't happen. I've seen some marvelously mediocre people—and the only thing they have got going for them is drive, and they have succeeded very well.

I asked him to define this drive, "Drive to do what?" He elaborated.

Drive to do what you feel you have to do. I don't think it is a matter of a specific thing because it is going to be individual for every person. But I think to be an artist you have to be somewhat driven, because intellectually I can't think of a more silly thing to do. I often wonder why does one do this? Why does one subject oneself to the slings and arrows of producing art? . . . I'm preparing for a show now and I realize that all the hatchets are going to be out for me once I put the show up. And why does one subject oneself to this? I don't know. But one is driven to do it.

He went on to explain that he was always working at something, a technique which appeared to allow him to regenerate his energies through constantly rotating exposure to a number of varied projects.

I find that I always have a half dozen projects at minimum going on at all times, from large ones to small ones. I can always work on one of them, and I probably work on at least one project for at least an hour every single day. It is a rarity—the only time I notoriously don't do anything is my two weeks in (a resort town) . . . when I literally vegetate, but then I find that my mind is still creating art whether I am physically creating it or not.

Albert flatly refused to accept the possibility of not being able to be create, as
was evident when I asked him "What happens when you can't make art?" and he replied "It's never happened".

I persisted "Why? Do you make time for it?"

"Yeah."

"Do you demand that there is time for it?"

He began to get excited and wave his arms about.

But there is time. There is always time. . . I do not understand people who say "I have no ideas to work with". I already have more than I can deal with in this lifetime, and I know that in the next two hours I'm probably going to generate enough for another year, most of which I am going to throw out, discard, and some will creep in somewhere. But there is always something going on here. Last spring I was in hospital for a week which was most unpleasant. But still the first thing I did was to say "Bring me a sketchbook", and even before they brought me the sketchbook I was diddling on the napkins. So no, there is no time that it is not happening.

Artists like Albert enjoy making their own artwork but are also often commissioned to produce designs to clients' specifications. He enjoyed the challenge of listening carefully and then producing what he thought the client wanted, or negotiating so that both parties are satisfied with the final product.

"Working with clients is fascinating because you have to satisfy them."

However, he also makes art for himself, and says that even so he needs an audience. When Albert is creating art he is always looking for a response.

Of course you want someone to say something nice about your work--and
it's not that I'm always necessarily looking for something nice, but I'm looking for somebody to say something appropriate. That they will respond to the works the way I wanted them to respond to them. . . . and if they are in the same ballpark then I'm satisfied that part of what I tried to say and what I wanted to communicate, at least one person has got. . . . it's not a validation of self. For me I think more an appreciation of an idea, a concept, a mood, an emotion, rather than a validation.

I asked Albert why he persisted in making art when parts of the process, particularly dealing with gallery curators, were so painful and uncomfortable for him. He explained that artists had to communicate, and this was for him the easiest way to do it.

I guess because we feel it's necessary, and I don't mean necessary personally. It's not that I personally want to be hurt, but what I am doing with the work is necessary. To me an artist in producing their work is communicating. There is (sic) all kinds of ways of communicating the thoughts that we have. You can talk as we are right now, and that is one form of communication. But one can also draw, paint, weave, cut fabric, do anything else to communicate other thoughts, other ideas, other emotions. Things that one often feels that you can't do in other modes. . . . I really can't let people close to me physically. This is another way of permitting it.

When asked why he needed to communicate his emotions he suggested that it might stem from unhappy early childhood experiences, most of which he could
not actually remember.

I don't know--you've got me on that one. It's something I've always wanted to do. I think I've always wanted to communicate at a deeper level all my life. I tried music, failed miserably. Couldn't remember all the key signatures, so that was hopeless. I tried writing--it's got better now that I've got a computer but writing was not a good choice. The visual had already been started and that one seemed to work quite quickly and easily, that one I never seemed to have any serious problems with.

(Pause) I feel--ooh, this is worse than a psychiatry session--but it may actually relate a lot to those blank periods I mentioned earlier.

The possible reason for Albert's "blank periods" will be discussed later under the subheading of Major Misfortunes. Creating art, he suggested, was sometimes a way of working out problems, and although most of the participants made that observation he was the only one to admit cheerfully that he was often "confused".

I think I do some of my best work when I am in one of my confused states. Not too clear on what's happening. And perhaps that's why you are doing the work--is to seek clarity. You are seeking a way of getting it out of yourself.

Most of the participants volunteered their opinion that their art had to incorporate a message; just producing something pretty was boring, although the two characteristics could certainly exist in one piece. As Albert said

One thing I often worry about, because I have this knack of producing
things that are pretty. Uhm, that's not always desirable, and sometimes people are able to see past the prettiness because often my work has a barb in it. Are you able to see the barb or not, or does the barb just pass right over you? If it passes right over you I feel sad, because you were supposed to get the barb, but I hope they are attractive enough that you would want to live with them.

Albert participated on several committees both within the institution and in other arts organizations, partly because he said it gave him a certain measure of control as to what was happening in the community. It is noticeable that in all three interviews his use of the word “control” pops up again and again in a variety of contexts. He explained that he had been forced into being an active participant in his community as the result of a challenge.

I remember my very first committee . . . I guess I've always been somewhat of an opinionated person—never too afraid to express my opinion, and I was giving him (the Chair) one of my rants and raves. He took me to task like there was no tomorrow—he just took a strip out of me and said “How dare you sit around complaining when you don’t get in there and do anything about it.” And it is something I learned very quickly from that conversation. If you don’t like things, get in there and do something about it. Stop bitching and complaining, that is pointless. You have got to be an active member of the community if you want to have a voice, and I have never looked back since. It's a matter of “I want to be part of this community, I want to be an active member of this community,
and I want to have the right to express my opinion", and to do that you have got to be active.

David (Drive to Create)

David, as an applied artist and painter/printmaker, also talked about the importance of emotion in art and of the need to be able to work personal problems out.

Painting a picture is a way of expressing yourself and getting certain emotions out, and for me it's not really for anybody else. It is a rather selfish act and if other people can enjoy it, fine, and I've never really cared whether other people cared about my work or not. I did it strictly for myself.

We talked about the frustration caused by sometimes not being able to make the kind of art he wanted to do, and the effect it had on him.

currently I'm in a situation where . . . my workload is very heavy on the design side, and I'm feeling a lot of frustration in my lack of time to make what one would call Fine Art. I'm art-deprived to the extent that I'll actually have a dream about painting a picture from start to finish. So that I'll get some satisfaction somewhere. If there is no time in the waking hours then I'll find it in the sleeping hours.

He explained that creating for himself, as opposed to for clients, was highly important for him in order to maintain a balance.

the art side's not always fun. It can be (pause) desperate work, and it depends. . . Because the art side, the fine art side, is the way to get out
frustrations. It's almost your own personal therapist. So at times it's fun, and at times it's, uh, sort of a necessary way of cleansing your soul or clearing your palette or getting rid of skeletons and ghosts that are harassing you over whatever.

He apparently had no control over his need to be creative which dominated his life, and felt that most artists were similar.

... it's just a drive, and I have that drive myself. And that drive isn't just painting, it's a drive to create. Recently my creations are functional, but they are no less artistic, and they don't use a different part of my brain. It's just there--it's a drive.

David is a constant tinkerer, always manipulating things with his hands, and always absorbing knowledge. He explained with emphasis and at length about his dislike of wasting time, and apparently views any downtime as merely an opportunity to regenerate the energy expended so that he can get back to being creative.

I don't like to waste any time, just be mindless. So if I know I have to go and sit somewhere for a while I'll bring books, I'll bring drawing devices, and I'll almost always preplan to do something to do, so that I am never in a situation where I am not almost entertaining myself somehow. ... I think it's just that I have so many things--it's all enjoyment-based. I enjoy learning new things all the time, and I just feel it's a lost opportunity and I don't want to be put in a position where I am just sitting there missing an opportunity to be added to, to the knowledge in a certain area. ...
I'm very conscious of not wasting any time... sitting down and watching a soccer match on television isn’t time wasted if it is regenerative time, but in terms of spinning my wheels I've never liked, uhm, let's say going and spending five hours in a restaurant. To me that's a huge waste of valuable life. And my wife loves doing that, and we've always been at odds over that. Long drives in the car, no, unless I’m specifically going somewhere. Unless I've got my paints with me and I spot something and I can stop and sketch. That's different. Or what I do is I bring things with me. My wife is always going “Why are you bringing that?” If I know I'm going to a boring family occasion at her parents' I'll bring my computer, I'll bring a book, I’ll bring a sketchbook. And after fourteen years of marriage she oughter know by now, but she still goes “Why are you bringing that?” Well, she’s sort of given up by now. She knows I’m going to bring things. Because I refuse to waste those hours.

... I'm always adding to my hobby list. But these are things I use for filling in those moments, or to make regeneration times interesting. So right now while I do my drive in and out of town every day I'm playing harmonica. So eventually within a few months I'm going to be a reasonable harmonica player, using time that I normally just spent mundanely staring at the road or listening to trashy radio stations.

He is also very active in a variety of sports, and it was apparent that he believes in working hard and playing hard. He is obviously in the grip of a relentless drive to create, and in a later conversation about the value of art he declared “The
truth is the desire to create is so strong that it doesn’t matter if you are on your deathbed you will be still be doing it. Because money doesn’t matter, (pause) even to an extent health doesn’t matter.” I found this pause to be significant. He was remembering my official role at the institution as the health and safety manager, and he was telling me something politically incorrect. But he was compelled to say it. Ultimately it could be more important to him to create art than to safeguard his health. His resentment at the advantage taken of artists by society was obvious as he continued

As long as you can express yourself creatively you’ve got something to live for, and it’s taken advantage of very heavily. . . artists tend to be highly educated and paid like gas attendants. . . . Really the thing is people know that an artist is going to paint whether you like it or not, and they take advantage of the fact. It’s essentially people who are going to work, whether you pay them or not, because they love to work.

This constantly busy artist felt, like the other participants interviewed, that artists had to grow continually, and he too had to be in control.

. . . when it comes to product innovation etcetera I am happy to change. I create change. Maybe I like to control the change myself. I like to be in control of the change. . . . I feel the biggest handicap is to not be able to do things for yourself--to have to rely on others or to not be able to express yourself because you are missing some simple technical skill.

Harry (Drive to Create)

Harry radiated an enthusiasm about life and had an urgent and frequently
expressed need to “take the next step, to move forward”, but confessed

Sometimes I get lazy. Sometimes I don’t do anything. I’ll spend a month
and not do a single thing new--like anybody else. But I think there is a little
ticker inside me that says “You know, today’s a brand new day and you
have to make the best of what you’ve got. Because there’s only a set
number of days that you are here and you just have to make the best of
every single moment you have.” Not that we can do that, and certainly I
don’t do that, but that sort of drives me every day. That makes me want to
do the best at everything I do.

In spite of constantly challenging himself to improve his windsurfing performance
(that being his favourite example of his creativity) Harry was doggedly insistent
that he was no longer a competitive person.

I think in the past I’ve approached it as “I’ve got to be the best”, and now I
approach it much differently. . . . I used to do the work for myself too, but in
the end I knew somebody was going to see it. And now I think it’s much
different. If I don’t do another piece it’s not going to bother me, but when I
do do something I do it with my heart. And whether somebody sees it or
somebody doesn’t see it--that’s not the point of doing it. I’m not out there
proving anything anymore, you know, because I’ve done a lot of things in
my life and I’m content these days. I don’t have to prove anything.

He had undergone a major transformation in the six months which because of
scheduling complications had elapsed between our first and third interviews. In
his final interview he talked largely about his windsurfing activities, declaring that
he had pretty well given up making physical objects and even caring about what the world thought of his activities. He appeared to have relinquished what he perceived to be the unequal struggle with society and had to a large extent opted out. Academically untrained but thoughtful and passionate, Harry offered his own philosophical contribution to the communication debate.

We don't exist unless we communicate. And within the realms of windsurfing, when I am sailing and people see me sailing, and it's in a non-competitive atmosphere, they pick up something from that. I'm making a statement. I'm saying "This is who I am: this is how I did it."

That's a communication.

The kind of message Harry was interested in communicating was one of hope and freedom to experiment and enjoy life. It might be seen as a justification of his free and easy lifestyle but it was really important to him to show people that such a lifestyle was available if they wanted it.

What we are really good at doing, I hope, in this institution, is saying "Look, this is who I am. This is the way my life is. I'm happy, and--this is sort of the way I did it." And we teach about (technique) . . . here, but in reality there is more to it than that. It is sort of showing them--you can have a job in a place like this, which is really creative. And you can go out and do this stuff which is really creative too, and there is a way of making it happen.

More formal communication was not always easy for Harry, in spite of his best intentions. He had recently had a curious experience where he found that
communicating in writing was not enough. He had travelled abroad and planned to write to his many friends using his state-of-the-art laptop computer.

My big plan was to do a lot of writing over the Internet to people, and use that as the artwork. That’s what my artwork would be. Well what happened to me was that I went away and, yeah, I started writing over the Internet and I got to the point where it was incredibly limited, and that I couldn't be expressive. So I put it down. I put the computer away, and I started (hand)writing letters to people. And when I started writing letters to people, you know, I started doing drawings on them, all over them. And then I started adding pieces of paper and other pictures on them, so they became collages, and it was this whole new world that opened up to me. I had the right intent--was to write, but then I found that it was just so tight and so limiting, and then all of a sudden I realized that you just find yourself a piece of paper and you start doing it. . . . And it was a lot more fun just doing it the other way. You know, it was so much more expressive, and I got a ton more out of it.

Kathleen (Drive to Create)

Kathleen also was a highly-driven artist who like Albert and David needed to be able to work out personal problems through creating. She explained that the message is always a vital part of her sculpture.

All of them have a relationship to people in some manner. Even if they are abstract. They may be relationships between two things, may be a dominance thing, may be a reflection. Most of them are reflective in some
way. Self reflection, in how one appears to the outside world as opposed to what one feels inside. I try not to make my sculptures traps. Like, even if they are completely enclosed usually they will have some crack or way out of them, or mirror in them or something. I believe there should always be a hole at the end of the tunnel. I guess I have had personal experience of that feeling of being trapped I don't like. . . . Often they are balanced on very precarious stances, like maybe the smallest surface possible. . . . That's a human thing too--you know, right on the edge. And they are often illusionary--I'm dealing with peoples' facades and how they act and look and so on. It's not necessarily what they are inside or how they feel.

It was evident to me from Kathleen's very unhappy childhood history and her description of her artwork that in it she was working through the anger, fear and negative feelings engendered by sexual abuse and feelings of powerlessness, and she was well aware of this.

I don't know if this is the product of fourteen years of therapy or not, but I can certainly relate to the abuse issue--a lot--with that. And incest issues and things that keep coming out in some way or another. Now when I go back and look at some of the older things I have done, I can see a lot more of what I felt. I remember picking up a card once that had this little spiky creature on the inside which had spikes all over it. And it said "Would a hug be out of the question?" And I thought "I've been doing these for years, you know". In fact Geoffrey impaled himself on one of my sculptures that was sitting on the coffee table, and it sunk right into his
elbow, they were so sharp.

Kathleen usually made art for herself, some of which she did not even show to others. Her drive to create was unrelenting and she reported that she got very anxious if she were prevented from being creative.

Oh it's an absolute drive. I don't--well, it's a need that has to be fulfilled or I get very frustrated. . . . during the time that I was held up with various health problems, even then I took stuff into the hospital with me and was making things while I was there because I couldn't sit there, no matter how much pain I was in, and not make something. So that's a pretty big drive.

Kathleen also found that she could not avoid thinking about art, even when she was unwinding, as illustrated by the following conversation which because of its complexity is reported verbatim.

Kathleen: One of my favourite places in the world is Manitoulin Island, and I love to go up there for a few weeks during the summertime because there is nothing else to do except look and touch.

Myself: So you are not necessarily creating during that time?

Kathleen: No, I'm gathering.

Myself: Aha. So this is the other side of creating?


Myself: Do you think you are?

Kathleen: A bit. I'm better now than I used to be . . .
Myself: Do you feel maybe you are a workaholic?

Kathleen: Not so much any more, no. Used to be. But I started realizing that I was putting too much strain on my body, and I was getting less done.

Myself: You are saying that you are no longer a workaholic but that you are busy. You are always busy. Do you feel that you are “driven”? Not as an artist but in your non-art life. Are you always kind of going hell for leather with something or other?

Kathleen: I have to concentrate on not doing that. I have to make a concentrated effort to say “No”. And setting boundaries even for myself is difficult. I can do it—been practising it now for a while, but I find that if I don’t, I do go flat out for a long period of time.

Kathleen was another artist for whom the tactile senses were important. She disliking planned, conceptual art and needed to work with her hands, relying a lot on her subconscious feelings to help her art emerge while playing with little pieces of cardboard.

I watch my hands do it. I sit down and I’ll start playing with these. Nothing comes out of a vacuum, so you really do have to be playing with something in order to come up with anything at all. That’s why I was so against this “Thinking Art” because you don’t do things like that—at least I don’t do things like that. I have to start off, I have an idea of something I want to say, but I have to be honestly, physically be doing something even if it is only out of little pieces of cardboard.
Kathleen too was enthusiastic about change but was fearful of domination and one-sided relationships which forced her into situations over which she had no control. So for her too control was important in her life.

**Maggie (Drive to Create)**

The highly articulate humanist Maggie insisted that art is the result of an irresistible need to communicate, but is only one of many human activities and must be placed in that context.

Art for me is communication, and communication is a social practice. When I say that art is politically and socially situated I just mean that... people who practice art and the consumption of art is relative to all kinds of other cultural influences. Artmaking doesn’t occur in a vacuum, it occurs as part of the wide—as a part of other social practices... I think that artists are communicators. That a large part of their artistic impulse is, besides that need to create whatever, mess around with materials, and just the sheer sensuous pleasure of it... is this almost excruciating imperative to communicate. That is definitely a large part of it for me—which is maybe one of the reasons why it doesn’t feel real until somebody else has seen it.

If artists are communicators, argued Maggie, it followed that they were also therefore teachers. Having been reared in a political environment (in her early teens she was volunteering for farmworkers’ unions and giving seminars in schools about African guerilla and liberation movements) it was inevitable for her to bring politics into art and to fall naturally into the role of community
pedagogue.

For me, when you start accepting and thinking about and conceptualizing a wider social role for the artist, which in effect to me is just acknowledging what the artist actually does, and the variety of ways that artists operate. When you start acknowledging that, then you can start conceiving of really innovative, really interesting, really constructive and productive ways for artists to interact with the community and to make a living. So artists-in-residence programs in prisons is a great idea. Artist as community pedagogue--anything that facilitates that kind of stuff is really important and really useful. Any kind of art project that's been done with street kids and . . . I mean, those projects are so, so, so productive in terms of the personal effect it has on the people involved, and in terms of the value to the community as a whole. . . . I started to work as artist-in-residence at the womens' shelter, and I did work with the Elizabeth Fry Society and set up educational and recreational programs, so I was really interested in the notion of an artist as community pedagogue and the community activism of artmaking. So I guess I view artmaking as a pretty interdisciplinary practice, and as a very socially-situated and politically-situated practice. Whether or not you are making political art is not the question. But I have a very politicized version of art practice.

She had a very political view of art not only from a global perspective but later also from a personal one. Having organized art therapy programs in prisons and battered women's shelters, Maggie was quite familiar with the potential of
creativity for self-expression, at the same time protesting that her own art was not autobiographical. However, I suspect that her history of sexual abuse and neglect had affected her so profoundly that she had very little choice but to include these themes in her repertoire.

... in the year after (her daughter) was born, that's when I started to realize that I had been sexually abused as a child and started to do work around that as well, and that was definitely a part of my feeling that I had to get out there and get involved and do something to affect the future because God dammit she was not going to grow up in a world where men were still beating women up. Of course she will, but I was going to do whatever part I could to make some change.

Maggie declared that she had a lot of other roles other than that of artist, and denied that she had a strong drive to create, but nevertheless was still driven. She described herself as

a very energetic person . . . (who) am not driven--to make things (but) I think I am a driven person. I get very driven about things--I have very strong personal ethics, and I am very invested in them. . . . And in that way maybe I am driven. But I'm not driven in terms of working creatively as an artist per se. I think whatever I take up I'm driven, and if I don't happen to be working as an artist this month, then I'm driven by whatever I'm doing right now. . . . I guess I think I am a creative problem-solving person.

Here she was echoing Albert's experiences, and another similarity emerged
when she commented that there was no real division between artmaking and the rest of her life. Maggie was, I suspect, speaking for all the participants even though they did not all express the thought when she commented

I think the lines between one's personal life and one's work life when you are an artist are extremely fuzzy. It's hard to tell where one begins and the other ends. You carry your work into everything you do, or everything that you do is carried back to your work. There is this constant reciprocity. You can't separate them out the way you could if you were working at (the institution) as an administrator, or something else. It's a totally different life, and I think it is the same with anybody whose work is fundamentally creative work.

She too voiced the common complaint of artists when she said "I know that if I don't make things I get miserable. That if I'm not engaged in some physical way with colour and design I'm miserable." There seemed to be an inconsistency here with her former statement that she was not driven to make art. She merely shrugged and said something to the effect that "The nature of life is that it's inconsistent." She later commented on a phenomenon which was beginning to become evident; the fact that many artists really may insist upon being individualists in spite of the costs.

One notorious bad thing (about being a creative person) is that there is often a conflict of interest involved in trying to express your creativity and trying to live with other people. I think that can be a big problem, and I think it is one of those stereotypes about artists—they tend to be
egocentric, self-centred, focussed on their own agenda, and “driven”. And when you are a “driven” creative person I think you can be pretty difficult to live with.

Maggie frequently made cautionary and even dismissive reference to the mythology and stereotypes with which society viewed artists, and then in the next breath appeared to corroborate them with her personal examples. I was not clear what her reference here to stereotypes meant and asked “So are you saying it is a true stereotype or it isn’t? You seem to be saying it’s true.” She argued that the reason stereotypes exist is because there is some truth to them, but that some people take advantage of this and merely play the role.

Some people definitely embody that, and I think other people just plain avail themselves of the opportunities that that stereotype offers. I think it is difficult, but I think there are reasons why there are clichés and stereotypes and truisms, but I think they also need to be questioned.

