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Exploring the Artistic Identity/Identities of Art Majors Engaged in Artistic Undergraduate Research

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Exploring the Artistic Identity/Identities of Art Majors Engaged in Artistic Undergraduate Research

by

Lisa M. Piazza

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Higher Education Administration Department of Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career, and Higher Education College of Education University of South Florida

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DEDICATION

For my mother Norma Piazza and late father Alfonso Piazza, *T’amo molto*. For my brother, Kurtis A. Piazza, who inspires me every day with his creativity and artistic spirit.
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ABSTRACT

In western societies, the persona of the artist has largely been associated with prevailing myths of the creative individual including the artist as genius and outsider. In my inquiry I endeavored to understand what it means to be an artist from the perspective of budding “creatives”. In this study I explored the process of becoming an artist that is how college students construct and navigate an artistic self (selves), and the factors that influenced this process. My purpose in this multiple text narrative inquiry was to discover how undergraduate art majors construct and navigate their artistic identity/identities, particularly while engaged in an artistic undergraduate research (UR) experience. I selected to explore students engaged in an undergraduate research project as a way to understand the process of artistic becoming within a unique educational practice, and to determine the role of creativity within this process.

My study involved students who participated in an undergraduate research scholarship program developed by the Office for Undergraduate Research at a large research university in the southeast of the United States. Ten undergraduate art majors participated in this study. Data included in-depth interviews, and participant writings in the form of “artist” reflective journal entries (which included both written and visual text), and a final self-reflection essay. I analyzed the interview data through a holistic-content approach (Lieblich et al., 1998). I identified specific themes in order to understand the complex, “whole” individual, which assisted me in understanding
participant “artistic selves”, and how creativity played a role in this process. I analyzed participant art products using methods adapted from Riessman (2008) and Keats (2009). Three key findings emerged from my inquiry. First, for the majority of participants, the construction of artistic identity/identities involved a significant evolution in their meaning making structures. Second, the notion of “doing” for oneself through research was profound for most individuals, which resulted in a stronger sense of artistic identity/identities. The third major finding was how participants weaved their artistic identity/identities through creativity. Implications of my research underscore the need for more robust institutional support and resources to assist emerging artists with developing career skills, creating supportive environments for art majors from a variety of backgrounds to help them succeed and thrive in college, the design and implementation of additional educational practices in the arts that promote self-authorship, and the expansion of UR activities within the arts.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Prelude

My dissertation project represents a long fascination with the persona of the artist. Although I began my undergraduate career with the intention of pursuing a law degree, enrolling in an art history survey course during my second year of study interrupted this trajectory. Shortly after the conclusion of the course I shifted my focus to art history and went on to obtain a bachelor’s degree in the discipline. I later completed a master’s degree in art history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. My Master’s thesis focused on the ways in which memory and forgetting influence the identity of the artist. My thesis explored a photographic series by the artist Allan DeSouza. I argued that the photographs communicated the artist’s longing for la maison natale, or the mother’s body, a time before language, which in adulthood can be accessed through memory. This dissertation therefore represents a long-standing curiosity about the “artist” and how one discovers one’s artistic identity through the process of becoming (Hall, 1996).

Instruction in art history involves the development of key skills such as observation and analytical thinking. It also involves placing yourself in the position of the artist through training in artistic methods and practices. The reasoning behind this requirement is that you cannot understand the mind and raison d’être of the artist unless you have “walked in her shoes”. Thus, at the undergraduate level, my art history degree requirements included the successful completion of several art studio courses including life drawing and the foundations of design.
Art historians must also be proficient in the formal analysis genre, or the ability to analyze a work of art based on its components. Although budding art historians often confuse this genre with pure description, the challenge of formal analysis involves the ability to see beyond the physical elements of the work and incorporate thoughtful analysis and interpretation into the text. As an art historian my primary occupation was writing about artists and making certain judgments about what an artist is and what an artist does. I now think about how my work almost certainly contributed to perpetuating certain myths of the artist.

My training as an art historian has served me well in the development of this dissertation project. My education in the field of art, and also my own artistic pursuits, a passion to which I have returned at various points of my life, provided a strong foundation and the necessary credentials to explore this topic. I thoroughly understand the environs of art instruction having experienced it at the undergraduate and graduate levels. For instance, my training not only involved learning about art but also learning with and among artists. In addition, I have composed a variety of creative works including several artist-invited exhibition catalogs. My combined life experiences have therefore sustained my passion for the topic and fueled my sense of discovery.

In my current position as a higher education administrator I have mentored dozens of art studio majors. Over the years, I have observed their research journeys, which often include struggling with who they are as students, as researchers, and as creative individuals. The elements that comprise this dissertation, which involve identity development, creativity, how students perceive themselves as artists and researchers, and how they experience the research process reflect both my experiences working with my
students and a longing to understand the process of becoming an artist. Through this
dissertation project I aimed to give voice to the artist rather than speak for her/him, and to
rectify some of the predominant misunderstandings and socio-cultural perceptions of the
creative individual.

Background

*Identity is the ultimate act of creativity* (Josselson, 1996)

*Becoming what one is is a creative act comparable with creating a work of art* (Storr, 1992)

*…there is creativity in identity construction just as there is identity construction in the most
mundane forms of creative expression* (Glaveanu & Tanggaard, 2014)

Artists hold a popular fascination in the imagination of western society. Often
perceived as different and independent (Deresiewicz, 2015; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2008) being an artist symbolizes a certain mystique. For several decades, the art world
has engaged in a vigorous discourse around artists and the business of artistic production
(Becker, 1982; Bilton, 2013; Freedman, 2007; Taylor & Littleton, 2008; White, 1993),
and recent discussions have also considered the contemporary artist’s increasing role as
celebrity (Fillis, 2015; Sulcas, 2015). While all of these factors have influenced the
persona of the artist, in modern history, the image of the artist and what it means to be an
artist has largely been developed around sociocultural “myths” including the artist as
solitary, tortured, and divinely gifted (Bain, 2005; Becker, 1982; Freeman, 1993;
Hagman, 2010; Royseng, Mangset, & Borgen, 2007; Sawyer, 2006; Wittkower &
Wittkower, 1963). Moreover, until recently, the artistic individual was almost always
defined and considered in terms of a male persona (Bain, 2004, 2005), a circumstance
linked to the long-standing underrepresentation of women (and non-western and non-
white artists) within the traditional “canon” of art history (Brun, 2015; Clark, Folgo, &
Primary characteristics of the “artist” include technical and manual competence (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976), creativity and innovation (Gardner, 1993, Sawyer, 2006), and the ability to navigate the artistic milieu in order to be accepted as an “artist” in society (Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, 1999).

Although scholars have long been occupied with identifying the characteristics of artistic/creative individuals (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976; Sawyer, 2006) including the examination of personality traits (Amabile, 1996), and problem finding skills (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976), unrepresented in the literature is research that investigates how undergraduate art majors construct, explore, and navigate their budding artistic identity/identities. In this study, I sought to comprehend the process of becoming an artist, how college students engaged in undergraduate research construct and navigate an artistic self (selves), and the factors that might influence this process. Furthermore, as the epigraphs above illustrate, scholars have noted the curious link between identity formation and creativity. Identity formation thus may be understood as a creative process.

Through this research, I endeavored to understand the potential influence of creativity in regard to identity formation in art majors, and the potential ways in which these individuals navigate the process of becoming artists during the undergraduate experience.

For many college students, the undergraduate experience is a period of self-discovery, experimentation, and exploration (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013; Baxter Magolda, 2001). It is a time for reflecting upon one’s identity and for pondering questions such as “Who am I?” and “What do I want to be?” (Baxter Magolda, 2001). In the case of art majors, the process of becoming artists involves exploring these questions
through the development of artistic competence (technical and theoretical training in artistic practice) (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2013), and by developing a sense of purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) as a creative individual (what does it mean to be an artist? and What does an artist do?) (Freeman, 1993). Additionally, indoctrination into the artist milieu of the academy and the larger art world (Abuhamedeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2004) provides the budding artist with a collection of appropriate sociocultural codes that communicate what it means to be an artist. Exploring art majors’ competence and sense of purpose are therefore critical to discerning the identity development process (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), that is, how individuals construct and navigate an artistic self (selves), and the ways in which this phenomenon might influence a student’s emerging artistic identity/identities.

For this project, I conceptualized identity development as a process that involves becoming (Hall, 1996). It is “mobile, a process not a thing, a becoming not a being” (Frith, 1996, p. 109). Moreover, the emphasis on process underscores identity development as a social, varied, and mutable phenomenon. While the identity development of college students has been explored from a variety of perspectives including the foundational work of Erikson (1959/1980) and Marcia (1966), the important contributions of Chickering and Reisser (1993) and Josselson (1996), and more recent formulations, which consider identity development among college students within the context of social identity theories (Abes & Jones, 2004; Baxter Magolda, 2001; Jones & Abes, 2013; Pizzolato, 2003; Torres & Hernandez, 2007; Torres, Jones & Renn, 2009; Torres & McGowan, 2016), scant extant research considers the process by which undergraduate students majoring in the arts “become” artists (Budge, 2016).
In addition, though the act of making art is considered a creative endeavor, the ways in which creativity might influence the process of artistic becoming within the context of undergraduate art majors has not been thoroughly investigated in the literature. It has been noted that creativity like the process of development concerns factors such as society, culture and history (Freeman, 1993, p. 2). I aimed to explore this line of inquiry through this research project.

Josselson (1996) stated that *identity represents knowing who we are in the context of all that we might be* (p. 27). As we begin to understand who we are our identity emerges from disparate places both within and outside of our selves (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Gee, 2000; Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976; Hagman, 2010; Jones & Abes, 2013; Josselson, 1996; Mishler, 1999; Roland, 2002). I endeavored to analyze how art majors engaged in an undergraduate research experience construct and navigate “who they are”, and how they might explore possibilities around “who they might become”. Lastly, rather than identifying a single artistic identity common to all, I acknowledge the plurality and mutable nature of identity thus I sought to investigate the emergent and varied artistic *identities* of participants in order to appreciate what it means to “become” an artist (Josselson, 1996; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Mishler, 1999).

Identity concerns how we see ourselves, but also how we are perceived by others, and the impact this has on how we see ourselves (Josselson & Harway, 2012). In this study, I invited participants to reflect upon their emerging artistic identities through multiple means of communication including the creation of an original research-based work of art and reflective writing. In contrast to typical narrative methods, which tend to focus on the collection and analysis of a single text (i.e. interview data), this study
involved the collection and analysis of multiple “texts” (Keats, 2009); written, in the form of participant reflective writing; verbal, represented in the interview data; and illustrative/creative expression, in the form of pictorial/visual journal renderings. Through a multiple text narrative approach I aimed to discern the emergent and interconnected “processes” of artistic identity formation. I also considered how sociocultural influences might shape a student’s artistic identities and sense of creativity through or against familiar “myths” or images of the artist. Lastly, the collection and analysis of various textual forms such as participant reflective writings, art work, and interview narratives assisted me with understanding the multiple layers and nuances of identity formation, and the potential role creativity plays in this process.

During the undergraduate experience, art majors develop and produce creative products (art work). This work is constantly subject to criticism and public opinion through in class critiques and art exhibitions. A student’s artistic identities are thus influenced in large part by sociocultural factors, and these factors are often internalized and incorporated into how individuals see themselves as artistic. Taking into consideration these ever-evolving circumstances, one’s artistic identities may be understood as constantly in the process of revision (Josselson, 1996). Such revisions might expose “different types of artistic identities” (Mishler, 1999, p. 102), which are created and presented according to one’s identity narrative.