Art had to have a message, and so there had to be an audience I discovered when I asked her “Do you make art for yourself or for others?” She explained

Oh, well that sort of ties in to that wanting to please other people thing. I definitely make it for others. I mean I get pleasure out of it, and I do it for myself in that way, and I maintain strict quality control. Nothing leaves my possession unless it’s really good. But that’s a hard question because I never feel like anything is real unless at least six people have either seen it or participated in it or somehow vetted it.
“So you need a seal of approval?” I wanted to know.

Always. Yes. And I always have to show it off. So even if I made something for me, sixty nine people would have to see it and say “Oh, that’s so nice.” Nothing ever feels very substantial and real. It hasn’t got any sense of veracity until other people—like, I just painted my kitchen over the weekend, and if I don’t get sixty nine people over there over the next week to see it I won’t be happy.

I summed up “So you have a sense of the theatre. The audience is really important.” To which she replied quickly

“Oh yeah. Oh, totally”.

Sally (Drive to Create)

Sally was the only artist to play down the personal urgency of the drive to create, while still acknowledging its existence.

I’m not as conscious of a passionate drive to do design work, but I think that if I didn’t have it I would find something else. I would find another outlet for that expression. There is always something that I would do or that I am doing that is in one way a creative expression. But I’m not really conscious of a drive. I probably would be if all my options were taken away.

This designer always appeared to be rather more businesslike and less spontaneous than the others, but in a previous conversation had like many of the others identified a former severe problem with low self-esteem. I thought that perhaps I had uncovered her creative motive when she observed
The ultimate goal is to please a client. You are working with a client, they have a goal, I have to solve it, and I want them to be happy with it. I want them to like the solution and I want it to work well for them. So there’s this people-pleasing aspect that comes out of the self-esteem issue. I would think artists would get that in the same way but it’s much vaguer—it’s not nearly as direct, whereas working with a client or working for an employer there’s that—hopefully some positive feedback or confirmation that you have done a good job and you are valuable.

I ventured a guess. “So this is really, I suspect, the driving force. It’s not a need to create per se, but it’s a need to be validated, maybe?” She agreed, “Uh-huh” although I thought without any great degree of conviction.

Sally’s frustrations were a little different from those of most artists, and stemmed partly from the frequent necessity to persuade a design client to see a solution her way. However, they perhaps also arose from her shy personality and uncertain language skills (coupled perhaps with her dyslexia), because she complained of an inability to express herself.

It’s very frustrating because I can in my mind’s eye see a scenario, I can see a cause and effect, or I can see something about somebody’s character, and it’s like I just don’t have the words to explain it. Somebody else will say it and it’s like “Yes, that’s exactly how I would word it”, you know. So I find it very frustrating. And it’s partly vocabulary, and it’s partly just not being able to put the words together—to express it verbally. This problem might certainly help to explain why she tended to be quiet in a
group of people. However, it seemed to me that this difficulty in communication would have also produced a need to make private art as a means of communication. She certainly talked about cooking, sewing and arranging flowers in her home, but as the most reserved of my six participants it may have been that she chose not to disclose information about any other regular creative activities she may have pursued.

If control was important to Albert, structure and control were of paramount importance to Sally. A quiet and understated person, she declared that she needed structure and control even in personal relationships. She alone, when asked “Are you conscious at all of a constant need to communicate, whether it’s to play with design or words?” answered simply “No, I don’t.” I wondered if these needs for control and structure drove her into the design field where she would not have to express her own emotions and could work largely to the specifications of others. She denied this, saying that such a scenario would have required her to plan her career, whereas she fell into it by accident. The fact that all her art is necessarily about clients’ communication probably explains why she did not comment on the self-evident connection between her art and the need to communicate. She was well aware, of course, of the social importance of well-designed graphics, just as David and Maggie emphasized the importance of design in almost everything we come in contact with.

Sally had been counselling troubled youths for some years and so was comfortable with the role of facilitator if not community pedagogue. She made an interesting contribution when she said thoughtfully
Being a creative thinker I guess I can see opportunities. I can perhaps see where there are opportunities where someone else may not. You may be more open-minded . . . being able to see how this person can do this, his skill could in tandem create something else, you know, do something interesting with putting disparate things together.

**Discussion and Summary (Drive to Create)**

It will become evident as we work through these emergent themes that Sally often does not fit the pattern which appears to include many or all of the other five participants, and so it is the case here. However, the other five seem to be remarkably consistent in their drive to create. They all profess to be driven at whatever they do and to work hard at it, although Maggie declined to be categorized as a driven artist per se. Because of this they all admit or demonstrate that their personal and creative lives are inextricably connected and indivisible. When they are prevented from making art they all admit to feeling considerable frustration and anxiety, while Albert goes further and simply will not allow anything to interfere with his capacity to be creative.

Amongst five of the six artists there appears to be an inexorable need to communicate, confessed by Albert, Harry and Maggie, but also clearly demonstrated in the driven behaviour of David and Kathleen. However, half of these six people admit that they make art for themselves rather than an audience so there appears to be considerable therapeutic value in what they do. Four of them identified emotion as the most important ingredient in art, and while Maggie did not specifically mention it she nevertheless uses her art to support
social causes in a way which leaves no doubt as to her message. Five out of the six identify the artist's role as community pedagogue or natural teacher, although only Maggie is overtly political. Perhaps this instinctive role of community pedagogue comes about because of the artist's natural ability to fit together differently the solutions normally found to problems, as Sally suggested. Albert was very insistent that he "viewed the world obliquely" by which he meant he tried to see a problem from every angle and did not necessarily accept the first presented solution as the correct or only one. Such an ability to "see where there are opportunities where someone else may not" as Sally put it would be a very powerful tool for a facilitator.

The need for control was a surprising development, being admitted by five of them. The sixth artist, Harry, did not mention it specifically but has clearly demonstrated his need for it by seizing control of his life and simply refusing to do many things which most people take for granted.

**Rebellion**

The mythology has it that artists are invariably rebellious and anti-establishment, often outside conventional behaviour and even morality, taking risks in all kinds of ways. I wanted to know whether this was the case with my participants, and if so, whether there were any common and definable reasons for these attitudes. The first question I asked each artist was whether he or she was often dissatisfied with the status quo, and they all agreed that they were. As I soon found from my interviews, creative people are experimenters and
explorers, always trying to see the world from a different perspective, to push the envelope of their knowledge a little further. Just as Czsikzentmihali (1996) pointed out, they master their domain and then expand the boundaries of knowledge. As the conversations continued I was intrigued by the fact that the artists I saw were constantly putting themselves in a situation where they risked failure or rejection. This behaviour also deserved some probing.

**Albert** (Rebellion)

Albert had an interesting perspective on his dissatisfaction with the status quo, explaining that it was more important to delight in the journey than to arrive.

Oh, most dissatisfied with the status quo, because things can always be better. There is no such thing as perfection, and if there is I hope I never reach it. To me the joy of life is the work towards that perfection in the hope that you never get there . . . Things that are perfect are really boring. But it is the striving towards perfection that is excitement, or in the words of the old analogy, the getting there is more important than being there.

He followed this with a fascinating thesis on the importance of argument as a means to seeking greater clarity. He was the only person to put forward this point of view, possibly because he has difficulty reading as a result of his dyslexia and so prefers face-to-face debate. Yet it struck me that his need for dynamic tension made a lot of sense and might perhaps help explain some of the rebelliousness for which artists seem to be known.

Change is exciting. It’s stimulating. It’s something that keeps me percolating . . . I think one of the worst things that can happen in life is to
become complacent. I think that's a terrifying thing to have happen. . . . I don't think I have ever had a day in my life that everything is comfortable. There is always something being debated, something being argued--which I think is very important. You have got to have it, it's almost a life force thing. . . . You actually want the discomfort that causes the stimulation that causes the desire to stop the discomfort, and to do that you've got to be proactive about it and do something about it. If it's a conceptual thing you have got to talk it out, work it out. If it's a tangible thing you've got to do something about it, to change it. And move yourself towards comfort levels.

I asked him "Are you saying that you at times stir people up in order to promote that discourse, that communication?"

Oh absolutely. . . . I found that by taking a stance, whether rightly or wrongly or playing devil's advocate, and getting the other person to start spouting off, they would often put an idea forward which would never logically come into my head, and that would then lead to a debate within myself so that I could come to grips with it. And sometimes you come to grips and you find that you haven't really changed your opinion from your original point, or you may find that you have changed dramatically. And you continue to argue the point until you are comfortable with the answer. And some things I have been arguing for a long time and some things I have stopped arguing because that's very comfortable. I guess it all started quite young for myself, and it hasn't stopped. If there is something
I am not too clear about I've got to talk it out, argue it out, debate it out. I like debating with other people because their brains do work differently from mine. And although I think mine is fabulous, inputting from other sources is a really good thing to do. . . . I know my Dean has been a little shocked that every time they come down with something they'll find that I will kind of bitch about it for a few minutes, I love to bitch. If I don't have something to bitch about then I am not really happy. . . . I do like to complain. Because in the complaint process it causes me to inevitably come up with a new solution. That's problem-solving. I don't think complaining is a bad thing. I think it is a good thing. He took the idea of conceptual exploring further, talking about the intellectual curiosity necessary for problem-solving.

To me, an artist, as a creative person I want to be able to look at a problem from the front, and the back, the side, the top, and the bottom, and maybe from the inside out, to see—because each view I take of it I see something different. And I want to see how clear can I see this. . . . I look at the world obliquely, and I want them (students) to look at the world obliquely too. If I think of an accountant, I find that they take what I call a very linear view of things. Very practical, very--numbers. Number crunching. There is a very clear beginning, middle and end, and that's the only way to look at it. When I talk about looking at things obliquely, it means don't assume the problem you are confronted with is the problem you think it is. Look at the problem carefully and you may find that viewing
it from a different direction you can come up with a much better solution
than the linear solution . . . when it comes to the kinds of problems that
an artist chooses to solve I think the most creative solutions are not the
obvious ones--are not the linear solutions. The most exciting ones,
someone has come at it obliquely--basically from the back or sideways,
but they are taking a different view of the problem and hence coming up
with a different solution.

This habit of seeing a problem from another angle is apparently not always
appreciated by those who do not have this ability.

I know on committees I sometimes get on peoples’s nerves because I will
get sticky about certain words in a document, because I say “If you leave
that word in I can manipulate that like there’s no tomorrow. I would
recommend that you change that word to this one and then it will not be
manipulable.” . . . The English language is a wonderful language, but it is
amazing what you can do with interpretation and manipulation, and if you
aren’t careful--particularly in documents--you can nail yourself to the wall
over a stupid little word. And you suddenly find, oops, we built a loophole
in it which we didn’t plan on.

I was interested as to why Albert undertook the often thankless task of serving
on committees, and the reply of this outwardly opinionated but inwardly shy artist
was typically exploratory.

I find it’s fascinating, and what I find fascinating isn’t necessarily the work
of the committee but the dynamics of the people. I am fascinated watching
people, and I think it is a great place to watch people. I am fascinated how it gives me the chance to get inside peoples' heads that often I can’t do any other way.

Experimenting is part of rebellion because one has to discard and go beyond conventional ideas. Albert explained that he experiments constantly with techniques because as an artist frequently on the cutting edge of his field there is nowhere else to go to for help.

I don’t know anyone else to learn them from. So it’s called figure it out for yourself. Like when I first got involved with all this . . . there were no good books out there. I eventually tracked one down, but by the time I had tracked down that one I was already well into it. I only picked up a few tidbits from that and I was off like a skyrocket in other directions. And then it’s just by trial and error, experimentation, trying different things. I’ve got drawers and drawers and drawers of little experiments, little try this and try that. Some of them worked and some of them didn’t. The ones that worked got incorporated into your work very quickly and the ones that didn’t, well they just got forgotten about.

Although the general feeling amongst the group was that it was important to learn from experimentation, Albert was more insistent that he had an obligation to further his field of knowledge.

Because I have lucked into this particular job here, I figure the people here, particularly the fulltime teachers here, we’ve got a privileged position. And one of the privileges of this position means that we don’t
actually have to sell any work whatsoever. We don't need it for the dollars and cents. So I feel obliged that I must now push the edges of my field. If I don't push the edges then I am failing the field.

We had a long discussion around the question of whether artists were really somehow different or whether this perception was just mythology.

I just know that when I deal with clients I have to put on my other hat. I have to be what I would call much more straight. You can't be as airy-fairy as you can be with a bunch of artists. . . . Very few clients want to deal with the strange creature called an artist.

I broke in, unable to restrain myself. "But this is what I'm asking. So they do see it as a strange creature?"

I guess they must, because--or let me rephrase that. I think that is my assumption, and I use the word "assumption" because when I come to them I come to them as this other creature. I come to them as a business person and I deal with them in a businesslike manner and they don't see what goes on. Not that I am a particularly wacky person anyways, but you don't let them see what I would call perhaps the "softer" side of yourself. It's a more clean, crisp, businesslike approach.

. . . . I think they are different, but I don't think they are as different as people make them out to be. I think the myth is greater than the reality. So I think by the time the conditioning process is finished the client has discovered who you really are. But you can't start there. If you start there you might scare them off on the first meeting. In the first meeting you want
them to believe that yes, you are capable of doing the job. Yes, you are going to stay sober, yes, you are not going to get drunk, you are not going to trip out, you are not going to sit in the gutter somewhere. Once you have got past that you can let your guard down a bit.

I tried to assess Albert's degree of rebelliousness by his attitude towards societal rules, and he maintained that he was a fairly traditional law-abiding citizen. He expressed the attitude of most of the participants when he said with evident satisfaction "I'm not likely to break the rule, but I will probably bend it to the point of breaking. I am a really good bender and manipulator of rules." His attitude towards authority was also similar to many of the other artists in that he rejected unthinking, unbending, by-the-book enforcement and preferred negotiated solutions.

I still get nervous around police, a cop. These are, I'm not too sure, I don't think "authority figure" is the right word. They have a degree of--I guess they are authority figures. A form of power over you, and it's a form of power we don't have an awful lot of understanding or control of. And you are often dealing with people who with all due respect don't have much training, and they don't have much going for them other than the rule book. Now most authority figures, say like in an institution like this, it's quite different. You are dealing with real human beings, theoretically with some kind of training, some kind of background. There is more likelihood that you can argue a point with them. I have argued points with, I think, every President who has been in this place, but I can't say I do it with an
absolute feeling of comfort. If I feel that I've got a point, then I've gotta
fight for my point. I guess it's back to having that discourse dialogue again
in another way.

Most of my artists seem to revel in the label of "risk-taker", but Albert was
more subtle. "No, I don't see myself as a risk-taker, but I think in analysis I am."
There followed a discussion about his being in the forefront of his field and
constantly needing to push the envelope of knowledge, and in turn this lead to
the following friendly exchange as he said "I did not perceive it as risk-taking."
"But it is" I suggested.
"Yes" he agreed.
I continued, "Because all the time what you are saying is 'Approve of me or reject
me.'"
"Yeah" he said. "I guess I am. You're worse than the shrink."
"I'm sorry" I apologized, amidst laughter from both of us. But he could not resist
teasing me. "This is worse than a real shrink session."

David (Rebellion)

David pointed out that he had to be dissatisfied with the status quo
because it was his job to be professionally critical.

That's the nature of what I do though, because I'm a designer. I'm always
looking at what exists and focussing on the problems with it. . . . The way
to design something well is first to look and see what's there. And that can
be rules, etcetera. And then you make a judgement on whether they were
designed at a time when they made sense at the time and the world has
changed, so the rules need to be changed but they tend to lag behind. . . . 

if you are in the forefront of these things you have to look at the rules as a 
changing element. So that doesn’t mean that you run out and break laws, 
but you do look. There are quiet ways of doing things without really being 
noticed. So I’m not a loud breaker of rules . . . I’m a modifier.

That statement that if you are on the cutting edge you have to regard rules as “a 
changing element” is highly important, because although nobody else voiced this 
thought they all are on or near the cutting edge of their respective fields. They 
believe in their necessity to push the envelope, to break new ground, and so by 
definition they have to break some rules or conventions. In fact David 
volunteered

I haven’t talked to a lot of other artists about it, but I would suspect that a 
lot of artists don’t believe they are part of the normal system. That they 
are somebody different, and that all the normal rules may not apply to 
them.

I concluded that David felt that this applied to himself. This perception may well 
come from both within and outside the artistic community, because a number of 
these participants have argued that the world sees them as different. As Maggie 
put it, they are stereotyped as “society’s maverick”. But quite apart from this 
David and several others amongst the artists pointed out that business clients do 
not understand the creating process and are sometimes mystified by it and by 
them.

The business world sees me as, sometimes you can see that--and it’s not
just me, it would be any artist in my position—they truly don't understand where artists come from. They have no understanding of it, so when it's stuck in their face they're in awe. They're in awe and they're scared, because they don't know how to deal with it. And they typically try to take you down a few notches so that you are not going to be a problem for them.

Being a rebellious artist often means that you work for others reluctantly, preferring to be your own master. David was no exception, although he may have voiced his preferences more forcefully than some.

I work for myself. I don't tolerate working in systems where I have an iron hand over me. It doesn't matter how much money was in it, I wouldn't be there. . . . If I don't like a client then the client can go. . . . I'm very comfortable with the idea that I will not allow myself to be put in the sort of under-the-thumb position, and would be willing to endure financial hardship to not be in that position. So, I would say that I'm dedicated to that lifestyle and that I don't like to be controlled.

I remembered his description of getting into trouble at school as a young boy because he insisted on drawing on all his text books, and wondered aloud whether this experience translated in later life into rebellion against all authority. "Could be" he said. "Could be that you are (pause) I've never known a teacher to be successful at stifling somebody who is generally loving drawing. And that probably creates a successful role model for bucking the system and winning."

David described himself as a "calculated risk-taker" and I detected a note
of justifiable pride or satisfaction in his descriptions of how as a boy he would fly a homemade hang-glider off a local cliff, and as an adult delight in physical sports like hockey, snowboarding, surfing and windsurfing. His insights into the risk-taking of artists were more illuminating.

Being an artist is a risk-taking thing in our society. It is not the norm to be an artist, and in some cases can be ridiculed, can send you on a life of ridicule if you are going to stick to your art. My personal experience is that I happen to be kind of riding the line between big business and art, and do both, and I don't totally connect the two.

... the average artist isn't successful. Once they get beyond, out of the family, out of the local school and you become connected to the larger art world it is very difficult then to get that reinforcement, and you tend to get probably shot down twenty times for every one you are built up, so I think artists are either extremely depressed (laughs) and suicidal or extremely resilient. I like to think I'm the resilient type.

He offered an artist's insight which on the face of it appeared useful.

Any time you do a painting that somebody else might see you are taking the same kind of risk that a poet takes, writing a sonnet and having other people hear it or read it. When you have people come and look at your image you are asking a lot of people to see quite deep within you, so, uh, you're setting yourself up constantly for embarrassment. I have confidence in my painting so it doesn't bother me at all, but if I look at the alternative, I'm not a writer or a poet. If I attempted to write something and
put it up on the wall I would be highly embarrassed.

David experimented, invented and modified constantly with very little apparent division between his professional and private pursuits, except that the latter elicited more interest and passion in his tone. He appeared to have a vast number of projects on the go at any one time, partly because he was such a hands-on person that he was not happy with conceptual art, needing to actually produce what he dreamed up in his mind.

The difficult side of it is that you are never able to keep up with the amount of ideas that you have, and I start a lot of projects that I have to shelve. I have about fifteen instruments started at home, incomplete with full intentions to complete them at various times but no time to do it—no time to focus. People think that I have a problem with not finishing things, but if they stop to look they realize that the amount of things that you have already finished is probably five times the number the average person has finished, in spite of the fact that there is a lot of unfinished things. The creative flow can be frustrating and heavy sometimes. And there is always, in my case, there is always the urge to quickly do it for real, rather than just be happy with the idea.

Experimenting inevitably means there are failures, and he cheerfully admitted that many of his prototypes and artworks were also abandoned.

There are an awful lot of them that I think it's a good idea and start to do it and I realize when I'm into it that it's not going to go anywhere. That it's wrong. That it doesn't work. That it's not containing what I think it should
Harry (Rebellion)

Harry maintained control over his life by dropping out of what he perceived to be a rat race. He used to be competitive, and he used to espouse social and environmentally green causes, but he had recently and quite radically changed his philosophy. Always a loner, it appeared that now he did not need to ally himself with even a small political constituency except possibly the world of windsurfing. He argued that crusading for a cause was really an egotistical exercise of defining oneself as a rebel rather than a purely altruistic act, and he no longer needed to provide a label with which people could describe him.

You know it's funny because a lot of that stuff, even though it's good, I think it has a little bit to do with the ego. It has a little bit to do with proving to the outside world that you are different, or that you are an individual. And you know, I have sort of gone through this change in the last, I would say six months, where again I don't have to prove anything. And I think back then, I think when you are growing up through life, there are points where you take on this thing around you that lets you--that shows other people who you are. I can't do that. I don't have the energy anymore to do that.

Nevertheless in a discussion on conformity he came close to echoing Maggie's observation that everybody needs a constituency.

One might say "You're a rebel" and you rebel against things, but we are just conditioned to follow certain rules, and we do that regardless of
whether we think we are or we are not. There are little ones that you
break, but it's all within a structure. . . . They have got to follow those
rules. It might look as if they are not. You have characters, right, you have
characters. You might have the Queen Street Punk character. But within
the Queen Street punk characters there are a set of rules that they follow,
and that defines who they are within their culture. . . . You wear a certain
type of clothes, and it's an established environment. I don't know very
many people who completely set outside society. Maybe the Timothy
McVeighs . . .

Although he had given up trying to change the world he remained an
idealist, worrying constantly about the commercialism and selfish driving forces
of society, and feeling alienated from it.

I remember my father saying to me “Yeah, no problem. We'll help you
through school, but you know it is really important to have a job
afterwards.” I really find that being an artist has nothing to do with making
money. Doesn't have a single thing to do with making money. . . . I think
art is a reality of life, and I think that society has tried to shut it off into one
corner, and alienate it. . . . It's sort of like we have set up this system
where we go to work at nine o'clock and we come home at five. Well is
that reality or is that not? It's been set up to make society run the way it
is, but it might be that we have been put here to play all the time, and
because we are caught in this we can't do it. And I think that because I
am an artist, that is reality and that's the way life should be. For
everybody. . . . Again, I think society has set it up so that reality has been
taken away from individuals because they have been forced to focus and
not see what's around them. . . . You know, the world shouldn't be like
that. We should start really, you know, finding ways of making things
better for people, for everybody, you know.

He really did feel that he lives in a separate reality because artists are not like
the rest of society, and this troubles him constantly. I asked him “How does being
an artist affect you in the world?”

It affects me a lot, because a lot of people sort of don't understand. . . . I
was the black sheep of the family, and I was the oldest and I have two
younger sisters both of whom have houses and jobs and kids and
husbands, and I was always the one who went out and did things
differently from what they did. And in some ways I was sort of put on a
pinnacle and in other ways there was a sort of lack of understanding of
how I approached, how I did things. So they always put me off to the side,
and for me to participate in my sisters' or my parents' world I would have
to enter into their's, and they sometimes find it very difficult because they
don't understand it and it's scary for them to step into my world and to
participate in that. And a lot of times, most times, they don't do that and
it's me going to them. So I have to do this sort of switcharound of, sort of
being the other way, and it feels very uncomfortable for me to do that.

Somewhat to my discomfort he used me as an illustration of how people really
did not understand how artists interact with their world, as he observed
They are misunderstood. I don't think they understand artists, and I think you are a good example of that. Just now, within the last couple of months you have been saying "I understand a bit more". You are beginning to see the way these people work, and you are beginning to appreciate. It is a different lifestyle, it's a different way of . . .

I interrupted him, "But it's also a totally different way of looking at the world, which I hadn't realized."

Yeah. No, it's true. But I don't think many people can understand that. They can say "Oh yeah, these people are different", but they don't--I don't think they really understand. I don't think they really understand. Because it's hard to do--it took you a long time to get to this point.

Adding to his sense of alienation from society was the fact that apart from being an artist he is also lefthanded.

I am lefthanded and I am an artist, and that's sort of what I was born with so I can't really separate the two things. . . And because of the way I am, and because I use one side of my brain more than the other side of my brain (and that's part of the reason why I am lefthanded) I've not been able to--uh, that's affected my life, and I think part of that is society is sort of set up to cater to righthanded people, and it works a lot easier for them. . . . I don't think I have per se a chip on my shoulder, but I do see that the world is sort of built--it's much easier to have the capability to use the other side of your brain and fit into society.

Harry never admitted to being a rule-breaker, apparently accepting those
he had to deal with for a quiet life and otherwise evading the issue by simply opting out as much as he could. Artists, according to Harry, “are the thinkers and the see-ers and the experimenters . . . and without that I don’t think that society can exist.” He saw his role as an art instructor to instill this idea in his students, to persuade them to open their minds to new experiences and stimuli whenever possible.

You teach them how to (use tools), but that’s not what you are really teaching them. . . that’s not what it’s about, you know. Last week I took them to a . . . metal scrap yard . . . Well it’s a great place to introduce them to where they can buy really cool materials and have a lot of fun. And I took them to the basement which is this rat-infested scary place, and the ceiling is almost falling down, and there are forklift trucks going over the top all the time. And I’m looking at these beams that are all cracked, and I’m thinking “Holy ----, this thing’s going to come down on my students.” But I know, ten years down the road, when they think back about (this institution) they are going to say “Remember that teacher who took us to this place . . .” Because that’s what I remember. I don’t really remember sitting in a classroom doing the drawing or doing the sculpture. I remember those people.

There was a general sense from many of the participants that artists may be, if not more observant, at least more open to sensory input than the rest of us. This helps them make connections and stimulate ideas which perhaps escape other people, Harry suggested.
We are very good at piecing a bunch of stuff together, because we are not focussed. If you are an accountant you are focussed on numbers. If you are a lawyer you are focussed on the way you are phrasing the words to the judge or whatever it is. But an artist is much different. You are doing lots of stuff, and you are bringing all that stuff together, and how it comes out comes out.

During the course of his interviews Harry frequently alluded to parallels between the process of making art and his windsurfing. Although his grammar may at times be fractured as sometimes happens with speech, I am sure that many artists would recognize and concur with the poetry of his metaphor.

I was always really good at manipulation of technique and coming up with something nobody else has done. . . . and relative to sailing also. My style is much different than a lot of other peoples’ style, and it is manipulation to find ways of making it better. . . . In the last three months I’ve sort of discovered that if I want to get better and to learn to go faster than what I do now I don’t have to go fast to do that. What I have to do is find more balance. So what I started doing is learning how to sail my board backwards, throw the sail backwards, and try to sail faster with the sail backwards, or try to turn around in a different way that I’ve never learned to turn around before. And all these little things in doing that--what happens is, in the end that’s what makes you go faster. Because you have a new type of balance that you would never, ever learn by going really fast. And I think that’s sort of a little bit like the way artists sort of
think. It's a little bit like—well, ok there's the end piece. There's what I sort of want to end up with. But I'm going to get there by going way over here (gesturing with both arms), and way over there, and all this stuff I'm going to learn from over here is just going to push that and make that work so well. And if I just focussed on that, you might as well forget it, because it wouldn't be the piece that it would have been if I'd done all this other stuff.

He made the interesting point that all this experimenting leads to learning and eventually with learned skill and experience comes intuition and the ability to be spontaneous.

Being spontaneous is sort of like going for it and hoping that whatever decision you've made is going to work out. And that you are going to produce something in the end with the trust that what you know is put into it and it works. But I think there is a lot of intuition . . . I think intuition is sort of an acquired thing . . . and the very same thing with a windsurfer.

The best windsurfers in the world make it look really easy, but you know they've been doing it night and day, night and day . . . . And every time you go out there, there is something different. And it's the same way with artists. Exactly the same way with artists.

Harry embraced change and new experiences. I had asked him to “Talk to me about two fun and two negative things about being an artist.”

One of the fun things . . . is always knowing that when you wake up tomorrow there will be something new on your plate, that you have not experienced before. And that's another fun thing too, because it's a
challenge. Every once in a while I will . . . talk about windsurfing. But when you are out on the ocean every single time you go out it's something completely new, that you've not been able to--because conditions are always different. It's always variable. You have the weather that's on top of the water, you have the water itself, you have how you are feeling that day, and you have the equipment. It's always new.

Later in the same interview Harry talked about his need to free himself of everyday responsibilities in order to be able to do what he wanted to do.

I have no possessions. Not many possessions these days. And I like it that way. What I own most of is windsurf boards. . . . I'm sort of at a point in my life right now where I don't want things over top of me--I don't want to carry around a whole houseload full of furniture. . . . I don't want to own the lawnmower to cut the grass up front. I don't want any of that stuff. All that takes up time, and it takes up energy even if it's just sort of sitting there. I just really want to be very flexible and be really open for new experience. So if I'm tied down cutting the grass and doing that stuff then I'm not open for new experience. I can't be.

However, this spontaneous way of life had its drawbacks, and another very frank exchange was even more revealing as he confessed

Sometimes, being an artist--in my life anyway--things are always variable. Things are always changing and never constant. I always tend to not to be able to hold onto a relationship that much, because it's always this sort of search. This change. It would be nice, for a little while, to have
something stable but it's difficult to do. Because there's nothing you can really hold onto because it's always moving around. I hope that there is somebody who is changing enough, growing enough, that I'm not going to get--bored isn't the right word . . .

"Into a rut." I volunteered. "Does it scare you to get into a rut?"

"Yeah" he replied. "A little bit. No, I like doing stuff."

I asked him "Is it change for the sake of change?", which he denied.

No, I don't think it's for the sake of change. I think, for me anyway, my inherent nature is to be always doing something that's the next step. . . . friends always say, because this year I'm doing this and the next year I'll be doing something different "Oh, that's just what he does. He just keeps on moving." But hopefully it's moving upwards. Sometimes it feels as if it's not but hopefully it is.

Harry was emphatic that risk-taking and creativity go together. He didn't discover art until in late high school, and his parents were very lukewarm about his going to art school, his father telling that he would have to get a proper job. He never has had a fulltime job, and has always taken risks with his life and with his art. But it does not appear to be for the thrill of the risk so much as the drive to push the envelope, to do something new.

I take lots of risks in my life. I think that part of being an artist is taking risks. If you are always sort of searching for that next level then you've got to take a risk. And sometimes you fall down. Sometimes it doesn't work. . . . But I think being an artist is all about taking risks.
We talked about his recent adventure when he spent several months in a completely foreign and exotic place, an experience which appeared to have had something to do with solidifying his recent changes in outlook. He said

Not many people, at least at my age of forty-five, make a decision to just leave everything and completely start something brand new somewhere, and for me it was incredible. It's like we all get into these little ruts and we all build up these little empires around us, and this is what our life is all about. And it would be good for a ton of people to just say "To hell with this" for a year or for six months and just go and do something different—it's really important.

I asked him "So you feel retrospectively that it has changed you, has made a difference?"

Oh yeah, it made a huge difference. It can't but help make a difference when you change your life. And it doesn't matter where you go. You could go anywhere, and just be stepping out of what you normally live in—what you perceive as your world—it can't but help change your life, and make you better.

Harry had indeed changed and seemed to be reacting to the world in a manner which was diametrically opposed to his philosophy of only a few years ago. He was now content to challenge himself and nobody else, and was very insistent about this.

For years and years I did all sorts of things where I was competitive. I used to race motorcycles, I used to race 100cc racing carts, and I was
always incredibly good at it. Over the years I've sort of decided that that's not what it's about. It's a self thing, it's inside, where you are competing against yourself. So when I started windsurfing I decided that I wasn't going to compete.

... If I think of my artwork, the reason I did my artwork was because I needed to prove to the world that I was the best at doing that. It's sort of like being an athlete. An athlete usually has to have a huge ego, they want to be really good. They want to be the best and they are not happy unless they are the best. When I do sculpture, or when I used to do sculpture, I tried to make a piece which would baffle everybody's mind and make them say "How did he do that?", and I would spend a year and a half doing a piece. In the end it was technically pretty amazing, but it's like, you know, I don't have to do that any more. I don't have to spend a year and a half, I don't have to baffle them with my footwork any more.

Kathleen (Rebellion)

Like all her colleagues Kathleen is often dissatisfied with the status quo and eager to initiate change.

I like change. I like to bring around change, and I like to see it happen much faster than it does. Like, a millennium is too long. And yet I dislike the fact that there are changes in government and so on which make it back to even the previous status quo. . . . Yes, I do get very frustrated with the status quo.

This made her angry and tense, but she admitted that she had mellowed through
the years, implying that the process of artmaking can be therapeutic and used as a safety-valve for what might otherwise be violent expression of inner feelings.

I think all the bangs and crashes and stuff sort of slowed me down. I don’t tend to fight as much as I used to. But at one time I certainly did go for causes. . . . Stomping your feet all over the place and getting mad about everything, I don’t think is necessary. I think artists often rebel in a quiet way. And it often comes out in their art—which means that they don’t become mass murderers. I think that is very unlikely. They may harm themselves . . .

She also, like all of the participants except possibly Harry, saw herself not as a rule breaker but a rule bender.

I circumvent the rules—creatively. . . . And yes, I think I do that in a lot of things. I don’t bang my head straight against the wall, and as I get older I stop panicking over it too. . . . finding loopholes in the rules.

Kathleen had explored most sculptural materials and techniques during her career, usually by trial and error and with minimal benefit of formal training. Experimentation is important to all the participants, but sometimes it has to be physical. Kathleen explained in the following conversation that the challenge was important to her.

I found it difficult when I was . . . a student . . . because my ideas went faster than I could learn the skills. So by the time I got around to taking a course in Plastics I had already gone through my plastics stage and was into my metal stage and I could never quite keep up. So I was always on
I commented "Which is interesting, because you talk about the human condition being a kind of fragile 'tippy' one, on the edge of falling, and yet you were putting yourself in that situation."

"Constantly" she replied. "It would have been much easier if I had learned one thing and done that, and then learned another thing and done that. But I don't do things that way." Several people had commented obliquely on the "Aha experience" made possible by experimentation and intuition. Kathleen talked about her need to fiddle with little bits of cardboard before her ideas started to come together.

Yes I experiment. . . . when I am in my geometric stages what I did was I would make 50 or 60 pieces--cardboard pieces--and they could stay on my drafting table for days. And then all of a sudden I would see something wrong with one of them and lop off that side and change it. And sometimes I can walk in there and see all the things that are wrong with them, and all of a sudden this fits with this, and this fits with that, and that fits with this. Interestingly enough I did maybe ten pieces which involve more than one piece. I would do two, or three or in some cases four that intermingle. And I thought "Oh, this is not going to be easy". Because it is difficult enough to make one piece that I'm really happy with, but actually they went together almost as if I knew something that I didn't know.

This artist considered that she was typical of other creative people, being constantly inquisitive and often taking notice of the patterns and gestalt of their
world.

I think it is very likely that they do look for things constantly, take things apart, see how things work, are looking in every aspect of where they live, or for shapes, or for things that call their attention to something. . . . I often go into rooms and line up corners--see how things fit in, how those two pipes fit into that corner, and I do that stuff all the time. Some people accuse me of not listening to what they are saying because I am always doing that.

"Because you are always looking at the ceiling or something?" I asked.

"Yeah. And it's not to be rude or anything, it's just something that's caught my eye and it's interesting and it seems to go together rather well." I asked Kathleen

"Do you perceive yourself to be a risk-taker?" and the answer was immediate and affirmative.

Yes, definitely. Because I will try and do things in my art that I know may have a 50/50 chance of ever making it. And I've had ones that haven't made it. I remember doing a piece that was very, very, very important to me. But I was making it out of material and I wanted to cast it in bronze, and the foundryman said "You know, I can't guarantee this is going to work." I said "Well, I'll take my chances" and it blew up . . . so, yeah, I do take risks. A lot of risks.

I tried a question which had puzzled me with all these artists. "If you are vulnerable, why are you a risk-taker?"

That's a strange question. I can't answer that. You know, I remember
taking . . . I wasn’t supposed to be taking on any more than I was already doing because I was loading my plate, and then I volunteered to chair the Christmas party. My therapist said “Why are you doing this?” I said “I don’t—I think it is to prove to myself that I really can.” I also want to prove that I can do it and I can do it better than somebody else.

“So you react to challenges” I said.

“Yeah. It’s my perfectionist drive.”

Kathleen’s risk-taking included leaving home at an early age, a marriage at the age of nineteen and a flight from that abusive first marriage a year later.

I have taken a lot of risk in my life. I mean, when I left my first husband I could have remained with the status quo, but I didn’t. I decided to pick up two suitcases and my dog, of all things, and headed off to Germany. That’s a pretty risky thing to do when you don’t know anybody and you don’t speak the language.

A later revealing conversation offered more insights into her sculpture and perhaps part of her need to take risks, as she explained

I remember a colleague saying “Good God, Kathleen, couldn’t you come up with something that someone has done before? Does it have to be the ultimate problem?” I found that I was never quite satisfied unless it was really risky. Especially with these things that balanced on two points or something. Obviously I could have just made one that sat on a table, but I wasn’t quite happy with that. It had to be just that slightly balanced or off balance--and I guess that’s what the human condition is for me too. That I
never knew what was going to be coming at me at any point in time, so that I was always sort of on guard, hyper-vigilant. That’s what these pieces were like too. There is a certain amount of tension there, in the thought that you could just touch it and it could fall over, or it looks like it could, when actually it probably wouldn’t.

Kathleen had reported a most unhappy childhood and since I had commented on a very determined streak in her she talked about her attitudes towards challenge.

I think it’s from being run down all the time . . . by my parents. Well actually my father didn’t run me down, my mother did. Telling me how I couldn’t do things . . . constantly being called stupid or whatever. Therefore I was definitely going to go to university and prove that she was absolutely wrong. I think that’s still a reaction to that--that I still have to prove that I can do what I want to do, no matter how many times people tell me that it’s not very practical.

She graduated from university with honours and became a teacher before turning back to art as a fulltime career.

Maggie (Rebellion)

Maggie reported that she came from a long line of social activists on both sides of the family and so maintains she was born a revolutionary. “I think my own personal suffering probably had a lot to do with it, but I have always really felt for the underdog, being an underdog myself probably.” She identified herself as an underdog for a whole variety of reasons as she explained
I don’t take any pleasure in being an outsider, or feeling alienated, or feeling in any way fringed or outside of a process. I don’t find anything to celebrate necessarily about being on the margins, just through the sheer fact of being on the margins. I think there is a certain amount of freedom on the margins in that you are expected to be a weirdo. You are expected not to conform, and therefore you can kind of set up your own rules out there, but the sheer fact of being excluded or being in some way derogated, in a derogated status because you are supposedly on the margins, I don’t take any pleasure in that.

I asked her “Does the rest of the world see artists as different?”

Oh, yes. Absolutely. (There is a) mystique, yes. Also something slightly dangerous. Which is part of the pleasure I get out of it for sure. Well, it’s that stereotype. You are living on the edge, you know. You are sort of society’s maverick, right? . . . that dynamic is there . . . something artists have in spades, is sexual caché. It’s like “danger, kind of maverick, kind of outsider, sort of sexual, sort of ooh là là.”

She still insisted that all human beings are potentially creative but that society tends to discipline it out of them. This is an important point because it implies that all those who remain creative are by definition to some extent non-conformist, having resisted societal attempts to make them “much more straight” as Albert had expressed it.

I feel very strongly that human beings are innately creative, all human beings are innately creative. But without the support and without the
resources you will never find that out about yourself, and you will become a stick-in-the-mud who just wants to watch TV and beat his girlfriend up when the Superbowl comes because you are so frustrated, and just be part of the mainstream, by the structure and flow of the mainstream. So I think that peoples' creativity is the old thing about counting square blocks into round holes or whatever it is in the school system. I think that people are trained to be conformist, and part of conformity is just ruining a person's creative abilities. I do think people who have been able to be creative, and who have had that aspect of themselves developed are very good at things like political smarts and being able to see different sides of the story. And as well as being able to empathize with other people. If you can see the other side of the story then you can put yourself in that person's shoes and empathize, and I think that's very important. There are interesting echoes here of Albert's need to see a problem from all angles, to "view the world obliquely" as he phrased it, and of Sally's suggestion that as a creative person she may be able to see connections and liaisons where others cannot. Is it possible to also see hints of Therivel's (1993) theory that misfortunes and assistances encourage a person to see the world differently? Inevitably, Maggie was discontented with the status quo, citing the now familiar need amongst these artists to push the envelope or "take the next step" as Harry had put it.

I think a lot of people are satisfied with what they would consider to be a status quo, and so they spend their lives trying to conform to what they
perceive to be the status quo. Or they conform to whatever fits their values. But I think if you are a creative person then that’s always going to rub you the wrong way. You could be a Tory or an NDP, I don’t care what your politics are, but if you are creative you are always going to be striving against that. You are always going to be trying to move forward, however you conceive of that.

In talking of conformity this artist brought up the useful reminder, as had Harry, that everybody conforms to something, even though they may have different standards and perspectives compared to those of the larger community.

So what are you conforming to? The whole notion of fringe—I mean everyone has some kind of constituency. We might conceive of neo-Nazis as fringe, but there are an awful lot of them out there, and as far as they are concerned they are not fringe. They are what should be the main stream . . . so the notion of conformity is also somewhat misleading because you are conforming to something.

These two notions of moving forward and rebelling against society while conforming to a smaller constituency were neatly demonstrated by Maggie’s “coming out” as an incest survivor. After years of therapy, of working with abused women on communal art projects, and of embracing feminist ideology she finally realized that she was not alone in her history of abuse.

And that whole process and that whole experience was very liberating because it just—I just let go. I just let go. And I let go of the anger against my parents, and it was a very positive, constructive experience for me. . . .
So for me to just relinquish control over all that and just say "---- it. I don't want this burden any more" and to start talking about things openly—I mean that shocked people. They would just be sitting there slack-jawed because I could say openly in a social situation or in the middle of a public discussion or in a more public situation that I am a survivor.

This eventually lead to an interesting discussion on roleplaying and the discarding of social conventions, and because it raises some important points it has been recorded here at length. I asked her

Do you find that you have to sacrifice things in order to be creative?

Some people like Glenn Gould, Glenn Gould didn't bother to talk to people he wasn't interested in. He would phone people up whatever time of night he wanted because that was his clock, and he didn't give a damn about convention. He just did what he wanted to do, and if he didn't want to do it he didn't do it.

“He was also a sick man” she objected. I replied noncommittally “Well, some artists are and some aren’t.” She pursued her thought.

“And he could also be described as egomania (sic), well he was.” I agreed, adding “And totally and utterly selfish. But do you suppose it was because he was totally and utterly selfish, or was he deliberately sacrificing the niceties of society to focus on his art, because that was what was important?” Maggie answered “I don’t think he had a--I don’t think he gave a hoot about the niceties of society or civility or any of those things.”

“But why didn’t he?” I persisted. “And not just him, but those artists who display
that kind of a temperament?” She observed

Well I think there is something to be said for the connection between mental illness and creativity, and I think there is definitely a connection there. There wouldn’t be an eternal age-old philosophical question if it wasn’t for the fact that it is exhibited time and time again in individuals. That there is a connection between mental illness and/or suffering and artistic creativity and artistic sensibilities. At the same time there is also this current in the way we have stereotyped creative artistic types, which is that they are free of convention, and free of bourgeois civility and bourgeois convention.

I interrupted. “Which of course allows them permission to do exactly what they like, so they are roleplaying.” She agreed, and continued her argument.