Finally, for undergraduate art majors, artistic and personal growth involves developing intellectual, manual and interpersonal competence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The development of artistic skill likewise involves the ability to think critically, analyze ideas and information, and make sense from one’s experiences.
It involves the ability to communicate effectively and incorporate feedback (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Examining how students developed competence in these areas revealed how they moved closer to a sense of self as artists (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

For most budding artists, what it means to be an artist in contemporary society is complex, varied, and ambiguous. In contrast to college students in other disciplines, for example accounting or engineering, in which the academic credential is associated with the development of a clear professional identity, for art majors the art degree does not necessarily credential individuals into a specific profession or career (Bain, 2005; Bennett, 2009; Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976; Miller, Dumford, Gaskill, Houghton, & Tepper, 2016). Thus, while establishing one’s identity, as “artist” is critical for personal and professional growth and success within the artistic milieu, it is simultaneously ambiguous and unspecified. The purpose of this study was to investigate how undergraduate art majors, particularly those engaged in high-impact practices (Kuh, 2008) such as undergraduate research, construct, explore, and navigate their artistic identity/identities. Moreover, I aimed to expose the process of becoming an artist, that is, how individuals form an artistic self (selves).

Statement of the Problem

Exploring how art majors develop an artistic identity/identities within the context of an undergraduate research experience is relevant for several reasons. First, the notion of artistic identity has been marginally considered in the literature (Bain, 2004, 2005; Freeman, 1993), and scant research investigates this construct within the context of college students (Lena & Lindemann, 2014).
Therefore, more research is needed that explores identity formation among those that are considering careers in art and/or the creative sectors. (Lingo & Tepper, 2013).

Second, examining how students negotiate and construct their identities within artistic academic environments is critical for identifying additional educational practices that might help art majors develop the skills necessary for success in the competitive world of work. For example, recent findings from the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP) survey (Lena, 2014) indicated that while 90% of arts graduates were “very satisfied” with their technical artistic training they did not believe they received adequate training and instruction in professional development skills such as management and communication skills (Lena, 2014). Similarly, in a recent report (Center for Cultural Innovation, 2016) that examined the significant social and economic contributions of artists, Tepper (2016) noted that educators must do more to assist students with identifying and successfully articulating (and marketing) their creative competencies (p. 55), which include among other elements the ability to deal with ambiguity and to improvise, giving and receiving critical feedback, and the ability to tell stories using multiple platforms and media. This project studied art majors engaged in an undergraduate research project to illuminate the ways in which students perceive the development of artistic and professional development skills.

Third, distinct from students in other disciplines where academic credentials are linked to a specific profession and professional identity, the art degree is not necessarily associated with a specific profession or professional identity (Bain, 2005; Royseng, Mangset & Borgen, 2007). Scholars have described the various categories of creative work including portfolio and protean careers, which demand adaptability and flexibility,
and which are characterized by project-based employment (Bennett, 2009; Markusen, 2013; Menger, 1999; Throsby & Zednik, 2011). Results of a recent survey of arts alumni (Frenette, Miller, Martin, Gaskill & Tepper, 2016) provide critical information for considering the mutable nature of the professional artist, and the artist’s ability to work across the various creative disciplines. While working across disciplines is not a new trend, success in the world of work is now increasingly contingent upon the individual’s ability to develop and navigate a diverse, creative skill set (Frenette et al, 2016). Examining the experiences of students engaged in undergraduate research might further illuminate how these individuals develop transferable skills, which are critical for navigating creative careers.

Lastly, very few studies have brought together the construct of creativity and academic identity development, specifically in regard to undergraduates (Aaron, 2010; Welkener & Baxter Magolda, 2014; Welkener, 2013). In addition, literature investigating student participation in undergraduate research (UR) in the arts is scant. Recent literature includes policy papers that recommend the expansion of UR experiences beyond STEM disciplines to include the arts and humanities (Elrod, Husic, & Kinzie, 2010; Levenson, 2010), and examples of UR projects that incorporate creative activities such as community-based art programming (Louis, 2008). Very few studies specifically focus on UR projects in the arts (Craney, McKay, Mazzeo, Morris, Prigodich, & Groot, 2011; Klos, Shanahan, & Young, 2011; Louis, 2008), or how these students develop research and professional development skills through UR participation.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multiple text narrative inquiry was to investigate how undergraduate art majors construct and navigate their artistic identity/identities, particularly while engaged in an undergraduate research experience. As part of this process the influence of creativity was also investigated. My research contributes to the literature in three ways. First, while several studies have explored how individuals construct and navigate their artistic/creative identities in regard to the world of work (Bain, 2005; Bennett, 2009), at the graduate level (Taylor & Littleton, 2008), and shortly after graduation from postsecondary education (Lena & Lindemann, 2014), similar investigations of artistic identity formation have not been examined from the perspective of undergraduate art majors. Second, scant extant research focuses on how students in disciplines other than science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) benefit from UR experiences, and how students perceive the value of research experience and skill acquisition in relation to future career goals. Third, while this study considered creativity in the context of artistic research, my research findings contribute to the ongoing discourse around the value of the arts as an important part of the undergraduate curriculum (AAC&U, 2007; Bast, Carayannis, & Campbell, 2015; President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 2011) and college student development.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate how undergraduate art majors, particularly those engaged in high-impact practices (Kuh, 2008) such as undergraduate research, construct, explore, and navigate their artistic identity/identities. Moreover, through this research project I endeavored to understand the process of becoming an
artist, that is, how individuals form an artistic self (selves). The following research questions guided my inquiry:

1) How do undergraduate students majoring in the arts negotiate/construct their identities as artists?
   a) How does participation in an undergraduate research experience in the arts influence the construction of identity as artist?

2) What role can creativity play in the formation of an individual’s artistic identity/identities?

**Conceptual Framework**

I brought together three key areas of research to explore the construct of artistic identity/identities. First, I investigated the notion of “artistic identity/identities” through the lens of current identity development theories in order to demonstrate how the construct of identity is a socio-cultural and fluid phenomenon. Second, I considered the potential role of competence and a sense of purpose to understand the ways in which these areas might play a role in the development of an artistic identity/identities. Third, I explored the concept of creativity (and the creative process) to determine how this element influenced the construction and development of artistic identity/identities. These combined areas of research assisted me with examining how artistic identity/identities develop and emerge during the college experience, and student perceptions around what it “means” to be an artist. The conceptual framework for this inquiry is depicted in Figure 1.
**Definition of Terms**

- **Artistic Identity:** Because degrees such as the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) and Master of Fine Arts (MFA) do not credential artists in the same way as in other disciplines, artists must find ways to distinguish themselves as professionals and credential themselves within the world of work. In this study, artistic identity refers to the ways in which creative individuals navigate their “selves” in a socio-cultural context (Bain, 2005).

- **Creativity:** In this study, creativity is conceptualized as a phenomenon that involves the interaction between the individual, the domain, and the field. The domain represents the “culture” in which the creative product is developed, and the field is the “society” that determines the “novelty” of a particular product (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). In this study, the domain is the university art environment (art departments) in which the creative process takes place, and the field is represented by the professors and other instructional staff who evaluate the work product.

- **High-Impact Practices:** Widely tested teaching and learning practices that have been shown to foster student success among students from a variety of backgrounds (Kuh, 2008).

- **Undergraduate Research:** This study follows the broad definition of UR put forth by the Council on Undergraduate Research: *An inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate student that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline* (Council on Undergraduate Research, 2011).
Overview

In this chapter, I outlined the statement of the problem and purpose of the study to underscore the significance of this inquiry and contributions to the literature. I also provided a brief overview of the methods, and I identified the primary areas of research as outlined in the conceptual framework. In Chapter Two, I review the principal areas of literature that guided this study including identity, artistic identity and creativity, and undergraduate research. I present the methodology for this inquiry in Chapter Three, and the participant narrative sketches in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five I outline the findings of the study. In Chapter Six I conclude with the discussion and implications of the research.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

...we constantly construct and reconstruct our selves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter (Bruner, 2002).

...creativity does not happen inside people’s heads, but in the interaction between a person’s thoughts and the sociocultural context (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

Organization of the Literature Review

In the literature review I discuss the theoretical concepts, constructs and empirical research related to this inquiry. The individual sections of the literature review form the foundation of the conceptual framework that undergirds this study. Research around identity development theories, the role of competence and a sense of purpose, and the concept of creativity (and the creative process) are all review in this chapter.

In the first section of the review I include a brief overview of the literature around the perceptions of art graduates including how they view their art training, and their identities as “artists” beyond the college experience. Considering how alumni reflect on their educational experiences and how they navigate work environments as artists is critical to understanding how higher education might better prepare art majors for life after college. Because the primary research question in this study centered on artistic identity/identities, in the second section of the review, I present relevant literature dedicated to the construct of identity including foundational theories, what is known about identity formation and college students, and models such as Self-Authorship and the notion of possible selves. In section three I examine studies that more specifically
center on the construct of artistic identity/identities. Artistic work (the creation of art) is considered a creative endeavor, I therefore conclude section three with research that focuses on the construct of creativity including an overview of the systems theory of creativity, how the processes of creativity and identity development are interconnected, and how artists conceptualize the concept of creativity. In the final section of the review I focus on the context in which this inquiry took place, and I provide a thorough examination of the practice of undergraduate research (UR) including a discussion of the benefits and outcomes of UR, and what is known about UR in the arts.

**The Making of the Artist**

What is currently known about artistic identity/identities emerges largely from the expansive literature on creative careers. My inquiry centered on potential artists in the making, and the identity formation process in the context of undergraduate research, a high-impact practice that helps students develop key skills for the world of work and/or graduate study. Therefore, I begin with the literature around art graduates’ perceptions about their art education, how they think about themselves as artists, and the ways in which they construct their artistic identities beyond the college experience.

In a study using data from the 2010 Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP) survey, Lena and Lindemann (2014) found interesting trends in regard to who self-identifies as an artist and who does not. The study both highlights the experiences of arts graduates and provides further evidence for the mutable nature of artistic identities. The study analyzed responses to two questions on the survey from 13,000 recent graduates and alumni who graduated from art schools or art programs within universities.
The two questions were: *Have you ever worked either full- or part-time, as a professional artist?* And *please select all the occupations associated with the arts in which you have worked, now or in the past* (p. 75). Professional artist was defined as: *an occupation whose primary purpose is the creation or performance of artistic works such as designs, films, illustrations, music, performances, stories, and videos.* In addition, the definition of artist *excluded* art teachers and art administrators.

Of the sample, 3,816 respondents indicated that they had never been professional artists, although these respondents also reported that they worked in artistic occupations. The authors labeled this group as the “dissonance group”. According to the authors, this dissonance group represents individuals who work in artist professions but do not “identify” with the title of professional artist. Findings also revealed that individuals who were more entrenched in the artistic milieu, that is, those who work in arts-related jobs, have parents or relatives who are professional artists, or those who attended arts-focused schools (p. 81), were more likely to self-identify as professional artists. In comparison, individuals with less exposure to art environs (i.e. designers) were more likely to be a part of the dissonance group. Lena and Lindemann (2014) argued for additional research that considers the role of identity in regard to individuals majoring in the arts, and how creative individuals “see” themselves within the larger sociocultural environs of work and personal identity.

Another recent study using SNAAP data, (Miller & Dumford, 2015) utilized Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) to study how environmental factors influence the development of creativity and more specifically creative thinking skills in arts alumni. The study included 10,938 undergraduate alumni
and 2,214 graduate alumni. Studio art majors represented the largest subset of the sample, 23%. For undergraduates, the freedom to take risks and faculty-student interaction had the greatest impact on creative thinking skills. Another significant predictor for creativity was the opportunity to perform, present, or exhibit work (Miller & Dumford, 2015). These findings are relevant to my inquiry because they demonstrate the impact of environmental factors (i.e. sociocultural) on student learning outcomes, how students make meaning from their college experiences, and the role creativity plays in this process. This study also highlights some of the ways that arts majors perceive their undergraduate experience, and how specific (perceived) college experiences are viewed as benefiting and enriching the college experience.