So in one sense they are roleplaying and in one sense that stereotype gives them licence to be assholes, basically. I have heard many times peoples’ behaviour being excused on the basis that they are artists and therefore above the law, and I don’t accept that. Not for one minute. I accept that people who are mentally ill are beyond the law, but they are not above the law. They may be beyond the ability to behave in ways that are civil and reasonable, and I’m not talking about bourgeois conventions, I am talking about basic behaviour. If Glenn Gould was my friend and he was calling up at three or four in the morning I would get pretty pissed off. I don’t care if he is Glenn Gould, I would say “I’ll talk to you in the morning”. And more likely I just wouldn’t answer my phone, because I
don’t. In that way I’m similar to Glenn Gould, in that I do definitely have my
own agenda. I just got rid of the answering service on my telephone
because I can’t stand having to deal with that. If they really want me they’ll
call back or get me at work or whatever, but it’s just one more thing
cluttering my brain that I don’t need, right? But at the same time I’m very
devoted to my friends, it’s not in any way a rejection. It’s just one more
kind of accoutrement that I don’t need. So in some ways I can understand
that desire to divest yourself of those sorts of unnecessary connections to
the outside world, but there is a difference.

I asked her why, and she elaborated “Because I feel fractured all over the place
as it is, and I think maybe that’s the price you pay for being a creative, driven
person--here I am reiterating some of the . . . “

“And walking right into it” I said, to laughter from both of us.

I know, I’m walking right into it. I’m consciously walking right into it. I’m
very conscious of the game you are trying to pull here. But the reason I
want to get rid of that stuff is frankly it’s a pain in the butt. It really is. I
don’t need any more demands on my time than I already have, and I
really need--my solitude is very important to me.

Maggie’s point about the connection between mental illness and creativity
is an interesting one on which many books have been written. It is unfortunately
not possible to examine this subject in this paper, although the related topics of
mood swings and low esteem will be explored to a minor extent. Maggie has
been an avid student of art history and philosophy, and while she is usually
careful not to generalize and to accept the mythology unquestioned she
nevertheless has a valid argument when she suggests that there is no smoke
without fire. For centuries it has been widely accepted in many parts of the world
that artists are unlike other people, they are mavericks, they live outside the
normal conventions of society, they are mentally unstable and so on (Lombroso,
1895). This stereotyping would not be so widespread if there were not some truth
to these statements, which although they cannot be applied to all creative people
have nevertheless been recognized as common.

Since art is produced for an audience, whether this is the producer or a
larger public, it is probably fair to say that creative people have a heightened
sense of the dramatic. Certainly the six people I interviewed were all proud to call
themselves artists, and they considered themselves different from non-artists. To
a varying extent they were therefore playing the role of artist, whether
consciously or not. This sometimes was used to justify the fact that they had their
own agendas, which of course every individual does. I do not agree, however,
with Maggie’s analysis that I was “trying to pull a game on her” or set a trap of
some kind. The quoted transcript is complete and has not been edited with the
exception of a couple of truncated sentences which made no sense because she
abandoned them, so it seems to me that she conceded my point that she (and I
would argue all artists) have to make choices. Some aspects of life, whether they
be a well-paid fulltime job, having children, taking time for leisure activities or
observing some of the usual conventions of society have to be sacrificed so that
there is time and psychic energy available with which to pursue the making of
art. The concept of “control” is therefore important once again. Control over one’s life as much as possible, and perhaps control over others. As she confessed, I get a very important sense of satisfaction and wellbeing out of being politically active, out of doing this kind of job where I am engaged with people in a very collaborative way, but where I also have quite a lot of control over certain kinds of things, and where I am a certain kind of boss. I really enjoy that. I hate to say it, but I do.

Risk-taking for artists frequently starts the moment the desire to be an artist is expressed, and the problem of parental or family disapproval which is probably fairly common for artists was pointed out by Maggie. “The first risk you take is to say you want to be an artist, because your mom and dad are going to say ‘There’s no future in that honey’.” Having studied art history she was able to talk knowledgeably about society’s attitude towards artists as well as offering a personal view.

There is something very comforting about some of these mythologies because they make us look so good, you know. We’re the risk-takers, we’re the passionate ones, we’re the ones who live life to the fullest, and are constantly on the edge, and Christ, all this stuff . . . some of the most boring people I’ve met, the most staid, boring, conventional people I’ve met were artists, right? And I’m not kidding. I mean that really seriously. But you see it here all the time. Some of them are very vibrant, exciting, really wonky people, but vibrant, exciting and wonky do not necessarily an artist make. Artists are all sorts. So, risk-taking? Well, I was born to be a
She added an example of risk-taking in her artwork, when she lived on the East coast.

I did this hilarious bunch of photographs--self portraits of myself when I was pregnant, because I got so pissed off about maternity clothes because they are so ugly and so infantilizing and all about covering your body up, and--Gee, it's like pregnant women are . . .

Knowing her, I could not resist breaking in and offering "So you did a Demi Moore and exposed it all?"

Well it's funny because I did this huge installation in the window of a gallery that had this huge window. It was basically lifesize blowups of me dressed as a beauty queen bare naked with a banner saying "Preggers 1990" and a tiara and some roses, and eight months pregnant. And it was a lifesize blowup of me and I had all these Bouché cherubs and beauty queens cut out of 1950s Life magazines, and I installed that two days before the Demi Moore cover came out. It was pretty funny, perfect timing. It was so good. I had a wonderful time doing that work.

Sally (Rebellion)

Sally had a serious need for control and structure in her life, a point that she emphasized over and over again.

Control for me tends to be a need to manage chaos, or to manage the unknown. . . . I recently met a person last fall who--my response--I had a really strong reaction . . . and it was mutual. My way of managing that was
to back off, and not just to go with that intense feeling. And back off and ask questions and find out who this person was all about, instead of just going with it. That's an example of how I use control to maintain that—for me something that would be out of control, or I don't know where it's going, and I don't know what's happening here so I just need to manage it.

Being controlled was different though, and quite spontaneously Sally said almost the same thing as Albert had said about aversion to authority figures.

Customs officials. I always get nervous when I see a uniform. Oh God, I have airport stories like you wouldn't believe. I have been strip-searched in South America, I have been grilled going through customs—I always get grilled, almost always get grilled. . . . I've had all kinds of problems. I'm not sure exactly where that comes from, that authority figure. Probably childhood, and teachers, and parents, and how you were raised with authority figures, and the power that authority figures have. And then as an adult, coming up against somebody who assumes an enormous amount of power just because they have a uniform on, and don't really have that authority. That kind of stuff presses my buttons. You know, an officious security guard.

She too has mellowed as she got older. I asked her “So that would automatically bring out the rebel in you, just on principle?” to which she said “Oh no. I'm too smart for that now. Would have in the past. Now I just do what I'm told.”

Sally agreed that she too was a risk-taker in her own way, although
careful not to let things get out of control.

To a certain extent, if I'm challenged. If somebody says "Go ahead, I dare you" I'll do it. It also depends on what it is. Yeah, I would say definitely I'm a risk-taker. I wouldn't be running my own business if I wasn't a risk-taker. And I'm not talking about uncalculated risks, but I tend to be more of a risk-taker than the average person.

She was probably more of a risk-taker than she gave herself credit for, becoming uncharacteristically loquacious on the subject of reaction to challenge. She explained that because she had always suffered from low grades at school, probably as a result of her dyslexia, it had been very important to her that she attend a degree-granting art school so that she could prove she was academically competent.

When I was in Grade Eight teacher wanted me to go to the technical high school, to learn to become a hairdresser. And my mother just refused . . . he didn't think I had the qualifications to even just go through a regular high school.

I asked her why she chose to specialize in the field of graphic design, and her answer surprised me.

In fact the feminist movement was getting started while I was in art school, and that was one of the reasons why I chose industrial design. It was unusual for women, it was a field that was unusual for women to go into. So in a way it was like, well, how do I stand out? How do I express myself or be different? And that is . . . a way of looking at how I've made decisions
on things that are important to me. How do I make a difference or how do I stand out in a crowd? Part of that is, don’t do what is conventional by going to OCA in the ‘70s. Go to the States. Do something different. Choose a field that’s not conventional for women.

She had deliberately chosen a field which would be challenging, both academically and socially. I wanted to understand what made her take this kind of risk when according to her reports her ego had taken a battering at school, and so within the context of this discussion I commented “This is fascinating, because you suffered to some extent from low self-esteem, and yet you set yourself up. Why?”

She did not understand. “Set myself up for what?”

“Well, for rejection. You went into a male-dominated society, deliberately. You stuck your head in the lions’ den. Why?”

“Yes, yes” she said. “Well I guess I’m comfortable there. I’m used to being there.” Now I did not understand. “But would you not want to stay away from that kind of trouble? I think I’m not understanding--I’m getting two messages here.” She continued

No, because maybe that’s part of where some of that rebel comes out. “I’ll show you”. It’s actually, I think on the one hand there is the low self-esteem where my behaviour or my grades confirm that “Yes, you’re no good”, and then there is the reaction against that of “Well, I’ll show you”, because I also have that. So it was a matter for me to find--and it wasn’t something I did consciously, but it was “How can I stand out?”
I was surprised at her characterizing herself as unconventional and wanting to stand out in a crowd because she had described how she had suffered from low self-esteem as a result of her dyslexia and shyness. She may have been low key she explained, but she was an Aquarian, and Aquarians tend to be very unconventional. I think I have very much more open-minded unconventional attitudes than the average person. It’s just not acted out. . . . I don’t like fitting into a status quo. I do, and I can. But I find myself diminished or I find myself diminishing myself in order to do that. No, I would much rather be identified with more of a fringe, or more of the unconventional. It’s more interesting. It’s more challenging, it’s more exciting. As opposed to fitting into a certain niche, a certain acceptable way of thinking, a certain acceptable convention.

I did not realize, until I came to assemble the vast amount of data collected, that I had no material from Sally’s interviews which could be classified under “experimenters, explorers”. She had told me how she played with designs in her head when driving back from a client meeting, and about the importance of intuition, but she had obviously said nothing more about the experimental process of being creative. Perhaps her particular form of art did not lend itself to a great deal of experimenting, or perhaps we had simply bypassed the subject during our conversations and not returned to it.

Discussion and Summary (Rebellion)

All the participants volunteered that personal growth was essential, which in turn meant that none were content to remain static and accept the status quo.
As Maggie put it, "If the status quo means not growing and not developing and not being able to accommodate changing conditions, or inhibiting growth in some way, then that does frustrate me." These artists are all in their forties and fifties, and have probably mellowed with age, most of them indicating that they no longer react as rebelliously as they used to. Perhaps like Kathleen they have discovered that one can find creative ways to effect change without expending a lot of energy and making enemies unnecessarily. Nevertheless, they all appear to be programmed to be rebels. Indeed, Harry appears to be the epitome of the kind of artist described by Lynch (1996) continually searching for "unrelaxed play" and passionately dedicated to the suggestion of Henry David Thoreau whom she quotes: "The order of things should be somewhat reversed—the seventh should be man's day of toil, wherein to earn his living by the sweat of his brow, and the other six his sabbath of the affections and the soul" (p.5).

All six felt that artists were both different and misunderstood, and all six either admitted or appeared to demonstrate a history of low self-esteem. Four of them admitted that an artist's unconventional lifestyle is exciting and to be preferred, and it can be presumed that the other two were in tacit agreement because they were actively living that lifestyle. Many of them demonstrated Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) assertion that "The only way to stay creative is to oppose the wear and tear of existence . . . cutting out meaningless chores that soak up psychic energy, and devoting the energy thus saved to what you really care about" (p. 358). "Control" seemed to be a key word which they all volunteered in one way or another, and I wondered privately whether for some of
these artists this stemmed from childhood experiences with parental and school authority figures. New experiences were irresistible to all, from Maggie's subversive and guerilla art to Harry's constantly challenging himself to find new ways of handling his sailboard, and in fact everyone expressed strongly their dislike to making multiples or doing the same thing over and over again. It appeared that their tolerance for boring activity was low and they craved the excitement of meeting new challenges. However, I was puzzled by Albert's comment that since he was teaching rather than producing art to earn a living he felt compelled to push the envelope of knowledge. This professorial approach initially impressed me, but on reflection after the final interview left me perplexed. His conversation certainly left no doubt that he loved teaching, and made a comfortable living from it, perhaps even to the point where he felt a little guilty. But I had the strong feeling that this particular artist (as well as several of the others) would have experimented and created art constantly for the sheer excitement and enjoyment of it. He did not need to feel obligated in order to experiment and explore, and yet he appeared to be making the excuse that this was indeed his motivation.

Another artist's explanation alluded me, when David explained that when showing people your painting you are taking a risk because you are baring your soul. He went on to say that he had confidence in his painting, but if he attempted to offer his public a sample of writing he would be highly embarrassed. It looks like a reasonable argument, but in retrospect this statement puzzled me. I can quite understand that pouring one's emotions into a work of art and then
submitting it to public scrutiny can be very difficult, and is therefore a risky thing to do. But in the next breath he said that because he had confidence in his work it was not a problem for him (i.e., was not a risk), but it would be if he was dabbling in a field which was not his own. I was not sure what to make of the inconsistency of his argument, and was not able to interview him again on this question.

In my quest to find out why artists took risks, since they all appeared to delight in doing so, I was still looking for the answer to the question of why? There appeared to be an interesting connection between the artist-as-risk-taker and his or her offering their artwork to the world, opening up their vulnerability and possibly being shot down, but nevertheless daring the world to do that. It seemed as though the artist must do that, perhaps for the occasional approbation won or for the exhilaration produced by the risk of being shot down. Or perhaps it was just to prove they could. As my discussion with Sally showed, these people were prepared to pursue their goals with a particular stubbornness and an attitude of "Well, I'll show you". Harry had the same spirit in his quiet, independent way, while I suspected that David was continually proving to himself and his parents that he was indeed competent. Kathleen probably voiced this spirit best when she said "I still have to prove that I can do what I want to do, no matter how many times people tell me that it's not very practical."
Emerging Themes Connected to Theory

Major Misfortunes

How much major misfortune, coupled with the necessary compensating assistances, is enough to make an artist according to Therivel's (1993) theory? This question, and the temptation to dredge up what might be minor misfortunes to complete the formula, make this topic a difficult one to assess. If one expects all artists to have misfortunes in their background one can probably find them, as the following conversation shows that Albert conjectured. These comments were made by Albert quite spontaneously without any prompting on the subject and without any knowledge of the Challenged Personality theory (Therivel, 1993) when he observed

I found out earlier, before we started our talk today, because of an earlier conversation today I realized that there is a large proportion of people at (this institution) who come from abuse, or are hiding something, or--I don’t want to say hiding. There is something that they are not prepared to make totally public, and yet they still want to scream from the rooftops about themselves, and yet there are parts about themselves they don’t--strangely enough they don’t want a public but they want a public at the same time. There is this very strange ambivalent juxtaposition.

I probed further. “That’s interesting. Would all artists do you think have this sort of approach-avoidance feeling, this ambivalence?” He continued

I would suspect that it would be there in one way or another. You may have to dig a little to find it, but I wouldn’t be at all surprised to find that
they all have some form of hide-disclose, hide-disclose involved in themselves. But whether it was a very deep personal thing, or whether it was a conscious thing, or whether it was being a slight crackpot. Even somebody like Van Gogh. This guy was just so convoluted, and there was so much coming out and so much staying in, it seems to produce great art. It seems to assist one. I had realized for years the frequency of which, my suspicions about, the disproportionate number of dyslexic or learning-impaired people here. I have been very aware of my area upstairs, in fact there was a notorious conversation . . . where ten out of twelve women sitting around the table admitted to sexual abuse in the family. This is a high proportion, and it suddenly dawned on me, partly because of a conversation with you and there are other things going on around here. I would expect there to be an extreme disproportionate number of people who, there would be some oddity in their background. By oddity, it could be some form of abuse, learning disabilities . . . But it is interesting to me the frequency with which these issues come up in conversations with people around this building. I would be surprised if these kinds of issues would come up with the same frequency if I was dealing with, say, the students up at the psychology school, or up at architecture. I don't think I would get the same proportion. As I say, it is only a theory, or maybe it is just because in recent years I am becoming more aware of these things myself around here. But maybe it's prevalent everywhere, I just have no reason to believe it's prevalent everywhere. I am suspicious that it may be
one of the many contributing things why someone would come towards the arts.

I asked him “So you have noticed this in your own dealings with students? This is something you have picked up on?” He replied quickly

Not just with students. In the faculty. And when one of them goes “Oh yeah, I was abused as a kid” it's kind of startling. “Oh my goodness, another one”, I kind of go, “Isn't that interesting”. Almost everybody in this building seems to have a little twist, a little something in there that takes them outside the so-called norm, whatever a “norm” is.

This section will review some of these artists' reported problems, and in addition investigate their history as young children at school. From personal observation of the art students (and faculty) at the institution where I work it seems very evident to me that many of them are not academic. They may be excellent at spacial relationships, colour, and form but they are usually visual rather than textual people, and indeed some have considerable difficulty reading and writing. I reasoned, therefore, that my group of interviewees would probably have struggled in school as young children, and so I asked them to talk about their experiences.

Albert (Major Misfortunes)

Albert was a classic example of the “little twist” syndrome he mentioned, which might partly explain his interest. He had mostly positive memories of school, although not elsewhere as I discovered when I asked him “Were you a happy kid at school?”
"At school, yes" he replied. "If that implies there was a place I wasn’t happy, that is correct."

"Which was home" I guessed.

"You’ve got it."

He seems to have suffered many of the usual reprimands earned at school by a lefthanded child, reporting that:

I know all kinds of people have horror stories about being hit over the knuckles or whatever, but I cannot honestly recall anyone even mentioning that. I do remember in school they got mad because the way I do write I do it upside down and backwards, and because of that you smudge all your writing. I was forever getting told off for that.

Albert suffered from a lack of self-esteem (and still does to this day) which he hides well but freely admitted to me. The causes are multiple, but one of them may have been the way his undiagnosed dyslexia was received at school where he implies he was made to feel intellectually inadequate by some teachers. However, most of them were very supportive of his non-academic activities, for which he is eternally grateful.

The other thing you have got to remember is that when I was a kid no-one even knew what dyslexia was. You were just considered dumb, slow, whatever. I was just incredibly blessed with all the right teachers at the right time coming through, and most of them recognised where my strengths were, and no-one ever tried to force me to do things that were inappropriate. In fact they were very encouraging to have me do things
that were appropriate for me, and as I say I am just really lucky, because I
know there were a lot of teachers out there even in my time who would
not have permitted that. . . . It was accepted that Albert wouldn't read too
much and Albert wouldn't write too much.

So according to him many of Albert's teachers supported him and he was
effectively moulded by them and by his inability to use written language, revelling
in his creativity which came easily to him. He remembers "Almost everything that
ever came back all the way through junior school--'very imaginative, too bad you
can't spell and punctuate'." Finally since it was clear that he had no interest in
academic matters but was wholly consumed by art even at that age, his high
school teachers reportedly conspired to falsify his marks so that he could
graduate and go to art school.

Come the end of the year grades were created for me in certain subject
matters, because everyone knew "Oh, he's going to be an artist, don't
worry about it. He's going in that direction". Everyone knew where I was
going. I can even remember in grade twelve getting out of high school, I
think it was about three of my grades--math, one of the English classes, I
think it was history. They openly told me that they created the mark to get
me out. It was a waste of time to keep me back, they knew where I was
going.

Like a significant proportion of lefthanded people Albert suffers from
dyslexia and I asked him how bad it really was. It has obviously affected his life
seriously, although he showed a remarkable lack of exasperation, possibly
because he had compensated to an extreme in his art interests.

For me? It's pretty bad. Reading things is very difficult. Even the transcript you gave me to read was very difficult to read. It was very dense, very even-textured, and it is very, very hard for me to focus on it. .

Sometimes you get letters confused. "b"s and "d"s are impossible, "p"s and "q"s are hopeless, there are a whole bunch of them that get very awkward. You put something in caps and we are just dead in the water. Often a lot of ways pages can be set up it just becomes a grey mush—it doesn't matter which glasses I put on I can never get it to unmush. . . . So reading is a real, real big problem.

At a later point in the interview I made the mistake of forgetting this admission and asked him if he had read a certain book, and he chided me gently if ungrammatically "I don't read much books."

Asked when he first discovered that he was interested in art, Albert told me matter-of-factly about his disjointed childhood.

I was about four years old. Due to a rather long, complicated family situation I spent my kind of 3, 4, 5 years of age with my grandparents, who were obviously much older at that point. Basically I was frequently put into a room and left alone. The one thing that I was always given a fair amount of was drawing materials and paper. By the time I entered kindergarten I was already doing three-dimensional drawings.

. . . I don't remember it as unhappy times. Although I am quite confident there must have been some, I have no overt, conscious
memories of bad times. . . . about twenty years ago I went through a breakdown and with my shrink we went back and traced back a lot of stuff, and there are a lot of blanks in my memory banks. Possibly my memory banks just blank them out, but I have no conscious negative memories. I have no memories of my natural mother—excuse me, I have one fleeting memory of her. She disappeared when I was an infant. When I came back into our family group, my father and his then-wife, my stepmother, and my two brothers, I was five. And I was already separated from my family and we never really connected. So I lived with these people, we co-habited in the space, but we never really connected.

He suddenly broke off the conversation at that point, paused and said softly

I suddenly realized that, is not a lot of my negative thoughts about myself going right back to those beginning roots of rejection. And that of course you are not good enough—your mother left you. And this just keeps coming back to that.

“So you punish yourself.” I observed. He nodded slowly.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. You know, I can't be good enough. I can't be good enough. And the number of times I will actually say something like that to myself is amazing. It just goes over and over and over again.

I tried to rationalize it. “Well it's something you never fully get over.”

He agreed. “Yeah. But as I say it is at least under control that these moods don't last that long—an evening tops.” Later in the interview he returned to these negative thoughts about himself as he candidly explained
My views of me are not very good. For years I would say "I don't like me" and to a certain extent that is a truism. I'm not too sure how to phrase it better, but the frequency even with my partner that I'll be having one of my black moods, and so "What's the matter with you and what can I do to make things better?" and I'll say "Well I just don't like me today. I'm down on me today." I will often go through "down-on-me" periods. Luckily they don't last as long as they used to. They used to last for weeks, weeks on end. Then it was that I finally had the breakdown, psychotherapy and all that stuff. Now I can usually talk myself out of it pretty quickly, lasts for an evening or two tops. But these black moods still come on a lot.

When Albert went to art school his life became even more complicated. This was partly because his parents had been "dead set against him going" to art school, and he had to finance it himself with a full time job and simultaneous weekend part-time job. At the same time he was also a full-time student as well as reportedly having to look after the household. His childhood traumas presumably made a big impact too, and it was probably not surprising that he later became emotionally unstable.

I lived on emotional roller coaster rides, no question about it. From the sublime to the ridiculous. I was also coming through--I think it was a form of puberty actually although I was in my twenties. You see I missed my teen years. I didn't do them until late twenties--again this weird family setup. My stepmother, when she moved in, she was actually quite an ill lady, mentally and physically as I ultimately figured out. And all the time I
was going through high school I pretty much looked after the house, looked after everything because she wasn’t capable of doing it. So I didn’t get the time to go to play, I didn’t get the time to go to the parties, the dances, the whatever. The kinds of things that a teenager should go through—that stage of life. So I just did it a little bit later. In my late teens I sowed my wild oats—Oh boy, did I sow them, I really sowed them. And this did lead—mind you I was always very emotional before that.

Albert used to have great mood swings, and saw the roller coaster that he as a creative person lived on was an important part of living life to the full. My shrink was describing the fact that when I had my initial overt problems the roller coaster I was on, the highs were too high and the lows were too low. We had to clip off some of the heights and some of the lownesses (sic) so we got down to a slower roller coaster. But it is still a roller coaster. You have good days that are amazing delights and joyful, and then you have days when everything seems to go wrong, and as hard as you try whatever you are trying to get out just isn’t coming out—it just isn’t working. Well that’s a real negative. So as I say this roller coaster is both a positive and a negative, you need both.

To complicate this situation somewhat, perhaps not surprisingly for an artist who uses colour, tone, light values and shade to create art, Albert suffers quite badly from a clinically undiagnosed Seasonal Affective Disorder. “Getting through February is really, really difficult. I think that’s one of the reasons I love Mexico. Because I can get this blast of sun . . . And I need sun. It’s not just good
weather. It has to be sun.”

David (Major Misfortunes)

Artists do not always abide by the rules, and the restless David who has to be always doing things found that his drive to create got him into constant trouble as a young boy at school. He refused to allow this to stop him being creative, but it sounds as though it made school a lot less pleasant than it might otherwise have been.

A true artist--anybody who is here as an art student, who draws, you can guarantee that these guys sketched all over their math book, all over their English book, right through school, and actually had to fight their teachers to do it--and they did it anyway. It's almost like a nervous habit you can't prevent. . . . and the moment you get into school and it's not drawing time and you're drawing anyway, you start to get negative. All the negative they give doesn't stop it. . . . I (pause) weekly all through primary school, would suffer the same pressure from the teacher to not draw on my book. And I won.

This was a triumphant memory, and it brought home to me just how determined some of these artists could be to do what was important to them whether or not the authority figures (school, parents, or any other) approved. However, David obviously had some painful memories of early school as the following uncharacteristically hesitant statement shows.

. . . but certainly I had to go and, uh (pause) I obviously had some sort of problems coping within the standard school system. And (pause) that was
not just myself but also the nature of the class I happened to be in. Uh, it
wasn't particularly easy. But, uh, my mother was concerned about our
intelli--she thought we were all smart but the school was coming back with
poor grades, etcetera, (pause) . .

The seemingly reluctant emphasis was his, and he was having such a difficult
time reporting his experiences at school during this particular interview that I did
not want to press this point any further. In a later interview this intelligent and
apparently highly competent artist had recovered much of his equilibrium and
attributed the reasons for his problems to the quality of teaching.

I had problems with the academics because of the teaching scenario. I
had really bad luck with teachers, and I also had an extremely disruptive
student in a large class with us . . . When it came to things like maths if
you didn't get it you weren't getting the help. All of a sudden it was
finished and gone and they gave you a passing grade and that was it. The
only area I actually had any problem with in real terms was math. I was
reading before I went to school, I don't remember not being able to read.

Apart from academic problems David reported that he was a target of
antagonistic behaviour in high school because he was different. Being an artist
while still at school, he felt, was a mixed blessing because while some people
admired you for your talents there would also be those who were envious of
them, or of the attention they attracted, and sought to take revenge.

I knew that I was an artist from a very early age. On one hand people like
you. They like your drawings, you gain a certain amount of popularity
through your ability to draw, to create. And the thing that you don't recognize as a child but you realize later is that there is a jealousy that comes along with it. I think a lot of artists, they get popularity on one hand and they suffer a lot of backstabbing, if you will, behind the scenes. . . . I didn't notice it in public school, it wasn't a problem. But in high school I definitely noticed it. There was a high amount of jealousy but at the same time I was never a complete outcast. . . . I had one solid year of torment from basically the football team, but I survived it. But that was rough at the time.

David chose not to speak much of his early family life, although he allowed that his father was away a lot and in the European tradition believed that bringing up children was the mother's business. He appeared to come from a matriarchal family where he perceived that both his mother and his grandmother demonstrated that they favoured the other four brothers (and particularly the eldest) over him.

I grew up in a pretty happy childhood. We had inequities in the family, there were five brothers and there were inequities in treatment as there always are, and in my family particularly there were some really broad ones. My grandmother had a heavy favouritism for my older brother and basically bought him (pause) uhm, anything he wanted . . . and not frivolous things but developmental things--tools, equipment, scientific equipment. . . . At the same time I received virtually nothing--I was told not to touch his things. And it wasn't my imagination. Our family doctor
actually approached our mother and suggested that we never see our grandparents again, so it was pretty evident. I'm glad they didn't follow that. I confronted that one directly myself to my grandmother and kind of dealt with it. But I think what I have to say is that probably receiving the worst treatment out of five kids, that was still being well-treated.

David was sent away to boarding school for four years where he reported being bullied, and I had the feeling that a lot of childhood history was not volunteered, so let the topic drop.

While this artist professed to have no mood swings he put an interesting spin on the question about Seasonal Affective Disorder. He noticed, he said, that in the winter months his creativity is "dampened" but that it blossoms noticeably with the arrival of spring.

I notice coming out of it because all of a sudden I will be bombarded with ideas, so I typically do find that there is usually a couple of weeks--this year it was earlier, February and March, where I seem to come out of mental hibernation. Well, I didn't really get the opportunity to hibernate but all of a sudden it went from being moderate to just an explosion of ideas. And the ideas are all over the map, and they come constantly. . . . So I sort of recognize that the end of my winter is when these ideas start popping into my head.

Harry (Major Misfortunes)

Harry came from a small Northern Ontario town where he preferred to spend all his time in the bush and was not happy at school, admitting that he
was very much a loner. In school, I had a really tough time in school, because I wasn’t academic. I wasn’t comfortable, I wanted to be more outside. And I think as I got older, sort of approaching the age of eighteen, there wasn’t much in high school that really attracted me until I got interested in art.

It appears that Harry’s current creative passions are merely an extension of his childhood behaviour because he explained that he had always been a maverick and had enjoyed solitary pursuits.

If I go back to when I was a little kid and I think about some of the things I played with and some of the things I made, and some of the things I did, and some of the things I thought, you know without knowing it I think I probably was an artist. So it was probably always there and that’s why I couldn’t fit in, and couldn’t figure out “well what the hell’s going on here?” So I think you are probably sort of born with it.

I tried to clarify his statement. “Was it school you couldn’t fit into?” His answer surprised me.

No, it was society. The way the structure had been laid out in front of me. You know back then it was really bad. I remember in Grade Five I had a problem. I used to like looking out of the window. Liked looking at the clouds. And because of that the school decided that I had a deficiency in my attention span. So what they did was they put me in a special class. It was the teacher, in this case the principal of the school, and myself and he would have a list of questions. And every single time I got a question
wrong I would have to hold out my hand and he would give me the strap. And that's the way they dealt with me looking out of the window--that's the way they dealt with me. So here I am, trying to be creative, thinking about things that really interested me, and what the system was doing is saying "No, that's wrong. You can't do that, and we are going to reprimand you for doing that." I was being creative while I was looking out of the window. For sure. I was thinking about things.

His ego was badly battered by his poor academic performance in the classroom, and he is probably still paying the price for that humiliation today.

I was really lousy. Even when I took auto mechanics or welding I got about 55% in all of the classes. I just sort of scraped through. Because there was nothing there, I wasn't interested in any of my classes. Because of that there was a real lack of self-worth. And, you know in high school you're supposed to meet girls and stuff like that, and I didn't talk to a girl for two years at high school. So it was very difficult.

Harry's memories appeared to be tinged with regret and I gained the impression throughout these three interviews that he felt that he would have been financially more successful in life had he received more support as a child from the educational system and his parents. He appeared to have had a fairly normal home life, although he seemed hurt by his father's lack of time and support for him as a boy.

. . . if I were a little kid right now thinking about it, I would probably say that I had a pretty good family life and my dad seemed to be around a lot,
doing stuff. But looking back at it from me being forty-five now, I realize my dad was into what he wanted to do, and it was ok if I wanted to play hockey or if I wanted to do that stuff he was interested in, but it wasn’t ok if I was interested in something else. . . . No, my dad spent a lot of time doing the things my dad wanted to do and not helping with the kids. . . . So what happened with me, was that I ended up being this little kid who was bored out of his tears, especially as I went into Grade Eight, Grade Nine, and because of that got into lots of trouble. Hanging around with the wrong people and doing lots of things I shouldn’t have been doing.

It is evident that Harry suffers sometimes from low self-esteem which he readily admitted, and when he talked a little cryptically about his decision to go to art school, I took his lack of detail as a signal that he really did not want to disclose further details of his family relationships.

. . . there was a whole bunch of insecurities within me because of the lack of direction, mostly from my father, of which I am really having to deal with these days, in coming to--it affects me to this day, that there was no real support, no structure built up around me to help, and even though when I say that there was financial help. My parents helped me to go to (this institution) but there was no--there was no real support.

In response to a question as to whether he experienced swings in mood he replied “Not as much as I used to. I used to do that a lot, but these days I’m pretty constant . . . I think I’m tempered.” But a contrast was not a bad thing, he argued, restating Albert’s roller coaster observation.”You can’t have the good
without the bad. You have to have both sides of that. For you to be happy at some point in your life you have to have felt depressed. “ He did, however, as an outdoors person actively seek the sun, reporting that symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder influenced him too.

It affects me mentally and physically . . . And I tend very hard to stay away from areas that are too grey. I travel, and when I am in the sun I am definitely the happiest. I am very much a sun person.

Kathleen (Major Misfortunes)

Kathleen was an incest survivor with a tragic childhood. Part of the verbatim transcript reads:

I have a very complex family. My mother gave up an illegitimate child and so therefore suffered from terrific guilt. So it was her drive right from the beginning that she was going to adopt a child. And when she was told after she had me that she couldn't have children any more, then she decided that she would bring in these two foster children. . . . I must have been about three. One of them I got along with like a house on fire. I loved her. I adored her. They got rid of her. It was heartbreaking. That was my very first memory, is watching her being taken away in a car, crying in the back of the window and--I'm going to cry, just thinking back . . . But she kept the other one, who was a wreck. She was blind in one eye, deaf in one ear, one leg was shorter than the other. She had congenital heart disease, she was as bald as a coot. She had emotional problems, she was violent. She was born in a maximum security prison, and this was the
one I was supposed to adore. I tried to rescue her from my father's beatings, but he would turn on me then. It was terrifically hard. Horrible. And of course my father hated her.

In talking about her interest in art and reasons for wanting to create she explained that it became at times the only way she could communicate.

At times it's a way of visually expressing something I couldn't possibly say verbally. And for a very long period of time I couldn't say anything verbally. I did some collages just recently that had pictures of myself and pictures from magazines and things like that, and most consistently where I cut mouths out or I crossed them out. And I remember one time my therapist saying to me, when I was having terrible problems with a relationship, that art was my mouth. And it was the same kind of situation where I got slammed into a corner and couldn't move, and then I just didn't talk any more. Then the only way for me to express myself was through art, and I suppose that's why I started so young. My father, and this is interesting too--my father worked with his hands. He had a very violent temper, a very violent temper, and very switchable.

This was a very traumatic life for a young child, but in addition she was deliberately made to feel academically worthless as her mother reportedly tried to strip her of every evidence of achievement.

Because my sister acted out, and because she was always having troubles in school, my mother was constantly telling her how bright she was, and how smart she was, and how much smarter she was than I was
because of course I got A’s, but I studied. So I had this running through my head that I was some kind of a dingbat, you know, and I just got A’s because I worked so hard. It wasn’t until I got to university . . . and my teacher came back and said “You know there are a lot of people I’m sure who spent just as much time on their papers, but there aren’t many that are as bright as you.” So I went back to the school and I said “Can I see that testing, because my mother kept saying to me that I was so much dumber than my sister?” They said “Wherever did you get that idea from?” And they pulled all this stuff out that said there’s not a shred of truth to that. Absolutely not a shred.

Not surprisingly she seemed to have suffered considerably from low self-esteem, and I commented on that, evoking the following response.

I think it’s from being run down all the time by my parents, both my parents. Telling me I couldn’t do things as well as other people. Well actually my father didn’t run me down, my mother did. Telling me how I couldn’t do things, or expecting me to know things that I wasn’t even old enough to possibly understand. So I was constantly being called stupid or whatever.

. . . I said to my aunt after she was dead “Why did my mother hate me so much?” and, now this must have been very obvious because my aunt did not say “No, she didn’t”. What she said was “Because she thought your father loved you more than he loved her”.

Constantly at loggerheads with her parents, she was finally completely
abandoned by them. "I was also thrown out of the house by my parents because I refused to marry someone they had chosen for me. Yes, I was only about eighteen." A year or two later she did marry a man of her choice, but it turned out to be an abusive marriage which lasted only a year before she fled to Europe. As she ruefully admitted when talking about her difficulty in finding the right therapist, for years "all I was doing was getting myself into situations which were repeats of that."

Kathleen was the only person in this group of six artists who did not experience academic failure, reporting that she was a straight A student at school and graduated from university with honours, a degree in English and a teaching certificate. She had worked hard at school, perhaps to get away from her unhappy home life, and certainly because her mother had told her that she was not capable of getting to university. Ironically her high school teachers in trying to support her not only caused her more stress but also incurred the jealousy of her peers which reflected the negative atmosphere at home.

I got an awful lot of support from my teachers. It used to be really embarrassing. Especially in funny things like—they would have me come up to the board and demonstrate something. You know, I hated like hell to get up in front of other people, and of course then I would get the envy of the other students the same as I was getting my mother’s envy. It sort of bounced back and all over the place.

Kathleen was reportedly mistreated and victimized by her parents in a number of ways, deprived of the companionship of the foster sister she loved
and made to care for the much more problematic one. Her self-esteem was constantly battered, as she was herself physically in an abusive marriage when still very young. It is not surprising that she described her temperament as "moody", not helped by the fact that she too felt depressed during the low light levels of the winter months.

I become very accustomed to light and shadows in my house and look for them. And they are often very interesting shapes, and then when it is really cloudy like that they disappear. I don't get the reflections . . . which upsets me.

Maggie (Major Misfortunes)

Maggie echoed Albert's observation when she commented that "I think artists tend to, in my experience, tend to come from fairly traumatic backgrounds". She too had been sexually abused as a child, suffered from parental neglect and deprivation, and as a child felt like a total social outcast. She grew up in British East Africa and went to a British school where she was made to write from Grade One with a fountain pen, which meant that her lefthanded style smudged the page invariably getting her into trouble. The school tried to force her to write with her right hand, she needed glasses badly as a result of contracting malaria when very small although nobody realized it until she was eleven, and she was never given proper school uniform because her parents did not think it important. She felt very out of place in the school where "99.9%" of the students were white expatriates, whereas her friends were her black neighbours.
I did not fit into there either socially, never mind the fact that I did not have the right uniform, that I was blind as a bat and that I was wearing red sandals instead of brown closed shoes and knee socks.

... all my report cards said “Maggie is very bright if she would just apply herself. She’s pestering...” You know, I would pester all the other kids because I couldn’t see the blackboard and nobody had figured out I couldn’t see it. “She’s disruptive in class, she has so much potential if only she would blah, blah, blah.”

... We didn’t have much money, and we didn’t celebrate Christmas the way most people did, and I was kind of set up to be a social outcast right from birth, I think. ... I was completely a Martian. And I suffered terribly as a result, just terribly. And then I was being sexually abused, and I was horribly neglected by my parents and I was basically at sea for my whole childhood.

Her school life was miserable because she felt so out of place and incompetent, and her home life was little better with parents who “hated each other’s guts... they weren’t physically violent but they were certainly psychologically brutal--they were really cruel” and who finally split up when she was eight years old. She came to Canada at age thirteen and quit school three years later, dropping into the drug scene and out of society for several years.

I got a reputation at school for being a lesbian, I didn’t even know what a lezzie was, and I quit school as soon as I turned sixteen. But the week before my sixteenth birthday a kid tried to rape me, in my school, and kids
were threatening to beat me up, and it was just generally not nice. And then I got into drugs (laughs). So I dropped out when I was sixteen and just felt completely lost. I had no idea where I was or where I fit in. I was completely lost.

Thinking of her later difficulties in actually admitting to herself that she was drawn to the world of art, Maggie commented that her mother was a medical artist

... and that’s a big part of the reason, I think, why I had such a difficult time aspiring to be an artist. Why it took me so long, to say to myself that’s what I was and wanted to be. My mother has always been quite competitive with me, and the fact that she should never have had children doesn’t help.

... That whole period leading up to my decision to go to (art school) was punctuated by huge bouts of clinical depression, and I’m surprised that I was never hospitalized. So it’s no wonder that I had no idea what I was or where I was going.

Most of the rest of her teenaged years seem to be unaccounted for until she surfaced at an art college to begin what became a career as a well educated academic.

Finally, when she was in her mid-twenties she became pregnant in less than ideal circumstances. “For me being pregnant was very much a lonely experience. It was a very isolated experience in many ways, because I really didn’t know people in (a small East coast town), I had been there less than a
year." Around the time she became pregnant her partner was involved in a tragic accident in which he and his best friend were swept out to sea. Her partner survived but his friend did not, and he "had basically lost his brother--one of the people he was closest to in the whole world, and (he) is not somebody who forms these kinds of attachments very easily." Her partner was devastated and traumatized, withdrawing largely from her world until they split up three years later.

It is an understatement to say that Maggie's early life had not been a happy one. She was philosophical about it, however.

There were things about it that were awful, but those things also--it's difficult to say that you can't regret things like that, but at the same time it's made me who I am, and I don't regret in any way who I am.

She also observed that she has a very volatile temperament, probably not helped by the fact that she suffers from Seasonal Affective Disorder (although not clinically diagnosed) which makes the winter months particularly difficult.

For me I am definitely a big mood swing person. Definitely, although I am by no means a manic depressive. But I do feel things in a big way. And if I am in a good mood I am in a really good mood, and if I am grouchy I am really grouchy. I have a hard time finding the middle ground, (but) I do get there.

We closed the interview with laughter as she said "I think my problems have all been as a result of social conditions--everybody else but not me."
Sally (Major Misfortunes)

Sally grew up in a middle-class suburban home and reports two traumatic childhood incidents, the first being when aged two she was hospitalized in isolation for a week.

I had something that was contagious and Mum was pregnant but neither of my parents were allowed to come in and visit. So there was a one week period when I was in this, and my mother said that when they were allowed to come and see me “She'll never forget the look on my face because she said I looked like I didn't recognize them--didn't know who they were.”

... The birth of my brother was traumatic for me. Just the way the whole situation was handled. Because we--I never--I never recovered from it in the first twelve or thirteen years of my life--his life, and then he went off to boarding school and it really wasn't until we were in our late teens or early twenties that we sort of got to know each other at all.

At school she was lonely and isolated from her peers, and her reported lack of self-confidence had a major impact on her life. Lefthandedness was not a problem per se, but Sally reportedly had traumatic experiences at school as a result of being dyslexic, firmly believing them to be the basis for her confessed lack of self-esteem and reserved approach to the world.

My mother tells me that I was a very outgoing, energetic, happy kid until I hit school. And there was a dramatic change in my personality once I hit school. I became much more quiet and withdrawn. ... There was
definitely a switch in my character once I started school . . . at the point where I started to learn how to read. I attribute who I am and how my character was developed more so from the fact that I have dyslexia and the impact that had on me and my self-esteem when I was going through school than being lefthanded. I was never singled out in class as being lefthanded, I was never encouraged to try to write with my right hand. But I never had any sense of inferiority complex because I was lefthanded . . . .

Because of the dyslexia, because I didn't do well in school, because people didn't understand at that time when I was going through public school enough about dyslexia and learning disabilities, so I would get singled out every now and again. Certainly the most painful situations were when we had to read out loud in class, because that's when—that's where I had the most difficulty and where I stumbled. Standing up in front of the class and having everyone staring at me as I was reading aloud was humiliating.

Like Albert, she explained that reading is very difficult and she rarely manages to finish a book.

I love books, I love reading, I love the learning process. But because of the dyslexia it's a stumbling block because I read very slowly. So most of the books I have, I have not read cover to cover. I have read the first thirty-seven pages, or I have picked and chosen chapters or pages along the way.

I suspect that this humiliation at school exacerbated her natural shyness and
drastically affected the way that she interacted with her world.

Throughout my childhood, not so much my early years but certainly high school and art college, I isolated myself. It was a tendency I had, and after art school as well. And that mostly had to do with self-confidence, or lack of confidence, lack of esteem. And being shy, and being misread. I think my shyness came across as being aloof and so kept people away. And it got to a point, especially in my senior years in high school, where I just accepted it and stopped trying to fit in, and did things on my own, and tried to value it as well. "I'm independent", but in fact I really just felt isolated and alone.

Discussion and Summary (Major Misfortunes)

Therivel (1993) suggests that a major requirement for sustained creativity in adulthood is a challenged personality which is shaped by major misfortunes and assistances or support systems during the formative years. Three of these artists could be fairly described as having experienced major misfortunes without question, and by comparison the misfortunes of the other participants pale into relative insignificance. However, the key is that misfortunes are both relative and highly subjective, and so it is possible that they may have been sufficient for David, Harry and Sally also to qualify as recipients of major misfortunes as they apply to the theory.