Findings from data compiled by Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP) between 2011-2013, which surveyed both recent (students who completed the survey no more than five years after graduation, and not recent graduates (those who completed the survey more than five years after graduation), are likewise instructive for understanding the development of arts alumni, and how artistic training potentially influences and prepares students for future endeavors such as employment or advanced education (Lena, 2014). SNAAP findings highlight the perceptions of arts graduates regarding both the benefits and shortcomings of an arts education. For instance, respondents indicated that while they were exposed to some professional development training during their undergraduate careers most reported that more emphasis should be placed on the development of key skills such as project management and networking, and better preparation for the world of work (Lena, 2014). SNAAP findings also point to the need for additional research that examines student preparation for success after college, and
how training in research and professional development skills might enhance a student’s college experience.

SNAAP findings seem to contradict the persistent myth of the “starving artist.” For example, 80% of recent graduates found work “closely” or “somewhat closely” related to their field of study compared to 82% of non-recent graduates (p. 16). However, as Lena (2014) noted, while the data are positive:

> Schools need to help these graduates find the right employment fit, and they need to provide students with stronger narratives about how the broad skill set they acquire in college can be leveraged—whether working as artists or in other fields (p.16).

These findings are consistent with other recent findings regarding art majors and the world of work (Frenette, 2015; Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010; SNAAP, 2013).

Finally, SNAAP findings have illuminated current understandings around race, gender, and socioeconomic status in the context of arts education (Frenette, Miller, Martin, Gaskill, & Tepper, 2016; Lena, 2014; SNAAP, 2013), which are pertinent to this study. For instance, the 2013 SNAAP survey collected alumni perceptions regarding institutional experiences and career trajectories around race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. Although findings pointed to a higher level of inclusiveness in regard to art schools, results nonetheless underscored persistent inequities with regard to time to degree, a sense of belonging within the institution, and the encouragement to take risks (SNAAP, 2013). Black alumni were the least satisfied with their freedom and encouragement to take risks at their former institutions (p. 12). For example, 76% of Black undergraduates were “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with this item as compared to 83% of Hispanic alumni, and 85% of Whites (p. 12). In regard to sense of belonging at their institution, while differences among gender were slight with 78% of female
undergraduates and 79% of males satisfied with their sense of belonging, the gaps were larger among racial/ethnic categories. For instance, 79% of White undergraduates were “somewhat” or “very” compared to 74% of Hispanic alumni, and 69% of Black alumni (p. 13). The 2013 SNAAP survey also captured data regarding post-graduation and the world of work. For example, female alumni become professional artists at lower rates than males. For alumni currently working as professional artist, 54% are female as compared to 64% of males (p. 16). Among racial/ethnic groups Asian (64%) and White (60%) alumni are currently working as professional artists compared to 57% of Hispanics and 53% of Black alumni (p. 15). These results illustrate the need for additional research that considers issues of race and gender in regard to art majors. My inquiry attempts to fill the gap in the literature.

Identity

Foundational Theories

This study centered on the process of identity development among undergraduate art majors. I begin this section with a discussion regarding the foundational theories upon which much of the research on identity, specifically identity formation among college students has been based. Next, I present the scant, extant research around the identity development process as it relates to emerging artists within the context of college. Although the study of identity development has moved away from the linear stage theories discussed below, current conceptualizations of identity development retain some of the concepts first proposed by Erikson (1959/1980) and Marcia (1966). The consideration of identity within the contemporary context must therefore be understood within the historical context from which it emerged.
Today, much of what is known about identity development in adolescence is derived from Erikson’s (1959/1980) psychosocial conceptualization of identity development, which was based on the epigenetic principle; the idea that human growth and development progresses in stages (the parts) according to the life cycle, and each of the parts rise to form a “functioning whole” (p.53). During adolescence individuals experience a crisis, which is followed by a period of “psychosocial moratorium” (p.111) during which individuals experiment with various identities. Once this crisis has been sorted out individuals move closer to identity formation. However, Erikson (1959/1980) also noted that some individuals do not experiment with identities, and he called this circumstance foreclosure. Still others face uncertainty with regard to identity, and he called this stage “identity diffusion”, which is an inability to settle on an identity (p. 97). Marcia (1966) built on the work of Erikson (1959/1980), and identified four “modes” related to resolving identity crisis. I discuss Marcia’s (1966) research below.

Marcia expanded upon Erikson’s (1959/1980) concept of ego identity. He argued that this process concerned two psychosocial tasks used to determine an individual’s identity status: crisis, or “choosing among meaningful alternatives”, and commitment, the degree of personal investment in individual exhibits (p. 551). He further identified four “modes” related to resolving the identity crisis in late adolescence (1966). The highest level of commitment is identity achievement. In this mode, the individual has achieved identity crisis, and is committed to decisions regarding occupation or ideology based on personal values and beliefs. In identity diffusion mode, the individual may or may not have experienced crisis; moreover, there is a lack of commitment in regard to decisions about occupation or ideology. An individual in the moratorium mode is in crisis and
actively struggling to make commitments. In the final mode, foreclosure, the individual is not experiencing crisis yet is working through commitments, which are typically based on external influences (i.e. parents) (Marcia, 1966). As Marcia (1966) explained, individuals in foreclosure mode will endorse “authoritarian values” more so than individuals in other modes (p. 557). The work of Erikson (1959/1980) and Marcia (1966) continue to serve as reference points for contemporary understandings of identity development in college students.

For instance, a recent study looked at career maturity and foreclosure in student athletes, fine arts students, and general college students (Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). The researchers hypothesized that because student athletes and art majors experience similar demands related to extensive involvement and commitment, these groups would possess similarities regarding career maturity and foreclosure. However, results indicated that art students did not have lower career attitudes in comparison to student athletes and general college students (Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). In addition, art students were not similar to student athletes in regard to foreclosure. For example, whereas student athletes tended to rely on decision-making based on external influences such as parents and coaches, art students were less likely to make career decisions based on external influences such as parents. Rather, art students relied on their own decision-making process and vision (Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). Furthermore, 89% of the participants expressed a high probability of pursuing a career in the arts. The authors clarified this finding by noting the strong emphasis placed on professional development and preparation for the world of work in the art programs at the school involved in the study.
However, another way to interpret these data is that they offer strong evidence for the importance of professional development training in the arts.

Finally, Linnemeyer and Brown’s (2010) study is constructive because it clarifies how art students might make meaning from their experiences, and the ways in which they move through the developmental process. Scholars have expanded the work of Erikson (1959/1980) and Marcia (1966), particularly in the context of college students. I discuss these studies in detail below.

Identity and College Students

My inquiry focused on identity as a socially constructed phenomenon (Torres et al., 2009; Weber, 2010). That is, identity is shaped within and in response to the larger social, political, historical, and cultural milieu (Jones & Abes, 2013). Moreover, Torres and McGowan (2016) noted that the social construction of identity represents an interplay between the self and others, which involves navigating the self within the complex sociocultural milieu (p. 189). I further conceptualized identity as a process of becoming (Hall, 1996), and one that involves constant revision (Josselson, 1996). As a process, identity is “continuous” and “incomplete” (Yon, 2000, p.13). It is a complex negotiation between the individual and society. As the individual moves through life, some elements of identity shift with time and place, while other parts remain constant (Josselson, 1996). The mutability and complexity of identity makes it a fascinating yet in some respects elusive concept. The work of Josselson (1996) and Chickering and Reisser (1993) provide a lens through which the process of identity development in college students may be explored.
Josselson (1996) expanded on the work of Erikson (1959/1980) and Marcia (1966) with a focus on identity development from the perspective of female college students. As she noted, while earlier work on identity development illuminated critical understandings of the developmental process, particularly during adolescence, what was missing in the literature was the experiences and voices of women. Josselson’s (1996) research was an attempt to rectify this omission. In her study, she analyzed participant stories according to the four established categories or modes outlined by Marcia (1966); however, she renamed the categories to better reflect the characteristics of the participants in her study. Josselson’s (1996) categories included Guardians (foreclosure), Pathmakers (Identity Achievements), Searchers (Moratorium) and Drifters (Identity Diffusion). Guardians have made identity commitments primarily based on external influences and typically have not considered alternatives: “This is how I am because it’s how I was raised or how I’ve always been (p. 35). Pathmakers had moved through the exploration phase to commitment. Importantly, they had experienced crisis and made commitments based on their own beliefs and values. Searchers remain in the struggle or exploration modes and have not made commitments. Finally, drifters are neither in crisis nor are they struggling to make commitments.

While Erikson and Marcia’s studies primarily focused on men, and centered on identity as regards to occupation and ideology, the women’s stories collected by Josselson (1996) reshaped and re-imagined these concepts. For example, Josselson (1996) noted that for women identity is based on the notion of connection to others. Participants spoke of occupational commitments in terms of how these commitments allowed them to be “connected” to others. Ideology too is framed around interpersonal
and interconnected elements (p. 236). For instance, participants talked about “being there” for the individuals they made commitments to within the work or home environments (p. 236). Furthermore, Josselson (1996) found that for the women in her study, the notion of competence was a central anchor of a woman’s identity. A woman’s sense of mastery in relation to work, home or creative endeavors was important to establishing who she was in relation to others. Mentors also played a large role in a woman’s sense of competence. As outlined in the Introduction, although artistic identity/identities has been thoroughly explored within the context of professional artists, and while a handful of research centers on women artists in particular, the formation of an artistic identity/identities from the perspective of female undergraduate art majors has not been explored in the literature. It is also important to underscore that the process of identity formation is not a universal phenomenon; but rather is strongly influenced by a variety of factors such as gender and race. Therefore, any examination of identity development must acknowledge and consider these factors. Josselson’s (1996) research is further instructive for considering how creative women construct and navigate their identities; particularly in light of recent data from the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP, 2013), which found that “women (and minorities) who attend art school are less likely than White men to persist as artists in the workforce” (p. 8). Finally, although my research project did not initially focus exclusively on female art majors, nine of the study participants were female; two of whom were African American, and one of whom was Hispanic; therefore, issues of race, gender and class emerged as prominent features in my inquiry.
Like Josselson’s (1996) research, the work of Chickering and Reisser (1993) further expands on the foundational work of Erikson (1959/1980) and Marcia (1966). However, it is a less linear approach than the foundational theories and is more inclusive. The model is based on vectors, or roadmaps on the developmental journey, and it offers additional possibilities for identity development. It also shares similarities with Josselson’s (1996) work regarding competence and the importance of connections. Seven distinct but interconnected vectors comprise Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) model of identity development of college students. These vectors or roadmaps demonstrate where individuals are on the journey through development and where they might be headed in the future. The vectors move from low to high achievement, however, movement is not linear; rather, individuals journey along the vectors at different points. Although detours may be experienced along the way, each individual journeys along each of the seven vectors at some point in the development process. The seven vectors include developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). While all of the vectors are important to the development of college students, developing competence and developing purpose were particularly relevant to this inquiry. I outline each of these below.

The vector developing competence includes intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Moreover, mastering content, gaining intellectual and aesthetic sophistication, and building a repertoire of skills to comprehend, analyze, and synthesize (p. 45) are all key elements
involved with developing competence. Developing new “frames of reference” and more “points of view” are also critical components of this vector (p. 45). Competence is derived from the “confidence that one can cope with what comes and achieve goals successfully” (p. 53). Manual competence involves using the body as “a vehicle for high performance, self-expression, and creativity” (p. 54).