If one were able to dig deeply enough I suspect that one would find that everyone, whether thought of as "creative" or not, has a "little twist" as Albert put it, and he is certainly correct in wondering what a "norm" might be. My own
history could be an example of this. Shortly before my birth in wartime Britain, my father was drafted and sent to India where he remained until well after the war ended. The first time I met him I was almost four years old, having been brought up single-handedly by my mother in London during the Blitz of which I still have memories. There are many, many histories much more traumatic than this, some of which will be briefly recounted here. However, the question is, was this fairly minimal deprivation, although significant to a young child, sufficient to influence whatever degree of creativity I now display? I have no answers. This is a dangerous game, and I am well aware that some of the histories reported here may lead the reader to suspect that I am clutching at straws to support a theory. However, in the spirit of phenomenological research I am going to recount what I have been told and then try to find patterns. There will be no conclusive answers of course, but there may be some interesting themes emerging.

I was initially somewhat dismayed, but later gratified, to find that most of the artists were very open about their major problems. This was particularly the case with the three with the worst reported histories, Albert, Kathleen and Maggie. It may well have been that the other three had comparable tales but chose not to disclose as much, and I had no right to pry. Albert, Kathleen and Maggie had all sought professional counselling in the past, with one of them still in therapy, and so they would have been more comfortable talking about their troubling experiences. This willingness to confide might also have been an artifact of the trust and closer relationship we had built up as co-researchers in this study. I got the distinct impression that the opportunity to review some of
their past history was appreciated by all three. In fact on one of the second interviews I was greeted warmly with “How does it feel to be a counsellor?”, the artist commenting something to the effect that “It is useful to be able to revisit some of this stuff years later”.

With the apparent exception of David all six participants were lonely and isolated at school, and since David was sent away to boarding school he may well have felt the same. During childhood they all appeared to suffer from a lowered self-esteem. Albert, David and Kathleen, the three most driven of the six, took refuge in art very early on, Harry, Maggie and Sally doing so in their late teens (although Harry and Maggie had always made things without recognizing that they were creative). Certainly it emerged that all six of these artists were devalued academically and made to feel worthless at school which may also be an interesting connection. Kathleen is the odd person out here because in spite of such reported attempts to devalue her efforts she shone scholastically at junior and high school as well as at university. In addition to this it is interesting to note that these other five academically-challenged people all made it clear that for personality or other largely non-academic reasons they felt at school that they did not fit in. I would suggest that those students who have a strong creative drive will constantly be at odds with their teachers because, as David illustrated, they cannot conform. His memory of being a small child resolutely continuing to draw when and where he was told not to, and ultimately winning the contest because the teacher could not stop him, is an interesting and in some ways an appealing one. It may well be that those successes encouraged him to defy
authority on other occasions. His story may help to corroborate anecdotally the Westby and Dawson (1995) finding that teachers tend to suppress creativity. Those students whose artistic drive is not very strong or whose egos are very fragile will be suppressed and any connection with artistic endeavours will be minimized or disappear completely. It is possible that creative children who can adapt to the demands of the teacher may do well, thus allowing only those behaviourally-adaptable creative people to survive the classroom with egos relatively intact. Those who battle constantly with the teacher will be taught both to devalue academic learning and to resist authority. To become even more rebellious and anti-establishment.

Two of the six were dyslexic, and I was impressed that both of these people had served on many committees and special interest groups in spite of these difficulties. Another two suffered sexual abuse at the hands of family members. Every one of the six reported feeling abandoned by their parents to some degree and three of them spent some years in therapy. It is perhaps significant that these three also underwent some additional pruning (Therivel, 1993) after the age of eighteen. Four of the six suffered from mood swings, even though they may have mellowed now as they became older, and all but Sally recognized that they were affected significantly by the changing light levels of the seasons.

Sally is a fairly shy and private person, and since she was not more forthcoming about her family relationships I could not gauge the relative importance of her early childhood anecdotes, although there was obviously a
serious sibling rivalry. This could have been significant since Therivel (1993) includes amongst his list of misfortunes “negative differential sibling experiences” (p. 414). Of perhaps more concrete relevance were her problems at school, possibly stemming from lefthandedness and dyslexia, which in turn appeared to have exacerbated her natural shyness and loneliness. I suspect that to a certain extent these problems continue today.

**Assistances**

According to Therivel (1993) a major requirement for sustained creativity is the experiencing of both major misfortunes and major “assistances” or external support systems when young. Major misfortune alone is likely to crush people and leave them feeling helpless, while an appropriate amount of assistance to counteract this may make them ultimately more creative because they see the world in a different light. In practice I somewhat loosely extended this span of eighteen years in which one is supposed to establish one’s life script (Therivel, 1993) because it seemed to me that all of my artists at that age were still in full learning mode and undergoing more positive experiences than they had ever had when younger. At age eighteen or thereabouts their earlier negative experiences were in the process of being modified by Assistances (mostly art school experiences) which were so significant that they literally changed their lives and made them the artists they are today. These could not, therefore, be ignored, and so I did not adhere rigidly to Therivel’s upper age limit of eighteen years. He certainly suggests that personalities can be pruned (Therivel, 1993, p.
after this age as a result of further misfortune, but although he does include education as an assistance he does not mention further education after the age of eighteen which was of course vital for all six of my artists.

It seems possible that to counterbalance their misfortunes and to allow them to see the world in ways which made them creative, my six participants also received strong support or assistances from a variety of sources. I therefore asked them about positive experiences during childhood. One has to be mindful always that the degree or importance of any such support (or misfortunes) can never be quantified and must be always highly subjective, that they are self-reported with all the selective editing (conscious and unconscious) which inevitably comes with self reports, and that there may have been an observer effect in play because of my interest in the topic. With this caveat in mind I asked each of them "Before the age of around eighteen or so what assistances or external support systems did you have in life? What made you feel good about yourself?"

Albert (Assistances)

Albert felt disconnected and alienated from his own family, but luckily for him had a neighbourhood family who reportedly cheerfully adopted him as their own. Being welcomed into this much more demonstrative family was very much a support when young.

Our family was a good old-fashioned Victorian style family. The concept of physical touch was quite verboten. It was only the great aunts that one had to kiss all the time, the rest of the time you just kept away. . . . I was
very fortunate in my mid teens to have some European friends, particularly a Dutch family, who I got very close to. And whenever I went over there it was always kissy-kissy, huggy-huggy as soon as you walked through the door, and here I am backing off as much as I possibly could but Mama wouldn’t allow it, and Mama just grabbed you in her bear hug and you got into the huggy-huggy, kissy-kissy. I guess I got over my worst hump of physical touch. I never really got over it completely, don’t imagine I ever will. It’s not near as bad as it was.

His father and step mother, he says, were uninterested in him and tried to prevent him from going to art school, but his teachers were most supportive and took his side. Albert is certainly most appreciative of the fact that most of his teachers made a positive difference in his life, and were there when he needed them. He began playing with art materials as a toddler in a situation which like so many could be described as both negative and positive.

Basically I was frequently put into a room and left alone. The one thing that I was always given a fair amount of was drawing materials and paper. By the time I entered kindergarten I entered already doing three-dimensional drawings. A kid gets tired of scribbling after a while. They do start scribbling—that’s a natural place to begin. And after a while you start to make things look like things. Even to this day I can remember when I did this three-dimensional tree and the teacher just about freaked out. Because you are not supposed to do that in kindergarten. But something I’ve always contended is that one of the biggest things people need in
order to learn to do art is time and practice. I was lucky—I got a lot of time and practice early.

He entered art school at the early age of sixteen, and there is little doubt that being able to make art seriously and use his obvious creative talents (in the process winning many awards) was a major assistance for him. "Once I got to (art school) it was like plain heaven. To suddenly be surrounded all the time with art was just wonderful."

David (Assistances)

David's description of outstanding positive experiences as a child opened my eyes to how much he had not told me about problems in his early life. As a result of his wilderness experiences at summer camp, he explained, his self-esteem was boosted substantially because he could demonstrate unique manual and inventive skills. Reading between the lines it was apparent that as a boy he had suffered badly from being excluded from groups, or perceived that he was in some way not accepted by people.

My experience camping in Algonquin Park, yearly for me '65 on, stood out as a prime motivation. It was a place where I could feel good about myself—real positive image development... The people I met there, and I just seemed to blend with the mix of people. But also the location changed people who I had met in the city, may not have been as open, or acceptable (sic). By taking away—with all these people that I met, hundreds of people, by removing all their personal protection and putting them in an outdoor environment with no electricity, etcetera, it stripped
them down to their personalities, and they tended to be much more open, friendly, much less judgmental, much more willing to work together to achieve common goals, and much less willing to hide behind their own jealousies or clique attitudes. The cliques didn’t tend to exist. So that led me into a lot of personalities that I might not have understood or met in a city environment or a school environment.

... I've always loved sports but I wasn’t very big, and I was in a school of big people. So that's where the Algonquin Park situation--maybe the types of sports were far less directed to that large physique, the ability to think on your feet, your ability to make do with nothing and to invent. And that's exactly what my ability was. So I could fix canoes, and you don't have to be a huge person to canoe well, or sail, or shoot bows and arrows, and ride. So it took away the ones that set me below.

David was always mechanically inclined, and growing up in a family of five boys four of whom were lefthanded, did not feel out of place because of his lefthandedness. They lived on a farm, and next door to his grandparents' farm, where he had plenty of opportunity to create toys and gadgets which perhaps could be considered an assistance because he was able to hone his skills and explore his creativity.

... we were introduced to mechanisms and devices and mechanics very early. We used to build all our own toys and things, and my parents encouraged that rather than worrying about the dangers and hazards. They felt we were well watched and coached, my grandfather was
constantly present there. So we just learned to operate things lefthanded and were taught to really understand a piece of equipment rather than approach it without thinking about it.

As already stated David did not talk much about his home life but did concede that his father was absent from the home a lot on business. Significantly he volunteered his grandfather rather than his father as a role model as the following conversation reveals, and so his grandfather was also a major support while he was a small boy. He reminisced

But I had a lot of contact with my grandparents. I would say that my grandfather would be—would almost have been the predominant male figure. . . . they were neighbours. I bonded with him, and he—he died when I was thirteen, and out of those thirteen years I think there was only one occasion when he actually raised his voice to me, and we saw him daily, sometimes the whole day.

. . . But he had an attitude. He was an artist. He was educated at Cambridge and U of T, graduating class of 1911, and he was—he had an interesting life attitude where basically it was all an adventure, and I picked up on that. So I would say if I had one person who was a prime positive influence that would be him. Sort of “Who would you most like to be like?”, that would be my choice.

Being a professional “modifier” as he termed himself, it was second nature for David to look at a situation and find an better alternative. It is interesting but not surprising, therefore, that he could always find a silver lining in any cloud and
a positive advantage to what others might have seen as a negative situation. He credited his mother with (unintentionally) training him to think in that way and so forming his determined and inventive character, as the following conversation about an accidental support makes clear.

I was the second oldest. I think I gained a life advantage out of how I was treated. I was never beaten or anything like that—that didn’t happen. But my older brother was given things constantly—and not frivolous things but developmental things, tools, equipment, scientific equipment. He was a straight A+ student, top of his school, top of his high school, top of his university, and he is a professor. He was an over-achiever from the word go. He lucked into a classroom with 12 students for his whole education and I lucked into one with 40. A very different education in the same school. . . . Where my mother was able—not able to say “no” to any of my siblings she was easily able to say “No” to me, so when I asked for something she just said “No” and I didn’t question it, and I got it for myself, built it for myself. Figured out how to get it myself if I really wanted it. So it changed how I did things. I itemized things on a value scale and if I really wanted something I figured out how to do it. . . . It may not have been my parents so much as the ability of my siblings to pester and to get what they want, like little birds in the nest. So consequently while my brothers were learning to pester and get what they wanted I went and worked with the farmer next door and helped other people out and earned my money in other ways and really got what I needed or wanted.
"Did you feel kind of shut out of the family?" I wanted to know.

Uhm. I did. It was--there is something definitely annoying on the one side that you work for three months to save up your pennies to buy a bicycle and the second you buy your bicycle your mother runs out and buys a better one for your younger brother. But at the same time you have the pride of ownership and you develop that as something that's an important thing in your life, and now my brother is in his mid thirties, doesn't have somebody to pester any more to get these free things, he doesn't have a very good job and he doesn't have much direction in his life and he lost in the long run. So I feel that my mother didn't intend to, but in real terms I probably ended up with the best upbringing of my siblings.

David had an independent streak which was nurtured both in the rough and tumble of family life with four male siblings but also at boarding school where he was sent for four years because of his academic problems at public school. Again his habit of putting the very best spin on a situation comes through in this conversation. I commented "I've never been to boarding school. Did you feel that you were being kind of shunted off, abandoned?" He replied thoughtfully

Uh, yes and no. On the one hand I've always enjoyed adventure, and that was an adventure. And I've always enjoyed being independent. In a strange way that was a way of being very independent. I was responsible for dealing with those people who bothered me for a year, and it wasn't down to my mother to protect me, or anybody, my father. I had to do it on my own, and it's made me a lot more independent in the long run. And I
recognized very quickly that the teachers were extremely good, better quality, and there is no question that had I stayed in the public system I would not have had a very good education.

Therivel (1993) acknowledges that education can be an assistance and it appears that David realized this, but so was being accepted into art school by his portfolio which meant that his artistic talents had been officially recognized.

Harry (Assistances)

Harry was an outdoors person, and characteristically insisted that as a boy he was often happiest alone in the bush with his creative imagination.

We grew up when I was young in (a little Northern Ontario town), and I used to spend lots of time out in the bush making tree forts and bows and arrows, and climbing cliffs and that sort of stuff. I think I--because I spent a lot of time sort of alone doing that sort of stuff, that helped me a lot. It's hard to explain. (I was) very much a loner.

This does not sound like an adequate assistance in Therivel's (1993) terms, but then neither were his reported major misfortunes. On several occasions he made mention of a teacher in high school who took a special interest in him and appeared to me to be a father figure, substituted for the father who was perceived to be inadequate at least in terms of interest and support of his young boy.

I was a student in high school taking auto mechanics, and for whatever reason there was a new (art) teacher who came to that school, and it was his first course in that high school. And he sort of took me under his wing
and he showed me and he taught me things—not totally to do with art but
to do with life, and he did it through example. Being honest, and being
truly yourself, and being strong no matter what happens to you, and I
think people like that have sort of pushed me through.

Harry said very little about his family relationships, but mentioned this art teacher
several times so this substitute father was obviously important to him and made
a big difference to his life. I found the term “people like that have sort of pushed
me through” to be significant, implying that life had not been easy. He made it
very clear, however, that being accepted into art school by instructors who had
faith in him was a very big boost for his morale.

Kathleen (Assistances)

Kathleen was creative from an early age, possibly as an escape from her
daily unhappiness and abusive situation, and she did it with the warm support of
a neighbour and her little girl who became a surrogate family. This was clearly a
major support system to her in her pre-teen years.

I had a girlfriend who was also very creative. Her mother was a nurse, and
I almost lived there. My mother, because I think she was afraid of my
father, chose to work from 3 o'clock in the afternoon until midnight, so of
course when I came home from school she was not there. . . . And I used
to go to this girlfriend's house every day. I hated coming home on
weekends, and we used to do craft projects. . . . I don't think I would have
gone along that line (i.e., pursued art as a career) had I not had that
family there.
Before this, when she was three years old she had two foster sisters for a year before the preferred one was sent away thus presenting yet another major misfortune. However, Kathleen felt that during this year she was strongly supported by her favourite foster sister which must have offered assistance however short in duration, because after a long and emotional pause she offered "I must have been very, very close to her. She must have validated everything that I felt and thought." Validation was very important for a child who was physically and sexually abused and systematically made to feel worthless, and so in the list of adults who provided external support the neighbourhood family again is prominent.

A family that I lived with to get away from my own family, and the mother was a nurse and very creative and used to encourage us all the time to do crafts and draw. . . . probably the most helpful of any. And then several teachers through high school, plus I had one auntie that was very helpful and my one grandma, on my father's side. And once I started on university then my university professors were incredibly reinforcing.

She worked hard both at school and university, and many teachers recognized that she was very bright and appeared to have gone out of their way to offer support which obviously made a big difference to her feeling of self worth. Then while at university studying English she mentioned to an advisor that she was interested in art.

. . . and he said "Well why don't you take some sculpture courses as an elective. You have nothing to lose, you are in the English Department
anyway." So I did, and at the end of the two years I had won the award for the best figurative sculpture in the Art Department, and I wasn't in the Art Department, which upset everybody.

Her talents were finally recognized, and she began to use them to compensate for her years of major misfortune. They could not expunge the memories of past abuse and deprivation, as evidenced by her many years of therapy and current tortured feelings which emerge constantly in her art, but this collective support was sufficient to qualify as assistances and to therefore prevent her from being totally crushed by these earlier experiences.

Maggie (Assistances)

Maggie reported being as a child both neglected and sexually abused, and seems to have taken refuge in books. However, her pursuits were not all solitary and as a gregarious person her friends helped sustain her.

I did read a lot. I read a huge amount, I was real bookworm. I had very close friends. I always had a best friend who I was always passionately in love with. So I did have friends, and I was very well read, and extremely knowledgeable.

She displayed an interest in creating art from an early age and her friends looked up to her for this, offering her some of the encouragement and positive reinforcement which may have been lacking from adults.

I had always made things . . . I had always worked in textiles and I had always been very creative, and I had always been admired by my friends. "Oh, you're so talented. . . Oh, you make the most marvelous things" and
Maggie declared that close friendships had been her most important asset.

I don't really know what it is that made me survive those years. I did always have good friends—I think that was important. . . . I think friendship has always been very important to me. . . . I've always had friends who thought I was marvelous. I think that makes a difference.

Maggie's friend Christen when she was between seven and nine years old came from a very abusive family and Maggie used to comfort her and talk about the situation. "I would talk to her about what was going on with her folks, and she always felt so much better, and she always felt I was so wise. . . . I always had friends who looked up to me for something."

While acknowledging that her childhood had been filled with neglect and abuse, Maggie could nevertheless still be positive about it.

. . . but in other ways I had a marvelous childhood. I grew up in Africa for Christ's sake. I went skin-diving all the time. I lived on the Indian Ocean and my house was right there on the beach, in Equatorial Africa. I had mongooses as pets. I had a brilliant time, there were wonderful things about it. I picked mangoes off trees, I roasted cashews off trees—I had a brilliant childhood in a lot of ways.

Having a generous capacity to find good in bad situations, Maggie also explained that the relationship in her early twenties with her daughter's father which ultimately ended in disaster was nevertheless extremely helpful and supportive when she needed it most.
I had Clint who was wonderful. I mean, that relationship ended badly because by the end of it he was resenting the person that I was growing into, in the fact that I was becoming this independent self-sufficient person that he had for years pushed me to be. So I think a large part of it was Clint in that first year or two before I went to (the East Coast), the first year or two we were together, that he was very encouraging. He just thought I was endlessly creative and talented and marvelous. . . . He was one of those wonderful friendship enabler types that I talked about earlier, that was really important to my survival, and he was a huge influence on—the fact that I am at all sane today was largely due to him.

It was shortly after this that she realized that she was an incest survivor and spent some years in therapy. Characteristically, instead of denying her sexual abuse she took the bull by the horns and announced it to the world. Suddenly her problems had begun to make sense and in “coming out” as a survivor she triumphantly threw off the oppression of her feelings of worthlessness and self-directed guilt. This courageous action was in my view one of her most important assistances or psychological advantages and was a key factor in forming her character as she is today.

You are owning who you are, you know, instead of denying who you are. You are owning who you are, and you are taking responsibility for who you are, and you are acknowledging that other people have the same experience, and it makes you feel so much more connected to the human race. So for me it was immensely liberating, and my artmaking was a
huge part of that process. A huge part of that—both the personal healing process and also what I learned about humanity. How I learned to like people through the community art projects that I was doing. It was just of immeasurable importance to me. Just hugely important.

... When I started doing the work on sexual violence, and went into therapy to deal with my own sexual abuse history and all that stuff, I just let go of a whole pile of baggage. Just utterly let go. And I can now talk about the sexual abuse or whatever very openly without so much as a feeling like I'm going to just fall apart. And most women I know who have had those kinds of experiences can't bear to even begin to talk about it. So it's liberating.

... What was therapeutic for me was not "Oh, this is my experience and this was so terrible." I didn't do any work that was personal, about my own personal experience. None, whatsoever. The work that I did was to connect with other women through Elizabeth Fry, through the Women's Shelter, through whatever, through the Guerilla Girls group that we did, whatever, and to connect my own personal experience to a wider political and social phenomenon. Sexual abuse is all over the place. I am but one symptom of a wider social problem, and doing that sort of thing helped me to make sense of my own experience. . . But a big part of what was important about all that for me was . . . learning that it was not just me, and it wasn't me that was crazy and didn't fit in, and it wasn't my fault that I couldn't see, and it wasn't my fault that I
couldn't write properly, it wasn't my fault, my fault, my fault. I mean, I spent my whole life carrying around this albatross. And this ball and chain of guilt and shame and inadequacy, and just "I'm hopeless". And when I started to see people who'd had some of the same sorts of experiences, and when I started to meet those people and I started to become more politicized, when I became a feminist--which to me was really like the way some people talk about finding God, that's how I feel about feminism. And that whole process and that whole experience was very liberating because it just--I just let go. I just let go. And I let go of the anger against my parents, and it was a very positive, constructive experience for me. I know of many people who have suffered far worse than me, and I know that it's not something that everyone can do. I kind of wish everyone could.

Another major assistance for Maggie was becoming a mother. Previously it appears that she had viewed herself on the periphery of society; irrelevant, incompetent, powerless, and victimized. Being pregnant made a dramatic difference to the way she viewed the world. Suddenly the future had an urgency and relevancy it had never had before. She saw people in an entirely different light, and that revelation also changed her significantly.

Just for me, personally, I think that it attached me to the world in a way that I hadn't been before that. . . . I think it made me more humane, more forgiving. . . . I think partly because I have never loved somebody the way I love my daughter. And that experience of that total unconditional,
unquestioned—I mean, she could be an axe murderer, and it's true, I would still love her. (I might stop talking to her for a year or two.) It really connected me to other people as well. It connected me to my parents in a way that I hadn't—I was able to be a little more forgiving of my parents and to understand them better I think, knowing what it was to be a parent. So that was important, but also in terms of other people, it just gave me a new respect for parents in general, which means half of humanity. And it also connected me to the future in a way that I hadn't really been. I mean, I had always had a sense of social responsibility and social justice, but I hadn't really felt the imperative to really do something positive about it, about affecting what was in essence my daughter's future society. So that had a really huge effect on me, both emotionally and politically, and socially as well. I'm much easier-going with people . . . I think it made me more humane, more forgiving. . . . before I had my daughter and before I came to terms with my sexual abuse I did not have a lot of time for the human race.

Finally, being accepted at a major Canadian art college and later by a university for a graduate degree must have meant a great deal to her morale and sense of achievement.

Sally (Assistances)

Sally mentioned that after bad experiences at junior school she had a lot of support and encouragement from one high school teacher, and it was this that persuaded her to go to art school.
So when I got into high school I was fortunate to have a really excellent instructor who supported me and encouraged me in a big way. And he was the one who insisted that I go to art college, and he was the one who was promoting schools in the U.S. He wanted me to go to Parsons in New York.

Sally's parents had established educational trusts to pay for the education of her two younger brothers but did not expect her to seek higher education, assuming that when she left school she would get married and settle down to be a housewife. In spite of this, and unlike those of most of these other artists her parents supported her decision to go to art school. To their credit when she announced that she wanted to go to an American art college they funded this education fully and without argument.

My education ended up costing probably three times that of either of my brothers, because I went to the States. He never--you know, I come from a very middle class family. My father could easily have said "Look, I can't afford to pay that tuition", or, "certainly we would like to see you go but we can't support you financially." There was never a question.

Some of her teachers had not thought her capable of university studies, so to be accepted at a degree-granting art college was obviously a psychological boost, as was graduating with the degree.

**Discussion and Summary (Assistances)**

Surveying the participants for patterns, the most obvious which applies to everyone to varying degrees is that they all received informal training and
experience in being independent. This could be seen as both positive and negative, but in the light of their current lives was probably a definite plus for all. Albert was left alone with art materials for long periods of time when very small, and felt totally disconnected from his family even while he was living with them. David felt that he was forced by his family interactions to build much of what he wanted himself therefore gaining valuable construction experience but probably feeling somewhat isolated, later being sent off to boarding school. Harry preferred being solitary, spending time with himself in the bush and lacking social interactions. Kathleen and Maggie were neglected or rejected by their parents and essentially on their own long before they were teenagers and so had to learn to entertain themselves and cope to a large extent without adult support. Sally isolated herself at school and left home at eighteen to go to College, where she also felt alone.

Four of the six artists were interested in art at a very early age, certainly by five or six years old, while the other two really did not discover the joys of creativity until they were eighteen. Five of them commented on how being validated by others, being included by others and being able to use their special skills made them feel good, whereas Harry was a loner and did not report this experience. Therivel (1993) regards education as an assistance, and with the sole exception of Kathleen who was accepted at university all these artists went to art school where admission would have been by juried portfolio. They were chosen because the art schools had faith in their abilities, so both the admission to school and the experience of being an art student would have been an
One of the attributes that all six artists had in common was that they were lefthanded, or more accurately non-righthanded. There are, however, varying degrees of lefthandedness and mixed-handedness, and it affected them to some extent differently. Growing up lefthanded in a righthanded world and at the same time working as an artist with the need to use both hands frequently apparently makes one more dextrous with the non-dominant hand. Or does one become an artist partly because one is more dextrous with the non-dominant hand?

Lefthandedness manifested itself in a variety of ways amongst these six artists, ranging from Harry and Sally whose surveys showed that they did almost everything with their left hands to Maggie who claimed that she could do most things with her right, although she was in fact lefthanded. They had varying degrees of problems dealing with the righthanded world, although not as many as I would have expected. I have tabulated the results of the handedness survey in Table 3.
Table 3

Results of Handedness Survey

Key:  L = Left hand, E = Either, R = Right hand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which hand do you use:</th>
<th>Albert</th>
<th>David</th>
<th>Harry</th>
<th>Kathleen</th>
<th>Maggie</th>
<th>Sally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. To write a letter legibly?</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. To throw a ball to hit a target?</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. To hold a racquet in tennis, squash, badminton?</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. To hold a match while striking it?</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. To cut with scissors?</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. To guide thread through the eye of a needle (or guide a needle onto thread)?</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. At the top of a pushbroom (not a corn broom) while sweeping?</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. At the top of a long-handled shovel while moving sand?</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. To deal playing cards?</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>J. To hammer a nail into wood?</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>L</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K. To hold a toothbrush while cleaning your teeth?</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. To unscrew the lid of a jar?</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Albert (Lefthandedness)

Albert claimed that although he can never tell left from right, he reads upside down "You would be amazed at what you can learn from a colleague's desk", and professed with a certain pride to be able to work at his discipline from any direction.

Right-left, up-down, front-back doesn't make an enormous amount of difference so it doesn't make any difference to me whether I'm facing the student or looking over his shoulder from the back. If I change my aspect nothing changes for me. I change my aspect for their comfort not mine.

I asked Albert how he thought that lefthandedness had affected him, and as a great believer in staying flexible and adapting to circumstances his perspective was predictable.

I don't think it really affects me at all... It gets awkward inasmuch as there are some tools that lefthanded people have just got used to using righthanded. The most obvious one for me is a pair of scissors. You can get lefthanded scissors.

"Have you bothered?" I prompted.

No. I'm now so accustomed, I once tried a pair of lefthanded scissors and they felt funny. Now they only felt funny because I've never used them. Like anything you get used to it. I think all lefthanded people have just become used to using righthanded implements.

... I think everybody who has any kind of a hand, physical thing or
a--I don’t know where dyslexia fits in, a mental problem or what, whatever kind of problem it is--I think you either knuckle under to it or you make adjustments pretty early in life. As you make those adjustments work, as you seek out solutions or ways to make things easier, by so doing you find new solutions to the problem, so it doesn’t become a problem.

Minor allergies were under control and there appeared to be no evidence of the auto-immune diseases suffered by a significant number of lefthanded people, but dyslexia was a real problem. “It’s pretty bad. Reading things is very difficult.”

David (Lefthandedness)

David reported no problems distinguishing between left and right and had no problems reading or writing, but he was clearly very proud of his dexterity with both hands. There is a suggestion in the literature that lefthanded people may have greater non-dominant hand dexterity than righthanders simply because they have to deal with a righthanded world (Coren, 1992; Peters & Servos, 1989). David almost certainly did not know of this debate in the handedness literature when he suggested that

I think out of necessity lefthanded people are more balanced. What we would call ambidextrous. It’s not a true ambidextrous, but I would say that the balance between the hands is much greater. Scissors is a great example. I can’t use lefthanded scissors. I have to use righthanded scissors because that’s the way I have learned to use them, and I just know them to be uncomfortable. But I can use them well. I’ve tried
lefthanded scissors and I can’t make them cut, because I automatically adapt to the right hand. . . . When I am sculpting in a negative sculpture, removing material, then I would always hold my knife in my left hand because I need that control, so I don’t cut myself. Although when you are sculpting with chisels you are two-handed, and I tend to swing the mallet with my left hand and hold the chisel with my right hand. But when I’m sculpting in clay, I sculpt simultaneously with both hands. Always, equivalent, and even to detail. It won’t make any difference. So if I’m doing something that’s symmetrical I’ll be sculpting simultaneously with both hands and feeling the same weights and shapes, and doing a mirror image with each hand.

. . . . I’ve had a very strange mix of which ways I do things. So I play golf righthanded, I shoot hockey lefthanded, I shoot bow and arrow left and righthanded equally, but I swing a hammer with my left hand. I write with my left hand but I paint with both.

I needed to qualify this, so interjected “Paint small or paint large?” “Larger” he replied. “When I was doing murals and things like that I would sort of, without thinking about it, switch hands.” This was what I expected but I still needed more detail. “Yes, but small, detailed work would tend to be . . . ?” Small detailed work always left hand, but I do tend to think about--I consciously think about using both. Pitching baseball with my left hand, I consciously made some initial attempts at learning how to throw righthanded as well. I don’t know if that’s something lefties are more
aware of; sometimes things are so awkward or you gain an advantage by learning both methods.

This last statement of David's was the only time he admitted that things were sometimes difficult for a lefthanded person. He acknowledged none of the relatively common problems with allergies or auto-immune problems, but his illustration of his facility with the non-dominant hand included an impressive claim.

I don't know if it is any different between righthanded people or not, but I find that I'm able to adapt fairly quickly. An example was archery. I learned to shoot lefthanded up to an above-average ability, and then I needed to upgrade my bow. I couldn't get a bow lefthanded of the quality that I wanted at the time, so I got a good bow but it was righthanded. And I was up to the equal ability in two days, righthanded. And then I improved righthanded and then I shot to the point where I have some carpal tunnel problems with the release finger shooting righthanded so I recently bought a lefthanded bow, a high quality lefthanded bow and now I can shoot both.

Harry (Lefthandedness)

In common with most of the group Harry had frequently been chastized at school for smudging his writing and commented regretfully that he had "lousy penmanship". He did not report any dyslexia, and in fact regularly read the numbers on tape measures upside down, although "you can buy them . . . the other way around". He had not bothered to get a lefthanded tape measure,
although he was the only one of the six to have bought a pair of lefthanded scissors. I got the impression that he felt somewhat excluded from the normally righthanded world.

You know, for a long time I would use righthanded scissors and it hurts your hands. But you find a way around that, you buy a pair of lefthanded scissors that sort of work for you. But you are always sort of faced with it. You walk into a hardware store and it's all for righthanded people. All its tools, all that sort of stuff. Look at that telephone right there. That telephone's for a righthanded person. I guess I have worked through it.

Harry's sports skills were mixed-handed as they were for most of the others, and he reported that he can throw a ball with his right hand and a frisbee with both. Although he observed that his motor skills were stronger with his left hand the only machinery problem that came to mind was the fact that the fence on a table saw is on the wrong side for him. "I can work the lathe with both hands . . . I couldn't do that with writing, but I can do that with most machines." We talked about the difficulty some lefthanded people had when demonstrating to students, which he maintained did not apply to him.

A lot of times I'm beside them, so I view them the same way. If they are righthanded I just sort of make the deception that I'm righthanded.

Because how else can you show them, you know? It's different. It's easy to show them both ways . . . I've never found that a problem, and part of it is because I think I could go righthanded.

There was, however, a piece of righthanded equipment which constantly
frustrated him and offended his pride in his technical abilities.

A knife for cutting bread. It's serrated on one side and bevelled on one side, so when you cut down it cuts straight for a righthanded person.

When you use your left hand it will not cut straight, and I want it to be able to cut straight. So that's my one big beef in life.

**Kathleen (Lefthandedness)**

Kathleen did not report any left-right problems and had no problems with dyslexia. She had an interesting mix of uses for her hands, although she made art almost exclusively with her left. "I certainly couldn't draw with my right hand. I do almost all my activities as far as creating art with my left hand." However, she did some sports with her right hand. "I can't play darts to save my soul if I use my left hand, not at all, and that's really precision shooting. No, I play darts with my right hand, I bowl with my right hand." I asked her how she coped with machinery designed for righthanded people, and she clearly found it frustrating. However, her response illustrated just how determined this artist could be when faced with a challenge.

Well I know that sometimes I get very cheesed off with that, but I guess the big test of it was that I worked in a factory when I was going to university during the summer time, and I was fitting these tubes together for televisions, and I had to do this action with a pair of tweezers connecting these little wires with my right hand. The first couple of days I got very frustrated with it, and I thought "No way is this going to beat me", you know. By the end of two weeks I was finishing at lunchtime the daily
Kathleen was the only artist of the six who unequivocally suffered from a number of the auto-immune diseases one might have expected to see in lefthanded people (Tonnessen, Lokken, Hoien & Lundberg, 1993; Wood & Cooper, 1992) She had also experienced a number of accidents although these did not appear to be specifically caused by her lefthandedness and a consequent awkwardness when dealing with some machinery, although this is a possibility.

**Maggie (Lefthandedness)**

Apart from the usual problems of smudging the page with her left hand at school Maggie has no problems with the English language, and is in fact by far the most highly educated of the six. She had no problems telling left from right, and was extremely proud of her claim to be highly competent with her non-dominant hand. I noticed with interest that although she was clearly lefthanded when hand-writing and insisted that this was so, she had indicated on her handedness questionnaire only one activity exclusively lefthanded,

I can do a lot of precision things with my right hand. . . . I have taught people how to knit who are righthanded, and I knit righthanded. . . . I can hammer with both hands. I use a screwdriver with both hands. . . . So I'm really technically good and I can do--I pick stuff up really quickly, right, and I'm curious about it, and I'm really good with my hands. I have really well-trained hands.

She had an interesting theory about why she used different hands for different
I cannot brush my teeth with my left hand, and I cannot wipe my bum with my left hand. What I realized after thinking about it, is that I have a kind of hierarchy with my hands. I think that my left hand does what I consider to be more (pause), my left hand is the elitist hand and the other hand is the dog’s body. I think that’s what it is. I write with my left hand, I do all my artmaking with my left hand, I cut with my right hand. Painting, all that sort of stuff I do with my left hand. I eat with my left hand. I put makeup on with my left hand.

I was intrigued by the thought of an elitist hierarchy of handedness within the individual, but a quick survey of the personal hygiene habits of the other five artists showed no consistency whatsoever. Knowing something of her history I could understand why competence with both hands was so important to her. She had come from feeling totally incompetent, marginalized and unconnected to the world to being a capable, highly educated person who could make her positive mark on the world. “I think that I’m good at a lot of different things. I have really, really diverse skills and I take great pride in that. It’s a big part of how I self-identify, and have done for ten years.”

Sally (Lefthandedness)

Sally had to think carefully before being able to distinguish between left and right, actually getting it wrong while she was demonstrating for me. She reported, however, that she was very good at reading upside down which might be expected of a graphic artist but perhaps not of someone with a significant
degree of dyslexia as is her case. As with all of the participants she was adaptable and did not appear to have a real problem with equipment or machinery. "I think I've just been able to adapt. I still haven't gone out and bought myself a pair of lefthanded scissors. Which I could do." She did not suffer from allergies, asthma or the auto-immune diseases to which lefthanded people are sometimes more susceptible.

Discussion and Summary (Lefthandedness)

I was struck by a distinct pride amongst these artists in being multi-skilled and competent with both hands. This might have been partly an observer effect because of my interest in the subject, but I believe it was also genuine pride in their abilities. Certainly they appeared to be more competent with their non-dominant hands than the average righthanded person, although this will be partly because they have been forced to use this non-dominant hand more often then they may have wished. As a couple of them pointed out they have been lefthanded all their lives and so don't know any other way, so they have simply adapted without a great deal of fuss. However, the fact that they were able to adapt and to become competent with both hands is important. This added dexterity is probably an advantage for an artist. Only one person had bought lefthanded scissors, and three of the six professed to be able to read without great difficulty upside down. Interestingly they included both the dyslectics who had problems reading the usual way, and I did not know how to interpret these claims. Two out of the six (33%) had problems with dyslexia (which is a considerably higher proportion than in the general population), and one self-
disclosed her auto-immune disease problems which again one might have
expected amongst lefthanded people (one in six being a far higher proportion
than the general population). Nobody admitted to having serious machinery
accidents, but David's mention of the repetitive strain injury to his non-dominant
hand is important, because in spite of his apparent ease in switching hands with
a bow and arrow he will have less strength in that hand and arm then in his left,
and therefore such an injury was more likely to occur. This is an almost classic
case of righthanded equipment causing injury to a lefthanded person, which also
tends to happen with righthanded machinery. Also of interest is the fact that he
had the confidence to spend a substantial amount of money on a good quality
righthanded bow on the assumption that he could make it work for him. Of
course having already spent those funds he had a powerful incentive to succeed,
but nevertheless I doubt that most people would have either the confidence or
the ability to do this.

This chapter has presented the results of data analysis. Chapter Five
offers a discussion of these results and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary and Discussion

This discussion of significant findings will draw upon the rich data which were reported on in the previous chapter, and also to some extent upon my knowledge of the people involved and the data contained in the large volume of interview material which could not be used because of space limitations. There may be duplications and inconsistencies in this data as there are in life, because we must not forget that these are the stories of individuals and their unique experiences. However, there are also patterns emerging, and clues which might explain the way they think and react to the world. Naturally not all artists fit into patterns, and so the process is not always a neat and tidy one. For example, some comments or insights from individuals will be included because they might perhaps reasonably be applied to most artists even though the majority did not voice that particular thought themselves. This is not an attempt to generalize to all artists, but a tentative speculation about these six participants arising from some of the emergent themes. There will be no clear answers but many questions which might eventually lead to a better understanding of some people who are creative, or some people who are lefthanded, or both.

Of the six participants Sally is so different from the others in many ways that she does not appear to fit most of the patterns. This of course in no way invalidates either her experiences and perceptions or any themes which might be found amongst those of most or all of the other participants. She is creative, and she is different. As an example, when asked about the importance of art the
other five all stressed the need to communicate emotion as being of primary importance, whereas Sally defined the importance of art in terms of communicating cultural values and commentary. None of the others would have disagreed with her, and neither would she have disagreed with them, I suspect, when they all made it clear that just creating something that was pretty to look at was not enough.

Most of the participants took this thought further and declared that art was a way of communicating things which could not be expressed in any other way. "Art is my mouth" as the formerly abused Kathleen said. It is probably inevitable that creativity which comes from the human mind contain some of the personal history of that individual, and several artists actually pointed out that making art was a way of working out problems, clarifying situations and dealing with their world. As Albert explained it

If it's an escape, and I'm not positive I want to admit to it being an escape, it is something you run to and not away from. Like you are running to the art, as opposed to running away from something. I guess it does become a form of escape (I would view it as a positive form of escape), not escape as in running away from life, running away from the world, because I think that most artists actually confront the world in their art. And it's a way of dealing with that, that for one reason or another you are not dealing with it any other way.

Making art was variously described as "therapeutic" and "creative problem-solving" as the conversations (with the possible exception of Maggie
and Sally) showed that these were indeed “driven” artists. There was a general dislike of making multiples and an eagerness for experimentation which is not surprising given the explanation of Csikszentmihalyi (1996) that in order to sustain the enjoyment of something human beings must continually increase its complexity to provide a challenge. But beyond that there was for these participants an urgent need to produce, which Maggie described was for her “this almost excruciating imperative to create.”

The tactile senses and joy of working with the hands (or body) was important, but so was the label of “artist” which they all wore proudly. They regarded themselves as different, were proud of their considerable dexterity with their non-dominant hands, and they enjoyed being rebels and “modifiers” of rules. There were also various subconscious attributes which many of them had in common, notably the distressing childhood histories. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1988) there are five major sources of inspiration for artists any or all of which may be used by any one individual. What he termed Stylistic Originality is the recombining of knowledge and experience to create something new. Precisely because of their knowledge and experience these artists probably all use this mode at times even though it may not be their primary motive. Formal Originality is the visual depiction of their environment as they perceive it, probably used often by Albert, David, Kathleen and sometimes Maggie but not by Harry and Sally. Historical Originality refers to the exposing of social issues and conflicts and commentary upon them. Here the group is sharply divided with Albert, Kathleen and Maggie participating with passion while David, Harry and
Sally deliberately avoid politics and social issues. The final two categories are of more interest since everybody either admitted to or demonstrated their need for Cathartic Originality (working through disquieting feelings) or Abreactive Originality (the recreation, usually subconscious, of painful childhood memories in order to better deal with them as a more mature person). The lone exception may be Sally who designs exclusively for clients and so has less control over the content of her art.

Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) found that most of the artists they studied had not come from traumatic childhoods. But Therivel (1993) maintained that “creativity has its roots in the pains and disturbances of being challenged” (p. 419). The Challenged Personality theory (Therivel, 1993) which hypothesizes that creative people have experienced both major misfortunes and also great assistances or support could be applied to my participants, certainly without doubt to Albert, Kathleen and Maggie and to the others to perhaps a lesser extent, to explain their creativity. It is not difficult to accept a subconscious “need to erase old insults or a sense of revenge against society” (Therivel, 1993, p. 421). The participants in this study, while being recognized by their peers as being of high artistic calibre, do not come close to the standards of excellence and discipline exhibited by those chosen by Bloom in his study of high achievers (Bloom, 1985). Nevertheless Bloom has some useful insights which can be applied here. He explained that his artists as children achieved recognition for their creative ability at school from their peers and teachers and built upon this to establish their own identities, a sense of competence and adequacy. “The power
of the special label seems enormous" (p. 110). Furthermore, he says of his musicians (and this could surely be generalized to other creative people) "They used music in their search for parental and teacher approval and reward, personal meaning, and a place for themselves in society" (p. 489). Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) suggested that making art could be used for "establishing control over a hostile environment" (p. 225), and that an important goal for artists was discovering how they fitted into society. "The discovery of how they relate to the rest of the world through the process of artistic creation is an important source of satisfaction for young artists" (p. 21). If we keep these various points in mind while examining the histories of our six participants a pattern begins to emerge.

All six participants as children felt at some stage abandoned by their parents and certainly did not come from what Bloom terms "child-centered homes" (Bloom, p. 503). All of them suffered in school and were made to feel humiliated and academically worthless. All of them felt to varying degrees during their formative years that they were somehow misfits and did not have, or did not warrant, a rightful place in society. It is noteworthy that they all admitted to feelings of low self esteem as children, with most of them conceding that some of these feelings continue to this day. And all of them were lefthanded in a predominantly righthanded world, which must have seemed like a cruel and continual universal rejection to small and already-battered egos. They felt that they were not like other children. If they were indeed rewarded for their extra-ordinary interest in art or recognized for some artistic talent early in their school
lives they would have grasped this rare recognition eagerly. Therivel (1993) observes when talking of the Challenged of the world who therefore tend to display creativity “Only through their work can they justify their difference to themselves and others” (p. 416). As Bloom (1985) implies they began to live the identity of the label “artist”, and I suggest that this was because they had no other identity. This is where Bloom (1985) and Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) perhaps do not take their theories far enough.