Competence in these areas has been thoroughly considered in the literature, and these areas are essential to this study. For example, scholars have noted that higher education must focus on learning strategies that assist students in “shifting their frames of mind” from reliance on external formulas (authority figures) to more complex ways of making meaning from their experiences (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013, p.868). High-impact educational practices (HIP’s) such as undergraduate research represent a promising strategy for enhancing student learning (Kilgo, Ezell Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015), and helping students develop internally formulated belief systems that engender both academic and personal growth (Kuh, 2008; Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014).

In addition, the discovery orientation of the undergraduate research experience challenges students to apply critical thinking, develop strategies to solve or find complex problems, and consider diverse perspectives; thus facilitating the development of more internally generated belief systems (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Finally, Chickering and Reisser, (1993) have noted that as competence increases so too does ability and self-assurance. For art majors this process no doubt involves creativity. Thus, the vector of competence was specifically pertinent to this inquiry.

_Developing purpose_ is also critical to development. It involves considering vocational plans, establishing personal interests, and interpersonal and family
commitments (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This vector involves the consideration of one’s future self (or selves) in relation to one’s present self. For example, in the process of asking questions such as “Who am I” students must also be concerned with questions such as “Where am I going? Developing purpose also involves the increasing ability to be intentional. For example, developing strategies for future goals and sticking to them despite obstacles or barriers. It also involves a consideration of various options and how these options fit into one’s plans for the future (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The decision to pursue an art degree is typically an attempt to continue feeding a creative/artistic passion that has been present since childhood (Gardner, 1993). For art majors, it might be the case that the exploration of the question “who am I”- has most likely been explored in part through creative endeavors throughout the course of their lives. The college experience, then, allows the student to pursue personal creative/artistic interests but also might help them consider the ways in which this deep personal interest might be translated to a future career. By observing how art students develop a sense of purpose through their creativity I aimed to discover the possible links between creative endeavors and future aspirations as artists/ creative professionals. Finally, developing purpose is not simply about setting goals and objectives. Rather, it likewise involves integrity and values (Chickering & Reisser (1993). The stronger one’s commitment to a particular cause, belief, or calling the closer one approaches a sense of self and life purpose. I endeavored to understand how students engaged in an artistic research project, which simulates real world experiences such as the logistics of putting together an art exhibit and presenting research findings in a public forum, might reveal some of the ways in which students develop purpose and ponder their future role in society as creatives.
Hetland and others (2013) have enumerated eight “studio habits of mind” in art education that provide additional ways of considering the vectors outlined by Chickering and Reisser (1993). The eight non-linear habits of mind include developing craft, i.e. technique; engagement and persistence, which parallel the vectors of competence and a sense of purpose; understanding the domain of art; delving into one’s métier; stretching and exploring, which involves challenging oneself to make mistakes and try new things; envisioning, or contemplating that which cannot be observed; reflecting, questioning and evaluating; expressing, exploring personal feeling and emotion; and finally observing, or careful “looking” (p. 6). Taken together, these habits of mind, coupled with the vectors I discussed above, and Josselson’s (1996) findings on the elements of competence and connection, point to the possibilities for artistic identity/identities development, and the ways in which creativity might play a role in this process. Another area of research that provides insight into college student development is the theory of Self-Authorship. I discuss this below.

**Self-Authorship and Student Development**

High-impact educational practices (HIP’s) such as undergraduate research represent a promising strategy for enhancing student learning (Kilgo, Ezell Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015), and helping students develop internally formulated belief systems that engender both academic and personal growth (Kuh, 2008; Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014). Moreover, the discovery orientation of the undergraduate research experience challenges students to apply critical thinking, develop strategies to solve or find complex problems, and consider diverse perspectives; thus facilitating the development of more internally generated belief systems (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).
I considered the Self-Authorship model as a possible way to understand how students made meaning from an undergraduate research experience in the arts.

Although part of the college experience involves preparation for the world of work, and for some preparation for advanced study, these goals should not be viewed as the only priorities of higher education. Rather, higher education must also be concerned with how to assist students in developing more complex ways of making meaning from their college experiences (Arum, Roksa, & Cook, 2016; Baxter Magolda, Abes, & Torres, 2009; Goodman, Baxter Magolda, Seifert, & King, 2011; Hodge, Baxter Magolda, & Haynes, 2009; Kaplan & Flum, 2012; King & Baxter Magolda, 2004), which might bring them closer to self-fulfillment and successfully navigating their lives. Assisting students in reaching this goal is particularly important in light of high profile studies that have noted the shortcomings of college learning outcomes (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Bok, 2006; Boyer Commission, 1998; Deresiewicz, 2014, NRC, 2012).

The critical relationship between participation in valuable college experiences and future success is documented in a recent study of more than 30,000 college graduates (Ray & Kafka, 2014). The study looked at the connection between certain college experiences such as internships, extracurricular activities, and engagement in extended projects, and long-term outcomes related to workplace engagement and well being (Ray & Kafka, 2014). Survey results indicated that regardless of institutional affiliation, a paucity of students was engaged in college experiences that have been shown to foster deep learning and future success (Ray & Kafka, 2014). This report illuminates the importance and long-term positive outcomes of actively engaging in college and “doing”, and how students are experiencing this “doing”. This point is particularly relevant as it
has been suggested that high-impact practices such as undergraduate research could help students move closer to internal ways of knowing (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013; Goodman, Baxter Magolda, Seifert, & King, 2011; King, Baxter Magolda, Barber, Brown, & Lindsay, 2009; Torres, 2011).

Baxter Magolda (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012) indicated that in order for students to know “what to believe” and “how to act” they must be provided opportunities that assist them in the development of more complex “habits of mind” (p. 3). The Self-Authorship model provided a lens through which I could explore how individuals in my study transitioned to more complex, internally motivated meaning making structures. Baxter Magolda’s model also guided my understanding around how participants made decisions about what they believed about themselves. It was likewise useful for investigating the degree to which external elements such as the prevailing myths of the artist influenced participants’ meaning-making processes.

Baxter Magolda’s conceptualization of self-authorship follows Kegan’s (1982, 1994) work on the evolving self. According to Baxter Magolda (1999) self-authorship involves: a cognitive dimension: how one makes meaning of knowledge (p. 10), an interpersonal dimension: how one views oneself in relation to others (p. 10), and an intrapersonal dimension: how one perceives one’s sense of identity (p. 10.) Furthermore, Baxter Magolda (1999) defines self-authorship as follows:

Self-authorship, then, is a complicated phenomenon. It is simultaneously an ability to construct knowledge in a contextual world, and ability to construct an internal identity separate from external influences, and an ability to engage in relationships without losing one’s internal identity (p. 12).
Given that the research questions I proposed in this study centered on the how one might construct and navigate one’s artistic identity/identities, Baxter Magolda’s model was particularly useful for examining the “process” of meaning making, and the ways in which an individual might navigate this process in an attempt to balance internal and external influences.

The journey towards self-authorship involves three key phases. In the first phase, individuals make meaning of their experiences based on external formulas (Baxter Magolda, 2001). That is, they construct knowledge based on information from “authority” figures such as parents and teachers. In the second phase, which Baxter Magolda (2001) refers to as the Crossroads, individuals begin the process of moving toward internal structures to guide their decisions, beliefs and relationships. In this phase, individuals begin to question external structures and the “internal voice” begins to emerge. Once a person reaches the final phase in the process, the individual possesses the internal meaning making structures to “authors one’s life” and navigate external structures rather than being dominated by them. (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

It must be noted that the journey towards self-authorship is long and does not proceed in a linear fashion. It is also important to note that very few college students develop internal structures either during college or immediately after graduation (Baxter Magolda, & King, 2012; Hodge, Baxter Magolda, & Haynes, 2009). This circumstance is intriguing in light of the Linnemeyer and Brown (2010) findings discussed above, and it raised interesting questions for me around the possibilities of self-authorship in regard to art majors. Although most students do not achieve self-authorship during college there are a few notable exceptions in the literature. For example, in a longitudinal study of
Latino/a college students, Torres and Hernandez (2007) explored the cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of development. The authors found that students who entered the Crossroads possessed the cognitive capacity to recognize racism, and to understand how it influenced their knowledge construction. This study also illuminated the ways in which identity and culture shape one’s ways of knowing. Students who transitioned to authoring their own lives successfully managed their own beliefs and their identities regardless of external demands (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). In another study, Pizzolato (2003) found that many high-risk students entered college with various levels of self-authoring capacity. According to the author this was primarily due to two factors: “provocative experiences”, which challenged students’ ways of knowing, and the notion of “privilege”. High privilege students entered college with scholarships or other guaranteed funding and a limited amount of preparation for the college experience. In contrast, low privilege students entered college without financial stability but possessed more internally grounded ways of knowing. Lastly, in a study that centered on lesbian college students, Abes and Jones (2004) found that as meaning making capacities became more complex, students were more successful with navigating external influences. In addition, the study outlined a more integrated conceptualization of identity construction and sexual orientation that involves the cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions.

These findings point to possibilities for identifying additional cohorts of students that might move closer to self-authorship during college, and the factors that influence this circumstance. The Self-Authorship model was instrumental for conceptualizing the ways in which higher education can better support students’ transition from external to
internal meaning making structures, and for identifying specific practices (such as undergraduate research) that might enable this circumstance. One final area of research related to identity development that informed this study is the notion of possible selves. I discuss this theory below.

The Possibilities of Possible Selves

My inquiry aimed to explore how undergraduate art majors engaged in an artistic research experience construct and navigate “who they are”, and also the ways in which they might explore possibilities for “who they might become” during the experience. Rather than identifying a single artistic identity common to all, I endeavored to discern the emerging and varied artistic identities of participants in order to understand what it means to become an artist (Josselson, 1996; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Mishler, 1999). In addition, the process of becoming, as I envisaged it in this inquiry, involves imagining the “possibilities for identity”, which involve contemplating identity in terms of past, present, and future perspectives. Thus, considering the notion of possible selves in relation to artistic identity/identities development further illuminated how I understood the processes of becoming for individuals in my study.

Markus and Nurius (1986) described possible selves as “complex and variable…but are authentic in the sense that they represent the individual’s persistent hopes and fears and indicate what could be realized given appropriate social conditions” (p. 965). Possible selves therefore represent an amalgam of past and present selves in order to realize a future self (selves). As I noted above, possible selves are social in nature as we envision our possible selves based on the social, cultural and historical contexts of our environment (Markus & Nurius, 1986). For example, an artist’s possible
self (selves) might be constructed in part from dominant sociocultural ideas such as the myth of the artist as genius, or the image of the artist as lonely and destitute. However, it must be noted that possible selves are not exclusively constructed from sociocultural (external) influences but rather emerge from a complex amalgamation of individual (internal) and sociocultural (external) elements (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The notion of possible selves was useful for examining the process of revision involved with identity formation (Josselson, 1996), and also how “different types of artistic “identities” (Mishler, 1999, p. 102) might emerge from one’s identity narrative.

For Markus and Nurius (1986), exploring and navigating possible selves is a critical component of the developmental process, which also involves the “working self-concept”:

The working self-concept derives from the set of self-conceptions that are presently active in thought and memory. It can be viewed as a continually active, shifting array of available self-knowledge. The array changes as individuals experience variation in internal states and social circumstances. The content of the working self-concept depends on what self-conceptions have been active just before, on what has been elicited or made dominant by the particular social environment, and on what has been more purposefully invoked by the individual in response to a given experience, event, or situation (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 957).

To this end, Markus and Nurius (1986) designed a study to measure possible selves within the self-concept. College students (n=210) were asked to complete a questionnaire, which addressed six categories (possibilities for the self) including general descriptors (creativity, intelligence), physical descriptors (good-looking, athletic), life-style possibilities (having an active social life, being health conscious), and general abilities (able to cook, knowledge about art or music), possibilities reflecting occupational alternatives (business executive, artist), possibilities regarding the opinions
of others (being appreciated, loved). Results indicated that individuals can indeed reflect on their possible selves, and more importantly their possible selves are not identical to their current selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In addition, possible selves are varied and are not constrained by current selves. Possible selves can act as incentives and they provide an evaluative and interpretive context for the current self.

Markus and Nurius (1986) concluded that possible selves “contribute to the fluidity or malleability of the self because they are differentially activated by the social situation and determine the nature of the working self-concept” (p. 965). In this study, I perceived the notion of possible selves as an additional way to underscore the process of identity development as a mutable and complex. Furthermore, through a consideration of how art majors might construct their possible selves, I endeavored to discover how participants imagine themselves as artists, and the process involved with forming and navigating an artistic identity/identities.

Finally, in 2007, Martin Erikson updated and expanded (1986) the foundational concept of possible selves put forth by Markus and Nurius. For Erikson (2007), agency is a distinct quality of the possible selves concept (Erikson, 2007). More importantly, agency is what separates the concept of possible selves from a life task or a simple hope or fear. As Martin (2007) explained, agency involves the experience of being an agent of say grief, how if “feels from the inside” (p. 352), rather than simply an idea of grief. In relation to artistic identity/identities, considering the notion of agency as an important feature of possible selves was useful for examining the possibilities for identity formation. For example, considering possible selves as an “experience of being” allowed for a more nuanced exploration of how participants visualized themselves as working
artists by building on the past and present and projecting into the future. Lastly, Erikson (2007) makes an additional point worth mentioning here. He argued that the narrative nature of possible selves is fruitful for investigation but that this aspect has not been thoroughly exploited in the literature. The narrative methodology I employed in this inquiry aimed to rectify this gap in the literature.

**Artistic Identity**

The literature around the construct of artistic identity/identities is limited and largely centers on how artistic/creative individuals construct and maintain artistic identities within the context of work, that is, the individual’s role as professional artist. My research on the other hand contributes to current understandings around the notion of artistic identity/identities from the perspective of undergraduates majoring in the arts. Considering competence and a sense of purpose, and also creativity in the identity formation process, I sought to understand the specific factors that influenced the construction of participant artistic identity/identities, and how individuals in my study were contemplating future career trajectories as creatives.

In an illuminating article on artistic careers, Lingo and Tepper (2013) noted the dearth of research dedicated to exploring the notion of artistic identity and how creative individuals develop and manage their identities as artists. The authors noted that in the current work environment, which demands flexibility and innovation, and is characterized by short-term project-based work and self-employment, artists must move away from established myths and stereotypes and toward the development of skills such as negotiation, marketing and a high level of professionalism (p. 352). Lingo and Tepper (2013) called for additional research to investigate how creative individuals sustain their
artistic identities through shifting professional demands, and how artistic identities are supported and reinforced (Lingo & Tepper, 2013). Most importantly, they noted that a theory of artistic identity, which considers the professional socialization of artists, was needed to thoroughly understand the growing phenomenon. My inquiry aimed to explore and document the perceptions of a group of diverse undergraduate art majors in the process of establishing and navigating their identities as artists, and the factors that influenced this process.

Modern western conceptions of the artistic/creative individual continue to be influenced by long-established myths created by society, culture and artists themselves (Hagman, 2010; Sawyer, 2006). Some of the most enduring myths include the artist as genius or touched by neuroses, the idea that making art is a difficult and solitary endeavor, and the notion that the artist is a unique individual with mystical creative powers (Sawyer, 2006). Empirical research has illuminated how artistic/creative individuals perceive such myths and how these myths might influence their identities. For example, a qualitative study involving thirty-three art students in Norway explored the notion of the charismatic myth of the artist (Royseng, Mangset, & Borgen, 2007). Briefly, the myth centers on some the elements enumerated above, including the artist as unique and solitary, and the idea that creativity emerges exclusively from within the individual. Royseng and others (2007) found that while participants incorporated elements of the traditional charismatic myth into their artistic identities they also re-shaped elements of the myth to fit a more contemporary conception of their artistic identities, one that included a careful consideration of practical aspects such as the ability to earn a living, and the realization that success is contingent on hard work in addition to talent.
Results of this study point to the complexity and also the shifting nature of identity as it relates to artistic/creative individuals. Investigating art majors who are in the process of developing their budding artistic identities must therefore include a careful consideration of the prevailing myths of the artist, and the role of such myths in the identity formation process.

To date, one of the most comprehensive studies on artistic identity is Bain’s (2004, 2005) work involving professional visual artists. In a study that included ten female artists working in Toronto, Canada, Bain (2004) investigated the role of space, in this case the artist’s studio, in the formation of an artistic identity. Bain argued that for these artists, the space of the studio represented status and belonging, which helped the women to form their identities as artists. Bain’s (2004) research is significant because it illuminates the perspectives of female artists and therefore complicates the dominant historical paradigm of the artist as a male figure. For example, the traditional myths of the artist, which include the image of a solitary individual willing to sacrifice one’s life for the pursuit of solitary artistic endeavors, are not necessarily circumstances with which contemporary women can identify. Rather, for the women in this study, the space of the studio signaled a safe, familiar environment. In fact several women equated the space of the studio to that of the “home”. For instance, many women decorated the space to create a more comfortable and welcoming environment, and for most women the studio was described as a space of refuge and calm. For these women, making space for their artistic endeavors simultaneously concerned making space for their creative “selves” and their identities as artists. Moreover, the space of the studio allowed them to explore their identities as artists on their own terms. Bain (2004) found that for most participants,
regardless of their personal situations, having a dedicated space in which to create art seemed to legitimize their artistic identities. The studios also validated their roles and status as professional artists (Bain, 2004).

A year later, Bain (2005) published findings from the larger study on which the study described above was based. In the larger study, Bain (2005) conducted interviews with eighty professional visual artists to understand how participants construct and communicate a professional artistic identity. Bain (2005) was particularly interested in examining the relationship between the self and work. She selected visual artists because as she indicated, for this group the relationship between the self and the notion of work is often ambiguous and tenuous. To explain, unlike other professions where academic credentials allow an individual to establish a personal and professional identity, artistic work does not hold a similar association. As Bain (2005) explained, the profession of art is not viewed as “real” work (p. 25) thus individuals must fashion and maintain an artistic identity in order to communicate who and what they are. In addition, without the traditional structures of work such as the physical environment of the workspace, visual artists employ a variety of myths and stereotypes to present their artistic selves, and this information becomes part of their professional artistic identities (Bain, 2005).

The notion of “real” work is highly problematic in regard to artistic practice. For example, one participant in Bain’s (2005) study discussed what she “does” in the studio (making art), and how it is in fact “work”. The disconnect between what work means to artists, and the traditional notion of work as productive, scheduled, and linked to compensation problematizes an artist’s identity and one’s sense of self. Another artist in Bain’s (2005) study further elucidated these issues. She noted that since society assumes
artists are doing what they love most people feel that artists should not charge money for their work. Again, the misrecognition reflected in this example involve the idea that because western society views art largely as a leisure activity that involves creativity and freedom, it has little relationship to traditional notions of work.

For Bain, (2005) the misunderstandings and disconnect in regard to the sociocultural views around of what it means to be an artist results in a circumstance whereby creative individuals construct an artistic identity that is simultaneously reliant on and separate from prevailing myths and stereotypes about artists. The influence of prevailing ideas about artists and artistic work additionally results in the formation of a fluid artistic identity, and one that is constantly re-constructed in response to sociocultural influences. Bain (2005) concluded that the moniker of “professional artist” is thus an empty signifier, at odds with the dominant narratives about working artists. While Bain’s work involves the examination of artistic identity formation within the context of work, and what it means to be a professional artist, her work is nonetheless instrumental in highlighting the conditions and elements that shape an individual’s identity. In addition, Bain’s (2004, 2005) research further underscores the fact that identity formation is a complex and fluid process, which is co-constructed by the creative individual in concert with sociocultural elements. Finally, while Bain’s (2004, 2005) research is highly instructive for understanding how professional artists develop an artistic identity, my research project with college art majors endeavored to contribute to what is known about the early stages of artistic identity formation.

In the middle of the nineteen seventies Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) published findings from one of the most comprehensive longitudinal studies of artistic
development to date. Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) followed a group of art majors for several years after graduation. A major finding that emerged from the study was the notion of problem finding. In contrast to problem solving, in the case of problem finding, the individual must find both the problem and the solution related to a particular issue. Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) used the term “discovered problem” to identify this phenomenon. As Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) noted, discovered problems require a high level of creativity and imagination. Rather than a reliance on external influences/formulas, the individual internally generates discovered problems. For instance, a highly creative artist developing a new work of art does not rely on an existing template or follow a formula to create a work but instead formulates a problem (the impetus for the work), and the solution (the work) through the creative process.

A curious connection between the process of the discovered problem and the process of self-authorship is worth noting here. For instance, authoring one’s life cannot be achieved through reliance on external influences or formulas but rather results from grappling with internal meaning-making structures and decision-making. Similarly, the most creative artists trust their internal decision making processes to produce highly creative and innovative work (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976). Contemplating the complex nature of these processes allow for a more nuanced exploration of identity formation. Returning to Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi’s (1976) study, their findings inspired a number of their graduate students to explore additional areas of research related to the notion of artistic development. One of these students, Mark Freeman, conducted a sociopsychological life history interview study with several participants from the original study.
Freeman’s (1993) research involved an exploration about how prevailing myths of the artist influenced the formation of an artistic identity, and how creative individuals work through their creative competence, mastery, and sense of purpose as artistic individuals. According to Freeman (1993), artistic identity involves an individual’s conception of what it means to be an artist. Freeman (1993) interviewed a group of 54 (28 men and 26 women) art students approximately twenty years after they graduated from an art related program at the University of Chicago. Of the 54 participants, most had become teachers, n=38. Of this group, 20 were teaching at the college level. After art school, 50 participants reported being “very” or “moderately” active in making art. Of the original group (n=54), 36 remained active, and 31 remained very active and had been involved with making art on an ongoing basis since graduation. Approximately 15 participants abandoned art and had not returned to it at the time of the interviews; however, they expressed interest in returning to their art at some point in the future. Some participants in Freeman’s study described themselves with reference to the traditional myths of the artist such as alienation, or the refusal of a bourgeois lifestyle. However, others in the sample did not associate their artistic selves with prevailing myths of the artist. Freeman (1993) was specifically interested in examining the impact of the negative myths in relation to an individual’s artistic production and artistic identity.

Freeman (1993) found that individuals who embraced negative myths at the beginning of their artistic careers seemed to struggle a great deal with making art and thinking about themselves as artists after graduation. For a few participants, these myths were debilitating and prevented them from creating work. The narratives also revealed artistic identity as a mutable phenomenon, one that continued to shift throughout
adulthood. These identities were also highly influenced by sociocultural forces (Freeman, 1993). For instance, one participant described how she dedicated lots of time and energy to figuring out who she was as an artist and how to be one. For this participant, the process of “becoming” an artist included reading books about what an artist’s life is like, and struggling to find a personal style. Other participants who left art soon after graduation spoke about not being talented enough to be good artists. These individuals viewed their artistic capabilities as limited, and not a skill or ability that could be developed over time and with practice (Freeman, 1993). This detail was critical for Freeman because for these individuals, prevailing “myths” of the artist such as the idea that one is born with creative talent, served to undermine their creative process. These beliefs essentially prevented them from realizing their creativity and their potentialities as artists. On the other hand, individuals who did not allow the prevailing myths to guide their creative process or self-knowledge of what it means to be an artist were more productive and successful.