These artists' drive to create which almost (but I think not quite) amounts to workaholism and the fuzzy demarcation between personal and artmaking life would seem to indicate a psychological compulsion of a very powerful kind, and Sally's comment about needing confirmation from her clients that she is valuable raises an interesting question. She may be different from the other five in many ways, but she is still a creative person living in a North American artist culture. Are these artists driven by a compulsion to create because of a deep-seated and subconscious need to define where they fit into society? Is it possible that for some of these particular people creating art is at least partly a desperate subconscious attempt to plug this nagging doubt about their value in the world with a circular argument? “I am an artist, therefore I create art, therefore I am a bona fide artist”? I am not for a moment suggesting that their art is not of value or that they are not real artists. What I am suggesting, however, is that they need to be valued for their creativity and most of them cannot separate themselves from the label of artist. This could explain why Albert and Kathleen both voluntarily described in detail how they continued to make art in their hospital.
beds even under conditions of pain and presumably mental anguish. At times of great stress it was important that they defined themselves as persons who still had some control by doing what they did best, which was making art. To be in hospital and not make art was to them to be once again undefined as a person, which is a very frightening situation to be in. They therefore had little choice but to confirm their self-identification as an artist from their hospital beds. The literature is silent on this interesting possibility of the origins of the need for self-identification as an artist, although we must remember Lynch's (1996) observation that "A feeling of inadequacy and low self-esteem drives the artist to make art almost feverishly, the results giving a temporary high and positive feelings of achievement and self-worth" (p. 5).

Even in everyday life the role of an artist can be stressful. Cross et al. (1967) described artists as "basically stable people living under strain" (p. 297), which could explain the drivenness of most of these participants. Albert, David and Harry have built their whole lives around their art, while Kathleen admits that she can work far too long and hard unless she consciously reins herself in. Maggie denies being a driven artist per se but accepts cheerfully that she is driven to work very hard at whatever she is doing at the moment, describing herself as "a creative problem-solver". Only Sally is not sure that she can lay claim to the same urgent degree of drive to create.

This theory of the need to self-identify as an artist may be given support by the emergence of another unexpected theme, the need to control. It is true that the studies which precipitated this paper found artists to be "strong, willful,
controlling, and self-centered" (Winner & Casey, 1992, p. 155, and also Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976). However, I did not expect five of the six to volunteer the fact that control was important to them. The sixth, Harry, did not address the concept directly but it was obvious from his lifestyle that he had simply taken control of his own life to the fullest possible extent, refusing to do most of those things that were not essential to his primary goals of windsurfing and earning a minimal income. Making art is about communicating, but it is also about taking control. Controlling materials and making them do what one wants them to do must be both satisfying and reassuring for someone whose misfortunes as a child instilled a deep sense of insecurity.

For a person who is lonely and helpless, the ability to create visual images is a sign that he exists, that he can change and control his environment. . . a child who feels threatened may turn to art as a way of re-establishing a feeling of competence. (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976, p. 210)

This is not to imply that these artists are even now lonely and helpless (although an unexpected stay in hospital might well produce that state), but rather to corroborate Therivel's (1993) theory that one's cultural script and therefore view of life is determined by one's childhood experiences and may indeed encourage one to be creative.

This need for control might also account for the remarkable and consistent degree of doggedness which these participants display in the face of challenge. Kathleen and Sally both successfully pursued university degrees specifically because they were told they were not competent to do so. Maggie now has a
graduate degree and dreams of doctoral studies after being a drug-addicted school dropout without an apparent future. Albert and Sally have both served in administrative capacities in a number of organizations in spite of the fact that their dyslexia often makes it extremely difficult to read a typewritten page. Harry actively and relentlessly pursues his dream of becoming one with the wind by negotiating the many obstacles put in his way by society. While dreaming of winning the lottery so that he can retire and paint full time David manages to juggle a family life, a busy professional life and a passion for tinkering, experimenting and making functional objects as well as painting. These people really are creative problem-solvers, and as Harry said "It’s a self thing". They are driven by something within them rather than by society’s expectations. It is worth noting that one of the high-scoring definitions of a creative child in the Westby and Dawson (1995) studies is “Is determined”, while another which was listed approximately halfway in both rankings (i.e., was seen to be somewhat representative of a creative child) is “Tends not to know own limitations and tries to do what others think is impossible." Bloom (1985) reported that his highly creative people when children were most often described by their families in terms of persistence, competitiveness, and eagerness. If the label of artist is important, then roleplaying may sometimes be essential. And a large part of the artistic role could be that of the rebel. As Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) found, “individuals preparing for a career in art identify more or less with the rebellious role--the role which seems most nearly to promise outstanding achievement in creative work” (p.526).
The question which really intrigued me, and for which I still have no answer, is why these artists consistently and regularly put themselves in situations where they risked rejection. It may have been a very human need for approval or validation, exemplified by Maggie's comment that "that sort of ties in to that wanting to please people thing. . . . I never feel like anything is real unless at least six people have either seen it or participated in it or somehow vetted it." On the other hand it may be because, as Csikszentmihalyi (1996) suggests, these people are amongst the relatively small proportion of the human race who are genetically programmed to explore, to experiment and to create. In order to do this they have to reject prevailing standards in favour of new ones; they have to rebel. A third possibility may be the Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) suggestion that human beings operate on a combination of homeostasis and conflict reduction. Albert who almost certainly had never heard of this theory unequivocally implied this when he said of argument and debate that

You have got to have it, it's almost a life force thing. . . . You actually want the discomfort that causes the stimulation that causes the desire to stop the discomfort . . . you've got to do something about it, to change it. And move yourself towards comfort levels.

It may be that an enhanced level of creativity in an individual encourages him or her to see other angles and so cover more possibilities in the search for comfort, or in other words to argue more. Comfort levels may at times be elusive for creative people who perhaps more than the general population experience swings in mood. It may be the case that in being more open and sensitive to
experiences they also are more vulnerable to being hurt (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

In order to be creative one must necessarily discard accepted ways of thinking or perceiving in favour of altered versions. This rebellious attitude is not only normal but may be essential for artists and inevitably colours the way they look at the world. In fact a recent newspaper article about a craft program at an Ontario college describes it as “dedicated to quality and craftsmanship, with students learning to follow their instincts and throw conventions, limits and inhibitions out the window” (Turnbull, 1998, p. C2).

Risk-taking seemed a normal part of the life of these artists, but I found two themes which emerged from the discussion on rebellion to be far more interesting. The first was Albert’s insistence that argument is creative and to be encouraged. “I do like to complain. Because in the complaint process it causes me to inevitably come up with a new solution. That’s problem-solving.” Non-creative people, particularly those in management, may tend to think that argument and dissension is bad and impedes the smooth running of an institution. According to Albert, creative people on the other hand will almost be compelled to take issue with a management decision on principle in an attempt to improve it from their own perspective. As several of the participants pointed out, that perspective is also different. Artists like to see things from different and unusual angles, which often appears to result in their making connections which non-artists cannot see. The second interesting point to emerge was that every one of these six participants described themselves with some pride as “rule benders” or “rule modifiers”. Central to the mythology and public perception of
artists is that they are anti-establishment, and certainly Winner and Casey (1992) and also Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) reported that artists “rejected authority”. However, it was left to David to offer a highly important insight with which I suspect the others would agree. Describing himself as a designer who was always looking at objects with a critical eye and inventing improvements, he could not help redesigning rules as well.

You make a judgement on whether they were designed at a time when they made sense at the time and the world has changed, so the rules need to be changed but they lag behind. . . . if you are in the forefront of these things you have to look at the rules as a changing element.

I suspect that “looking at the rules as a changing element” is enormously important in distinguishing between how artists and non-artists think about society. It may very well be that non-artists tend to think of rules as static and irrevocable whereas artists are far more flexible and regard rules as merely guidelines which may be outdated and no longer relevant. David certainly thought so when he commented “I suspect that a lot of artists don’t believe they are part of the normal system. That they are somebody different, and that the normal rules may not apply to them.”

Clearly these two artistic mindsets, the importance of argument in creative problem-solving and the need to modify rules, have major implications for the management of art schools. Once administrators realize the necessity of creative people to modify presented solutions they may be able to offer them in another way, or to welcome such modification without automatically rejecting it. By being
more flexible and allowing creative people to play a more active part in deciding how the community operates administrators may be able to turn potential confrontations into situations where everybody wins.

Another concern of administrators of art schools should be that the literature indicates that lefthanded people are at greater risk of injury because most equipment is built for righthanded users (Coren, 1989; Coren, 1992; Coren & Halpern, 1991; McCann, 1992; Merriman, 1990; Paul, 1990a, 1990b; Wallerstein, 1993). David demonstrated this in a minor way when he talked about a repetitive strain injury to his non-dominant hand when using a righthanded bow. Even more important, however, were the findings that "lefthanders were about three times more likely to be mixed than right-handers" (Coren, 1991, p. 1347), and that mixed-handed people such as my participants may be more likely to suffer from accidents (and auto-immune disease) than either lefthanded or righthanded people (Coren, 1991; Daniel & Yeo, 1991; Hicks et al., 1993; Wood & Cooper, 1992). Nobody else admitted to having any other relevant injuries but I was not surprised at this because as the institution’s health and safety officer I was not the right person to whom this kind of admission could be made. In spite of the fact that I was unable to demonstrate an increased accident rate amongst mixed-handed people, a study by somebody who is not perceived to have a vested interest might yield some useful information both for art school administrators and for people who design machinery and equipment used in situations where a more than average percentage of the population might be expected to be mixed-handed. One of the six participants has well-
diagnosed autoimmune system problems, again a condition probably more common amongst lefthanded people (Fitzgerald, 1990; Fry, 1990; Geschwind & Behan, 1982, 1984; Geschwind & Galaburda, 1985; Tonnessen et al., 1993; Wood & Cooper, 1992) and a much higher proportion that in the average population. Disappointingly, I could find no evidence of the veracity of Rich and McKeever's (1990) theory that those participants with first degree relatives who were lefthanded should have displayed evidence of immune deficiency problems, and neither did my participants report an abnormal incidence of headaches (Kilty et al, 1987).

As several of the participants pointed out it is difficult to differentiate between some of the effects of being lefthanded and the consequences of having artistic ability since they have known both ever since they could remember. The impact of lefthandedness may appear perhaps to be less obvious to an artist than I had anticipated, or at least manifested in more subtle ways, such as an increased dexterity with the non-dominant hand. For it would appear that all these participants are extraordinarily competent with their right hands. It is, however, impossible to determine from these interviews whether this is largely because they live in a righthanded world which forces them frequently to use their non-dominant hand, or whether it is because they have an innate ability with that hand.

It has been suggested by Winner & Casey (1992) that lefthanded people may be what could be termed “wired differently” as they argue that

According to the neurologist Norman Geschwind (1984), superiorities in
the visual-spatial domain are often linked with pathologies in the verbal
domain. For example, superior visual-spatial abilities have been found to
be associated with autism and dyslexia (ibid.; Geschwind & Galaburda,
1987). Geschwind (1984) referred to the association between left­
hemisphere disabilities and right-hemisphere talents as a "pathology of
superiority". Thus, rather than view dyslexia, for example, as merely a
pathology, one should also recognize it as potentially a pathology of
talent. (p. 166)

Two of these six unquestionably intelligent artists are dyslexic, a condition which
is relatively common in lefthanded people (Annett, 1994a; Coren, 1992; Eglinton & Annett, 1994; Geschwind & Behan, 1984; Geschwind & Galaburda, 1985;
Gotestam, 1990; Temple, 1990; Tonnessen et al., 1993; Winner et al., 1991;
Wood & Cooper, 1992). Dyslexia has affected the lives of these individuals
severely even though they have worked hard to compensate for it, and Sally may
have been doubly affected if in fact she is also a visual thinker as defined by
Grow (1994) as her language problems seem to indicate. It is noteworthy that
Annett (1994b) found a connection between lefthandedness, dyslexia and weak
phonological processing of both verbal and written language, which might
describe Sally. Of interest here too is the default hypothesis of Winner et al.
(1991) which suggests that many creative people choose artistic careers rather
than struggle with reading and writing problems, and which Albert, Harry, and my
personal observation seem to corroborate.

Albert astutely observed when talking of both his dyslexia and
I think everybody who has any kind of a hand, physical thing or a--I don't know where dyslexia fits in, a mental problem or what, whatever kind of problem it is--I think you either knuckle under to it or you make adjustments pretty early in life. As you make these adjustments work, as you seek out solutions or ways to make things easier, by so doing you find new solutions to the problem, so it doesn't become a problem.

This is a very significant insight which speaks directly to Therivel's (1993) Challenged Personality theory. If as children they had to deal with the problem of being lefthanded (amongst various other misfortunes) but they also received assistance in the form of recognition for their artistic competence they would each qualify without doubt as Challenged people. This would reinforce not only their interest and participation in artmaking activities but would also make them more creative by demonstrating that "looking at the world obliquely" as Albert put it would allow them to find alternative strategies which would make life easier for them. Lefthandedness therefore might be seen as a misfortune as Therivel (1993) defined it, resulting in an enhanced level of creativity in those individuals possibly as a subconscious desire for a "need to erase old insults or a sense of revenge against society" (Therivel, 1993, p. 421). Therivel's (1993) theory might therefore explain why many researchers have found an increased level of lefthandedness amongst creative people (Fry, 1990; Gotestam, 1990; Mebert & Michel, 1980; Petersen, 1979; Petersen & Lansky, 1974, 1977, 1980; Schachter & Ransil, 1996; Winner & Casey, 1992). There is obviously a need for the
Challenged Personality theory to be tested against lefthanded people to determine both their levels of misfortune and assistances, and their level of creativity, and thus perhaps help explain the way in which they interact with their world.

**Recommendations for action and further study.**

A number of interesting themes have emerged which should be of interest to the administrators of art schools and could usefully be pursued.

- If an increased level of dyslexia, autoimmune diseases such as asthma and allergies, and accidents are possible amongst non-righthanded people (as the literature and my study of six people may indicate) then a competent study of non-righthanded people in an art school population is important in order to ascertain the proportion of the population who may be at risk and to identify both them and the extent of their problem so that remedial steps can be put in place.

- If Therivel's (1993) Challenged Personality theory is correct, most people in an art school will have suffered from misfortunes and experienced assistances or extra support in childhood and adolescence. It would be interesting for this theory to be tested against artists to the extent possible to determine both their levels of misfortune and assistances, and thus perhaps help explain the way in which they interact with their world.

- Similarly, if this theory is correct, there is obviously a need for this theory to be tested against lefthanded people to determine both their levels of
misfortune and assistances, and their level of creativity, and thus perhaps help explain the way in which they interact with their world.

- If artists are more likely to have suffered from childhood traumas including possibly sexual and physical abuse some form of psychological counselling, both on an individual level but also perhaps as a healing circle or "Survivor's Club", should be offered. Post traumatic stress syndrome should be taken seriously, recognized, and treated. If there are a lot of unhappy people in art schools, they should be offered help.

- Artists' apparent need for argument and debate, for complaining, for modifying rules and regarding them more as guidelines should be noted carefully by administrators of art schools and taken into account. Where possible they should be given the opportunity to exercise their creativity administratively, and where it is not possible the reasons should be explained carefully so that bureaucracy does not appear to be arbitrary and unyielding for no reason.

- Art school administrators should recognize that rebellion is essential to many artists, and should be as tolerant and flexible as possible in their bureaucracy. Indeed, since art students have been shown to deliberately choose rebellion as the road to success, a bold administration might offer them opportunities to rebel.

- Administrators should realize that a significant proportion of an artist population may have problems reading, and do their best to design signage and written materials in a way that will make them as accessible
• It would be interesting to find out whether lefthanded artists are more competent with their non-dominant hands than are non-artists. There is perhaps a way to answer this question with a comparative study involving other skilled but possibly less creative lefthanded people such as plumbers, carpenters, auto mechanics or electricians to discover whether they have a similarly enhanced capability with their right hand.

• It would be interesting to do a competent comparative and quantitative survey of the personalities of the population of an art school as opposed to a university in order to discover both personality differences in general but in particular whether the artists displayed lower levels of self-esteem.

• It would also be interesting to do a competent quantitative survey of the handedness of the population of an art school as opposed to a university in order to discover differences.

**Conclusion**

This study has looked at a few of the perceptions and experiences of six lefthanded artists. It is not generalizable to all such creative people, and yet some interesting and at times disturbing patterns emerged which might also be discovered in the general artist population to a greater or a lesser extent. Progressive and thoughtful art school administrators might find it useful to do a quantitative handedness survey in order to ascertain their non-righthanded population with an ultimate goal of understanding their special needs. It might
be useful to attempt to discover the extent and type of reading disorders in the population (correlating them with handedness), and to improve the design and readability of posters and written materials produced for the art school population. It would be humane and productive if a variety of forms of counselling were offered to those with unhappy childhood histories (although for better or for worse such counselling would undoubtedly affect how they made their art). Finally, art school administration might become easier, or at least less stressful for all, if administrators recognized the artistic predilection for rebellion and argument, and were more understanding and accepting of their population’s facility for “looking at the world obliquely”. This study has certainly caused me, as an administrator, to look at artists with very different and more tolerant eyes.
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APPENDIX A

Emergent themes

a) Addressed in the thesis:

Meaning, importance of art

Drive to create

Need to communicate

Major misfortunes (includes Problems at school, Problems with language)

Support systems and assistances

Rebellion (includes Experimenters, and Risk-takers)

Low self-esteem, Mood

Lefthandedness

b) The following emergent themes were also discovered but could not be fully explored because of the need for brevity:

art as escape

art as selfish

art as therapy

artists are different

artists are misunderstood

artistic influences

artistic frustration

attitude towards work produced

business ability

confidence in abilities (ego)
dominant or assertive versus passive

dominant themes in art

economic values

fulfillment, satisfaction

hobbies

importance of texture, form, colour, shade

independence vs. need for structure

inspiration sources

introversion, extroversion

joy of process

learning

lefthanders' perceptions re mirror image

music

pedagogue, facilitator

people-pleasing drive

philosophies

political attitudes

problem-solvers and problem-seekers

psychology of the artist

teaching

technology

time management

typology
vulnerability

work regime, circadian rhythm
APPENDIX B

BROCK UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: "A phenomenological exploration of the lived experiences of six left-handed visual artist-educators."

Researcher: Ted J. Rickard  Academic Advisor: Dr. Susan Drake

I understand that this study in which I have agreed to participate will involve my being interviewed on at least two occasions for a total of approximately three hours. I will be asked to talk about my personal experiences and perceptions as a left-handed visual artist who also teaches art in order to allow the Researcher to try to understand something about what it is to be an artist.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without penalty. I further understand that there is no obligation to answer any question or to participate in any aspect of this project that I consider invasive.

I understand that while this interview will be tape-recorded in order to produce a transcript, all personal data will be kept strictly confidential, and that all information will be coded so that my name is not associated with my answers. Only the Researcher named above and his Academic Advisor at Brock University will have access to any data which can be directly associated with my name. I understand that I will be offered an opportunity to read and edit this transcript in any way I wish before it or any parts of it are used in the final thesis which will eventually be published by Brock University and made available in their academic libraries.

Participant Signature __________________________ Date ______________

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the study, please feel free to contact the Researcher Ted Rickard at extension 977-6000 ext. 615 (home: 964-2326) or Professor Susan Drake at (905)688-5550, extension 3931. Further information about how the data collected is being analysed will be available in the Spring and Summer of 1998 from Researcher Ted Rickard, who will be happy to share any insights with you.

Thank you for your help.

***

I have fully explained the procedures of this study to the above volunteer.

Researcher Signature __________________________ Date ______________
APPENDIX C

Handedness Survey

Please indicate which hand you habitually use most for each of the following activities by writing R (for Right), L (for Left), E (for Either).

Which hand do you use:

A. To write a letter legibly?
B. To throw a ball to hit a target?
C. To hold a racquet in tennis, squash or badminton?
D. To hold a match while striking it?
E. To cut with scissors?
F. To guide a thread through the eye of a needle (or guide a needle onto thread)?
G. At the top of a pushbroom (not a corn broom) while sweeping?
H. At the top of a long-handled shovel when moving sand?
I. To deal playing cards?
J. To hammer a nail into wood?
K. To hold a toothbrush while cleaning your teeth?
L. To unscrew the lid of a jar?

Ted Rickard,
39 Douglas Crescent,
Toronto,
Ontario M4W 2E6

Dear Ted,

I certainly do remember our meeting in the summer.

Of course you may use the 1970 questionnaire - it was published for all to use. You may also change it as you like - preferably with acknowledgement that your questionnaire was based on mine. You do not need my permission.

I would only point out that if you propose to compare your findings with mine, it would be better to keep the questions and order as standard as possible. The very fact that you have arranged the questions in approximate order of likelihood of a response may affect the probabilities in ways unknown.

I do agree that you need to specify the type of broom for a North American sample.

Have you thought of incorporating a personality questionnaire in your procedures? I am planning to include the RUST schizotypy scale in my next undergraduate sample (called RISC from Psychological corporation). Another researcher has found a relationship with my subgroup handedness classes (some of the data collected in Canada I believe) - and an artistic sample might be interesting. It might also be an interesting base for your phenomenological enquiries - provided you gave the questionnaires straight first.

All good wishes,

Marian Annett

24 Sept. 1996
Dear Mr. Rickard:

I have just received your letter of November 4. Sorry you had such difficulty tracking me down. My son did give me your message and e-mail address. Unfortunately, I do not currently have access to an e-mail account and was therefore unable to contact you. I have looked over the tables and they look fine to me. I don't know the legalities of the situation so I don't know if I can give you official permission to use the tables (doesn't the publisher "own" the article once it's published?) However, I, personally, have no objection to your using the tables. Your study sounds interesting. We did a follow-up study (accepted by CRJ but evidently collecting dust in some editorial closet at the moment!) that suggested that teachers' concepts of creativity were particularly unlikely to match the personality profiles of spatially (as opposed to verbally) creative children, so your focus on artists and "visual thinkers" seems particularly pertinent. Best wishes with your research.

Sincerely,

V. L. Dawson

57 Slab Bridge Rd.
Assonet, MA 02702
November 12, 1998
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