Ultimately, Freeman (1993) observed that artistic development occurs when a creative individual frees oneself from the negative myths of the artist, and when one practices one’s artistic ability rather than believing that creativity is an inherent gift that cannot be developed over time. Freeman’s (1993) work underscores both the importance of competence in regard to the developmental process, and the ways in which the identity development process is largely influenced by sociocultural factors. It likewise points to the meaning making processes of these individuals, specifically the epistemological subject-object relationship described by Kegan (1994, Kegan & Lahey, 2010), and Baxter Magolda (2001; Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).
Another study that centered on identity formation in the context of artistic/creative individuals is Mishler’s (1999) work with craft artists. Mishler (1999) conducted life history interviews with five craft artists. He was particularly interested in exploring how adult work identities as craft artists were shaped over time, and also how the identities of these individuals were influenced by life experiences. Like Josselson’s (1996) examination of female college students, Mishler (1999) found much variability in the artists’ life histories. Furthermore, the conflicts and tensions that artists faced at different points in their lives compelled them to constantly shift and re-examine their ideas about who they were as artists and individuals.

For Mishler (1999), the tension and conflicts within and between the artists’ identities was both instructive and revealing. For instance, one participant spoke about needing to create work despite other life responsibilities such as raising children. Mishler (1999) identified this balance as a “conjunct identity”, or the ability to balance two strong motives in one’s life. He concluded that in the case of the craft artists one must speak of “artistic identities” (p. 102) rather than a singular, unchanging creative identity. As with other research discussed in this review, studies that address the phenomenon of artistic identity underscore the impossibility of defining one set of characteristics or qualities that define all artistic/creative individuals. Rather, as Mishler (1999) has argued, artistic identities function in different ways according to the circumstances of an individual’s life and the degree to which creative endeavors figure in one’s life. Mishler’s (1999) work, like the other studies discussed above, demonstrate that the process of identity is mutable, and involves “possible selves” (Markus & Nurius, 1986) rather than a singular, immutable self. Mishler’s (1999) study, along with that of Josselson (1996), provided
much insight for exploring the first research question I proposed in this inquiry. Moreover, through a narrative inquiry approach, and with a specific focus on undergraduate art majors; I endeavored to investigate the distinctiveness of creative lives and identities rather than searching for commonalities that unite all artistic/creative individuals.

Finally, the notion of artistic identity has been explored in children. Rostan (1998) investigated how children might form artistic and creative identities. Specifically, she was interested in examining young artists to discover the early phases of identity formation in creative individuals. She sought to investigate the origins of artistic and creative identity and to observe “artists in the making”. The study included 39 children between the ages of 8-11 years of age who participated in an after school art program. Unstructured video taped interviews were conducted with participants to ascertain what they were producing and how they felt about the work. Three themes emerged from the interviews including what it means to be an artist, what it means to be creative, and important aspects of the participants’ creative works. Several characteristics of artistic identity in children emerged from the study including motivation, knowledge and purposeful work, working hard, imagination, making “realistic” work, and communicating feelings. In addition, Rostan (1998) discovered that conceptions of what it means to be an artist shifted through the emergent process of creation.

In a related line of inquiry, Albert (1990) conducted a longitudinal study that considered the identity, experiences, and career choices of exceptionally gifted and eminent (in math/science or high IQs) boys. Albert (1990) illuminated the link between creativity and the developmental process. As he noted, creativity within this context was
characterized by the decisions an individual makes, which was predicated on self-knowledge and the specific aspects of one’s world; for example, an openness to experience and ambiguity and intellectual curiosity (Albert, 1990). He also noted that an individual’s “creativity and personal identity are emergent” (p. 19). As the individual grows, the creative part of one’s identity shifts and changes; creativity and identity are thus interconnected and interdependent. The interconnectedness of the processes of creativity and identity development will be discussed in a later section of this review.

Albert (1990) offered several recommendations for supporting young people (gifted or not) as they develop a sense of identity and ponder the future, which are relevant to this study. For example, he encouraged parents and teachers to help children to explore emotions such as passion and joy, which might assist in the development of creativity. Albert (1990) also emphasized the importance of “involvement” rather than simply focusing on techniques, and the importance of allowing children to experience error, surprise and novelty as these experiences allow them to ponder important questions such as: “What do I think? How do I know? What can I do?” (p. 29), questions that Baxter Magolda (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012) later proposed in reference to college students. As she noted, higher education must support students in developing internal ways of knowing so that they are better able to answer “big picture” questions such as the ones proposed by Albert (1990). The foundational research of Rostan (1998) and Albert (1990) provides important insight into the early processes of identity formation. More importantly, this research demonstrates the possible influence of creativity on the identity formation process, and the notion that creativity and identity formation are emergent and mutable elements.
The Significance of Social Identity/Identities

As I have stated above, identity is mutable and emerges from a variety of factors both internal and external to the individual. In addition, identity may be understood as a social construction, which involves the larger historical, political, and cultural milieu in which the individual inhabits. In this section, I review select literature related to social identities, which guided both my understanding around the dynamics of these complex systems or dimensions of identity, and the ways in which these systems/dimensions influence identity formation. Through a review of the literature I also aim to further clarify how identity may be understood as mutable, emergent and social in nature. My inquiry examined how undergraduate students navigate and construct their emerging identities as artists and creative individuals. To thoroughly engage with the construct of identity, it was necessary to recognize how social identities emerged from (and functioned within) participant narratives.

In the most basic terms, social identities are the labels used to categorize and identify individuals in society. While gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, and class seem to receive the most attention in the literature, other identities such as disability and nationality are equally significant and gaining prominence in the literature. Weber (2010) noted that social identities such as gender, race, and class have been characterized as “universal” and immutable phenomena. For instance, she introduced the basic “definitions” for each of these categories in order to illustrate the static nature of examining these elements in terms of definitions. As she noted, gender is typically defined as “culturally and socially structured relationships between women and men”, and race is usually defined as “ancestry and selected physical characteristics, such as skin
color, hair texture, and eye shape (p. 27). Lastly, class is typically linked to “one’s position in the economy” (p. 27). Although these definitions offer a starting point, they do not go far enough to illuminate the highly complex and mutable nature of these dimensions of identity (Weber, 2010).

In western societies, hegemonic values and norms inform social identities such as gender, race, and class (Andersen & Hill Collins, 2013; Jones & Abes, 2013; Weber, 2010). Furthermore, social identities largely involve the dynamics of privilege and oppression (Jones & Abes, 2013; Weber, 2010). Weber (2010) characterized social identities such as gender, class, and race as complex, pervasive, variable, persistent, sever, and power based (p. 23). Similar to Josselson (1996), she notes that the “meaning and experience” of these identities shift and evolve over time as an individual moves through life (p. 24). Jones and Abes (2013) explained that the process of identity construction is bound up with the interplay between privilege and oppression. To clarify, social identities derive meaning in response to and in concert with the larger established societal systems of inequality that involve both privilege and oppression (p.38). These elements must be acknowledged and considered in order to fully understand the identity formation process (p. 38). An individual’s ideas regarding gender, race, or social class emerge from a complex interplay between how one views oneself, and how society views her/him. The “story” of one’s identity is incomplete without a thorough consideration of how the various “parts” emerge from and function within oneself.

Andersen and Hill Collins (2013) conceptualized social identities as “intersectional systems of inequality” (p. 61), which operate within social power structures. They added that social identities do not emerge from “natural” states but social
and historical “processes” (p. 62). Another significant feature of social identities is how they tend to be characterized in “binary terms” such as male versus female or Black versus White. These binary structures facilitate oppression and “otherness” among social groups (p. 63). Finally, similar to other authors I have discussed above, Andersen and Hill Collins (2013) argued that categories such as gender, race, and class are not fixed but rather these elements shift and change over time, (p. 63) and are impacted by the environs one inhabits. For most participants in my inquiry the formation of artist identity/identities involved a complex amalgam of social identities, the most prominent of these were gender, class, and race. While these are not the only identities pertinent to the construction of self, these three emerged as highly relevant to the majority of participants in my study.

Another important factor to consider in regards to social identities is the notion of identity salience (Jones & Abes, 2013, Jones & McEwen, 2000; Hurtado, Alvarado, & Guillermo-Wann, 2015). Identity salience involves the degree to which an individual embraces a certain feature of her/his identity. For example, an individual might privilege or feel more connected to her/his gender over race for example. In the context of my study, identity salience was critical to understanding the ways in which participants constructed and navigated their artistic identity/identities.

The conceptualizations of social identities that I discussed above demonstrate how identity formation is mutable, and how an individual’s identity shifts and evolves in response to sociopolitical environs. The interconnected nature of these elements/systems was particularly useful to my inquiry because gender, race and class did not emerge as
separate entities in participant narratives but rather these dimensions intersected and overlapped during the study and within the individual narratives.

Creativity

In this study, I explored the potential role of creativity in the process of artistic identity formation. I observed this process through the experiences and perceptions of art majors engaged in an undergraduate research project, which included the development of a research-based art project from idea to installation. As I discussed earlier in this review, identity formation concerns, among other elements, competence and a sense of purpose, which in the context of art majors is intimately connected to creativity and the creative process. In this section, I review how creativity is defined and theorized in the literature, and I consider the role it can play in the development of an artistic identity/identities. I also discuss the systems approach to creativity to provide context for how the construct of creativity is conceptualized in my inquiry. I conclude the section by examining what is known about the link between artists and creativity.

Creativity: Contexts and Definitions

To frame the construct of creativity within the context of this study I begin with a brief overview of how creativity is categorized and defined in the literature. According to Sawyer (2006), creativity research (within the domain of psychology) may be categorized into three historical “phases”. The first phase, which emerged in the 1950’s, focused on the personality of creative individuals. For example, early studies centered on the biographical aspects of creative individuals in order to discover unique personality traits associated with the creative individual (Amabile, 1996). During this early period, creativity was also linked to intelligence. By the 1970’s the second phase of creativity
began to emerge and centered on cognition, or the mental processes that contribute to creativity (Sawyer, 2006). Cognitive psychologists emphasized four stages of the creative process including preparation, incubation, insight and verification (Sawyer, 2006).

A sociocultural approach characterizes the third phase of creativity research, which emerged during the early 1980’s. Howard Becker’s (1982) research on “art worlds” underscored the sociological and cultural influences on creativity, specifically in regard to artists. In Creativity in Context, Amabile (1996) demonstrated how supposed “objective” personality tests used to measure originally failed to consider the impact of subjectivity inherent in the tests, what she referred to as subjective creativity judgments (p.33), and Csikszentmihalyi (1990,1996) has argued that creativity involves an interconnected system between the individual, society, and culture. My study is aligned with the third phase of creativity, which focuses on how creativity emerges from the sociocultural context.

Finally, in an anthology which explored the philosophy of creativity, Paul and Kaufman (2014) traced the discourse around creativity to Plato and Socrates, who described poets as divinely “inspired (p. 3), and later Kant and Schopenhauer who considered artistic genius as involving mystery and the ability to lose oneself in the experience (p.4). These musings provide historical contexts for the persistent myths and narratives of the artist, and the notion of creativity. In their examination of the philosophy of creativity Paul and Kaufman (2014) noted that creativity is “a vehicle for self-expression and part of what makes us who we are” (p. 3). The authors further explained: “Creativity seems to be linked to our very identity; it is part of what makes us who we are both as human beings and individuals” (p. 8-9). My research project endeavored to study
this “link” with regard to undergraduate art majors. Next, I consider the construct of creativity through a model that takes into account the many aspects of creativity I have described above.

**Creativity and the Domain of Art: A Systems Model**

Csikszentmihalyi’s systems approach to creativity was useful for investigating the creative process among individuals engaged in an artistic research project. In the systems approach, creativity is an *emergent* process, which involves a combination of individual, social, historical, and cultural factors (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Considering participant stories with the systems approach in mind yielded insights into the connections between creativity and the creative process in the formation of participant artistic identity/identities.

Creativity involves an interaction between the individual, the domain, and the field (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999 in Sternberg). The domain represents the “culture” in which the creative product is developed, and the field is the “society” that determines the “novelty” of a particular product (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999 in Sternberg). The domain provides “flexible rules for creative, playful action” (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2003, p. 24). In my study, the domain was the university art environment (art department). The field is comprised of professors and other instructional staff who evaluate the artistic work product. However, the field does not simply represent the competitive, evaluative component of the system; rather, it includes figures who are important for developing and sustaining good work and positive relationships (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). Faculty mentors, other scholarship recipients, and additional staff such as the scholarship director represented the field in my inquiry.
These individuals were an important source of support and motivation and therefore strongly contributed to the individual’s process of creation.

In the systems model the domain is the cultural repository of established creative forms or notations such as language, for example. In order to introduce a potentially novel idea or product one must know (and practice) the “language” of the culture intimately. The novelty of the idea or product is evaluated and accepted into the domain based upon the established cultural language. When an individual “changes” a domain this represents an instance of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). There are a variety of reasons why an individual is capable of changing the domain. For instance, the individual might be well positioned to engender the change, or a specific personal quality might provide an advantage.

In the systems model, change in the domain is not possible without the influence and judgment of the field (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). The field or “gatekeepers” for the social component of the domain evaluate what should be permitted to enter the domain. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) has compared the systems model to the biological process of evolution. However, unlike the biological process, within the environs of “cultural evolution”, new ideas are not automatically transmitted to the next generation; rather, individuals must learn the cultural “memes” such as songs, laws, and values in order to succeed in the culture and make change. It is the cultural “memes” that creative individuals change through their endeavors. If these contributions are judged to be novel and appropriate they are recognized as creative. From the systems perspective, creativity does not solely result from the efforts of the individual; rather, an artistic work or idea or product requires recognition from both the domain and the field. In the systems approach
the role of society and culture figure prominently in the creative process. Although in one’s mind one may consider one’s self “creative”, it is only when one gains acceptance from the field and the domain (society and culture) that the creative self (selves) can emerge and be recognized. As in the case of identity, the process of creativity is constantly re-constructed and filtered through the lens of society and culture.

Recent research in neuroscience continues to support the notion of creativity as a “system” of characteristics (Kaufman & Gregoire, 2015). The “multifaceted nature of creativity” (p. xxiv) involves a combination of characteristics such as intelligence, skills, confidence, inner motivation, and a variety of environmental factors. In other words, creativity results from a multiplicity of factors (p. xxiv) rather than high achievement in a single area.

*The Literature on the Process of Creativity*

My investigation involved art majors engaged in an undergraduate research experience in which the outcome was a research-based art project; the creative process was thus a primary feature of this experience. It is therefore essential to consider how the creative process has been defined, specifically within the domain of psychology. Research on the creative process dates to at least the late nineteenth-century (Lubart, 2001). In 1908, the French mathematician Henri Poincaré outlined an early formulation of the creative process in an essay about mathematical creativity. This four-step process was later formalized to include the following steps: preparation, incubation, illumination and verification (Guilford, 1950; Wallas, 1926). It is important to note that although the creative process has historically been defined in terms of “steps”, most scholars emphasize that these steps do not denote a literal representation for how the creative
process works for every individual, nor do they characterize every instance of creativity (Amabile, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Rather, these steps suggest possible patterns that have been observed in empirical research on the creative process. More recent conceptualizations of the creative process expand on the basic four-step model. For instance, Amabile (1996) outlined a theory for the creative process, which involves a five-step process including presentation, preparation, response generation, response validation, and outcome. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) likewise identified a five-step process, which I explicate below.

How might the creative process function for art majors engaged in an undergraduate research project? Csikszentmihalyi’s (1996) conceptualization of the creative process was particularly useful for considering this question. For Csikszentmihalyi (1996), the process of creativity typically commences with curiosity about a particular problem or issue. This is followed by a period of: incubation, during which ideas churn around below the threshold of consciousness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p.79). Insight or realization is the next step in the process. This is the stage at which the puzzle pieces begin to take shape. The fourth step in the process involves a high level of uncertainty, self-doubt and self-criticism. It is during this stage that the individual must decide whether or not the idea or product is “novel”, and it is during this stage that one must decide whether the field and the domain will embrace it. The last step in the creative process is perhaps the most challenging. It involves the complete execution of the idea in order to bring it to fruition (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). To clarify, these steps are not linear but rather when and how they occur vary based on the individual. For example, an individual might contemplate an issue or remain in the incubation stage for long periods
of time before moving to another step. Moreover, I argue that the steps of the creative process as described by Csikszentmihalyi (1996) share commonalities with the process of research, which renders his scheme particularly useful to this research project. Thus, the process outlined by Csikszentmihalyi (1996) provided a useful approach for considering how participants conceptualized both the creative and research processes during my study.

The Intersection between the Process of Creativity and the Process of Development

In this research project I aimed to explore how art majors develop an artistic identity and how this identity may be influenced by creativity. In order to elucidate this phenomenon, next I explain how both development (identity formation) and creativity can be understood as processes, and how these processes inform one another and are interconnected. Development and creativity are emergent processes within complex systems (Sawyer, 2003). As I indicated above, in the systems model, creativity involves the individual’s interaction with the sociocultural environs of the field and the domain. The development and emergence of an artistic identity is therefore bound up with the creative process as both processes emerge through the individual’s habitation within the system. Moreover, the interconnected nature of these processes also involves mediating factors. For example, in the developmental and creative processes, symbol systems such as languages (or myths of the artist for example) influence both identity and the creative process. Abuhamdeh and Csikszentmihalyi (2004) further explicate this dynamic.

As they noted, while the notion of the “artistic personality” might explain some of the characteristics of the creative individual, a consideration of the sociocultural environs in which the individual operates is critical for understanding artistic creativity.
(Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2004). The authors further noted: “One does not become an artist simply by making art. To earn a living and develop a self-concept as a bona fide artist…one must be legitimated by the appropriate art institutions” (p. 37). The “artist” emerges when the field recognizes the “creative work”. Creative endeavors are therefore intimately linked to one’s identity. To be recognized as creative is to be recognized as an artist.

A major component of my inquiry centered on understanding the role of creativity in the process of “becoming” an artist. However, it must be emphasized that the process of “becoming” is mutable and fluid, and depends on one’s ability to navigate one’s identity in various situations. For instance, an art student who embodies the typical image of the tortured and introverted artist might be viewed as original and innovative by professors; however, to sustain success as an artist beyond art school requires individuals to be flexible and open to changes within the domain (Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2004; Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976).

Several studies have demonstrated that success in art school does not necessarily transfer to success in the art world (Freeman, 1993; Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976). For example, some students who were judged to be less creative than their colleagues persevered in the art world after graduation despite the fact that they were judged “less creative” in art school. And some students who were more introverted in art school had difficulties adapting to changing circumstances and environments within the art world. These experiences further underscore the important connection between creativity and identity development. Research related to artists and identity (Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010) found that art majors who possess more internally generated ways of knowing,
and successfully work through identity crisis are better prepared for personal and professional challenges after college. Thus, investigating how art majors develop and navigate an artistic identity/identities must be understood in tangent with the creative aspects of who they are and the creative process.

*Artists and Creativity*

For artistic/creative individuals, the processes of identity development and creativity involve competence and a sense of purpose. Thus, questions such as *how do artists conceptualize the notion of creativity?*, and *what does the term creativity mean to artists?* were pertinent to my inquiry. A study that included sixty-four artists in a variety of artistic domains aimed to explore answers to these questions (Gluck, Ernst, & Unger, 2002). The study asked “free” (painters, sculptors) and “constrained (designers, architects) creatives to define creativity. The authors hypothesized that individuals in these two groups would define creativity in different ways because creativity is defined and understood differently within various creative domains (Gluck, Ernst, & Unger, 2002). Results highlighted important similarities and differences between the two groups. For example, both groups ranked assertiveness, cultural competencies, and richness of ideas very high. However, free artists ranked intrinsic motivation lower than constrained artists. In addition, free artists ranked artistic personality higher than constrained artists. Moreover, the free artists associated the notion of hard work with creative achievements. For constrained artists, originality and the artistic personality was less of a concern, but intrinsic motivation was highly rated by this group. The constrained group conceptualized creativity in terms of its value in society and emphasized function as the most important component of creativity.
Study results demonstrate that how one defines creativity is linked to the type of creative work in which one is engaged, how the individual views her or his creative contributions within society, and how one views oneself as an “artist”. These data confirm findings I discussed earlier in this review such as how creative individuals view their “work” as artists (Bain, 2004, 2005), how the type of work creatives perform influences how they see themselves as artists (Lena & Lindemann, 2014), and how the traditional myths of the artist are simultaneously embraced and re-conceptualized in the current environment (Freeman, 1993; Royseng et al., 2007). Finally, the Gluck and others (2002) study demonstrates the ways in which the processes of identity and creativity are emergent and interconnected.

Finally, Rostan (2010) examined how early engagement with artistic activities shape one’s view of creativity. The researcher conducted a study with fifty-one children ranging from ages 9 to 15 who participated in an after school visual arts program. She was interested in examining how a young person’s motivation to pursue visual arts training might launch one’s journey toward competence and creativity. The study revealed the ways in which sustained practice and engagement in artistic tasks (drawing) might influence changes in thinking and competence. Results indicated that older students who engaged in sustained artistic activities gained technical skills, honed problem finding skills, and demonstrated perseverance. Engagement also resulted in satisfaction, motivation, and a sense of purpose (Rostan, 2010). She concluded that early experience with art engenders skill acquisition, motivation, and a sense of purpose. Engagement can also foster distinct habits of mind and stimulate creativity. These findings were relevant to my inquiry because they demonstrate the potential benefits of
sustained engagement in artistic activities. The data also reveal a curious link to the
practice of undergraduate research, which has been associated with fostering competence,
positive habits of mind, and skill acquisition through engagement. In the next section of
this review, I discuss the literature on the context for this study, undergraduate research,
to illustrate how this educational practice can influence artistic identity. I also outline
what is known about undergraduate research in the arts.

Undergraduate Research

In this literature review I have presented an overview of research that
demonstrates the possibilities for an emerging artistic identity and the role of creativity in
this process. The existing literature has not always included college students as part of
this exploration. My study further endeavored to contribute new understandings around
undergraduate art majors engaged in the high-impact practice of undergraduate research
(UR). By using the practice of UR as the context, I hoped to discover how participation in
UR might influence a student’s identity development and creativity, and sense of purpose
related to artistic professional endeavors. I begin this section with background
information to frame the aims and impact of UR within the context of higher education.
Next, I define undergraduate research, and I provide a brief review of the outcomes and
benefits of undergraduate research. This is followed by a discussion of UR in the context
of underrepresented groups and the notion of a science identity. I conclude the section
with an overview of the scant research on the practice of undergraduate research in the
arts.

Participants in my study were engaged in two high-impact practices (HIPs): a
summer study abroad experience and undergraduate research. During the summer
semester abroad participants were enrolled in coursework and engaged in research activities. In the fall semester, participants completed a research project, which included composing a research proposal, developing a research-based art project, and creating a research poster to accompany the art project. Observing students engaged in high-impact practices is important for two reasons. First, empirical research indicates that students who participate in high-impact practices develop more complex ways of making meaning from their experiences (Baxter Magolda, 2007; Torres, 2011). These experiences also help students gain more confidence in their skills and abilities (Kilgo, Ezell Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015). Participation likewise results in better preparation for future success in graduate school and careers (Gilmore, Vieyra, Timmerman, Feldon, & Maher, 2015).

While the majority of research concerning HIPs, particularly undergraduate research, involves students in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) disciplines, a major aim of my research was to expand what is known about the benefits and outcomes of HIPs from the perspective of students in non-STEM majors, namely art majors.

The topic of undergraduate research has attracted a substantial amount of attention in the literature since the publication of the Boyer Commission Report (1998), which called for research universities in the United States to embrace transformational change in undergraduate education. The report provided a *blueprint* or vision for change, which aimed to set the model for educational excellence at the nation’s research universities, and improve the balance between the research-teaching nexus (BCR, 1998). However, the environment of higher education in the United States has changed substantially since the publication of the Boyer Report.
Recently, attention has shifted to an emphasis on “student success” in the areas of persistence, degree completion, global citizenship, job readiness, and preparation for graduate or professional school. This has placed high-impact practices (HIPs) such as undergraduate research at the forefront of undergraduate education reform (Kuh, 2008). Reform measures have also coincided with the urgent need for colleges and universities to remain competitive and relevant in the expanding global education marketplace (Altbach & Forest, 2006). As a result, other types of HIP experiences such as study abroad have also received increased attention in the literature (Campbell & Schneider-Rebozo, 2014; Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2010; Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut, & Klute, 2012).

**Defining Undergraduate Research**

The definition of undergraduate research put forth by the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) emphasizes discovery, investigation, and dissemination of research findings: *An inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate student that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline* (http://www.cur.org). Moreover, Hensel (2012) has outlined a broad range of characteristics or “best practices” that characterize excellence in UR including institutional commitment, faculty engagement and accessibility among others. Additional understandings of UR are described below.

Scholars have expanded the definition of UR to encompass characteristics such as creativity (Showman, Cat, Cook, Holloway & Wittman, 2013). In addition, Hu and others (2008) have outlined a basic set of characteristics common to the UR experience in all disciplines, these include:
● A faculty mentor who directs the research
● Development of a research project
● Composition of a research proposal that outlines research
● Training in research skills, method, design, and the research process
● Data collection and analysis
● Synthesis of the results in written form
● Presentation of the results

All seven of the characteristics outlined above encompass the UR experience described in my study. Kinkead (2003) has also put forth a useful definition that highlights the production of original work (p. 6), and the crucial role of the research mentor. Finally, it should be noted that the UR experience varies according to the discipline and distinct context of the UR project. For instance, in STEM disciplines, mentored research might involve working closely with a mentor in the lab or as part of a larger research team. In the arts and humanities a UR experience might include more independent research, which is carefully monitored by the mentor.

Benefits and Outcomes of Undergraduate Research

Extant literature on the topic of undergraduate research focuses on the “benefits” of student engagement including improved critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, better preparation for a career and/or graduate or professional school, and an appreciation for lifelong learning (Bauer & Bennett, 2003; Desai, Gatson, Stiles, Stewart, Laine, & Quick, 2008; Hu, Kuh, & Gales, 2007; Lopatto, 2007; Lopatto, 2009; Russell, Hancock, & McCullough, 2007; Seymour, Hunter, Laursen, & Deantoni, 2004; Schmitz & Havholm, 2015; Urias, Gallagher, & Wartman, 2012). Issues such as persistence, the impact of summer research experiences for undergraduates (REUs), undergraduate research capacity, undergraduate research course integration, and faculty engagement have also been investigated (Frost & Teodorescu, 2001; Karukstis, & Elgren, 2007;
Lopatto, 2004; Nadelson, Walters, & Waterman, 2010). Taken together, these studies offer a broad range of inquiry dedicated to the practice of undergraduate research, and they provide empirical evidence for the benefits and outcomes of UR experiences.

Although most research in this area involves students majoring in STEM disciplines, it is nonetheless important to review what is known about UR from this perspective as the major outcomes discussed in the literature regarding STEM students such as gains in research and critical thinking skills, increased interest in post-graduate study, preparation for the world of work, and the formation of a “science identity” are likewise relevant to the issues and research questions that I proposed in this inquiry.

As I indicated above, the majority of existing research regarding the practice of UR primarily focuses on benefits and outcomes from the perspective of students in STEM disciplines. An early study by Nagda and others (1998) linked UR engagement to increased persistence and graduation rates. Additional reported benefits and outcomes include the student gains in the development of critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and research skills (Desai, Gatson, Stiles, Stewart, Laine, & Quick, 2008; Gray, Coates, Fraser, & Pierce, 2015; Hu, Kuh, & Gales, 2007; Lopatto, 2007, 2009; Russell, Hancock, & McCullough, 2007; Russell, 2008; Thiry, Laursen, & Hunter, 2011; Thiry, Weston, Laursen, & Hunter, 2012). For example, 1,100 students at 41 institutions who completed the first iteration of the Survey of Undergraduate Research Experiences (SURE) in 2003 ranked understanding of the research process and readiness for more demanding research as the top gains from the UR experience (Lopatto, 2004, p. 273).
Several studies have also reported student perceived gains in student preparation for (and increased desire to pursue) a STEM career, and pursue graduate education in STEM disciplines (Bauer & Bennett, 2003; Junge, Quinones, Kakietek, Teodorescu, & Marsteller, 2010; Kardash et al, 2008; Lopatto, 2004, 2007; NSSE, 2007; Russell, 2008; Russell et al, 2007; Seymour et al, 2004). For example, Bauer and Bennett (2003) surveyed nearly 1,000 alumni from a midsized, research-intensive university to understand alumni perceptions and possible impacts of UR experiences. Results indicated that 80% of alumni who participated in UR experiences pursued graduate education compared to 59% of alumni who did not engage in UR.

Recent research on the practice of UR and outcomes has confirmed earlier findings. For instance, using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Webber and others (2013) explored student and faculty engagement in UR activities. While their research confirmed previous findings regarding the positive outcomes of UR such as increased skill acquisition, and the connection between participation in UR and success in graduate school, findings also revealed disappointing information regarding women and underrepresented populations. For example, Webber and others (2013) discovered that women and first generation students were less likely to participate in UR activities than men and students who were not first generation college students (Webber et al., 2013). The authors suggested two possible reasons for these results including the larger proportion of male students in STEM, and the lack of female role models in STEM disciplines. However, the authors also noted the critical importance of institutional culture regarding student and faculty participation in UR, and the need to
develop additional programming to support the success of underrepresented students in UR.

In another recent study, Gilmore and others (2015) examined the link between undergraduate research experiences and research skill performance in graduate school. Results demonstrated a strong and positive link between participation in undergraduate research and performance in the area of STEM research skills. Results also confirmed previous findings as regards to the length of UR experiences and outcomes. The largest gains were reported for students who had engaged in extended research experiences as undergraduates (Gilmore et al., 2015). These data echo similar issues and findings discussed in an earlier section of this review as regards to students majoring in the arts. For example, the need for additional research that considers career trajectories of women and minorities in the arts (Frenette, Miller, Martin, Gaskill, & Tepper, 2016; SNAAP, 2013), and the importance of sustained engagement as in the case of Rostan’s (2010) study. Below, I present a brief review of UR and underrepresented populations to highlight the gaps in the literature concerning these groups, and to highlight some curious similarities between the development of a “science identity” and how this phenomenon relates to the research questions I investigated in this study.

*Undergraduate Research and Underrepresented Minorities: Outcomes and Issues*

Although extant literature focuses on the benefits and outcomes of UR involving students at a variety of institutions including research universities and liberal arts colleges, an important area of emerging research considers the practice in regard to underrepresented student groups (Finley & McNair, 2013; Jones, Barlow, & Villarejo, 2010; Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup, & Kuh, 2008; O'Donnell, Botelho, Brown, González, &
Head, 2015). Below I discuss several key studies that consider the perspectives of diverse students engaged in UR to underscore commonalities with my inquiry.

Several studies have investigated the significant relationship between academic socialization and underrepresented minority (URM) student development of a science identity. In a qualitative study involving fifteen women of color, Carlone and Johnson (2007) developed a model of science identity centered on the elements competence, performance, and recognition. The model, largely informed by Gee’s theory of identity, outlines how individuals form a positive science identity. This process includes a combination of having a high level of competence in science, and positive recognition from other scientist. The science identity model has much in common with the research I discussed in earlier sections of this review around identity including the critical importance of competence, a sense of purpose, and recognition from the field and domain.

In another recent study, Eagan and others (2013) considered how a student’s participation in undergraduate research impacts enrollment in graduate school. Findings from the study support the general consensus that undergraduate research is beneficial to a student’s academic experience (Eagan et al., 2013). Researchers also found that participation in undergraduate research enhanced the development of the participants’ science identities, which resulted in a positive effect on a student’s intention to pursue an advanced degree (Eagan et al., 2013). Finally, participating in UR activities facilitates both immersion in the discipline and the ability to establish professional networks with faculty. In this sense, undergraduate research mimics the professional environment and allows students to become a part of the science culture. I aimed to explore similar trends
and issues in art majors through this research. Emerging research on the benefits and outcomes of UR in regard to underrepresented populations in STEM demonstrates the need to explore the practice from a variety of disciplines, and from diverse perspectives. This is critical for grasping a better understanding of how college impacts students, the types of activities that might help students learn more complex ways of making meaning from their experiences, and specific academic practices that might assist students with developing positive habits of mind.

As evidenced in my discussion above, the benefits and outcomes of UR in the context of STEM disciplines are well documented in the literature. However, lacking in the current discourse is research that considers how students in other disciplines, specifically the arts, benefit from UR experiences. In addition, there is a dearth of research that documents possible outcomes associated with UR participation by students in disciplines other than STEM. Below, I review the scant, existing literature in this area.

**Undergraduate Research Experiences in the Arts and Humanities**

Literature concerning UR in the arts is scarce. Recent literature focuses on policy papers that recommend the expansion of UR experiences beyond STEM disciplines to include the arts and humanities (Elrod, Husic, & Kinzie, 2010; Levenson, 2010), and examples of UR projects that incorporate creative activities such as community-based art programming (Louis, 2008). Other publications address issues of assessment in UR projects in the arts and humanities (Johnson & Gould, 2009), designing creative UR projects in the arts and humanities that involve non-arts majors (Blackmer, 2008), the unique challenges of designing and implemented UR programming in the humanities (Schilt & Albino Gilbert, 2008), and designing interdisciplinary undergraduate research
seminars that center on the arts and humanities (Young, 2008). Finally, while the Council for Undergraduate Research publication *Creative Inquiry in the Arts and Humanities* is one of the most comprehensive publications on research in the arts and humanities to date, the publication is mostly dedicated to research in the humanities and does not include specific examples of UR in the context of studio arts (Klos, Shanahan, & Young, 2011). Given the scarcity of research in this area, I developed this project, in part; to expand interest and research around art majors engaged in UR activities.

**Student Participation in Undergraduate Research in the Arts**

In recent years, data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has provided critical insight in regard to UR participation by art majors. For example, 2010 NSSE data indicated that less than 25% of seniors majoring in the arts and humanities reported participating in research (NSSE, 2010). However, recent findings reveal that the numbers are slowly creeping upwards. For instance, in 2013, 27% of seniors majoring in the arts and humanities reported participating in research, and this number increased to 28% in 2014 (NSSE, 2013; NSSE, 2014). These modest results demonstrate the need to focus additional attention on research in the arts. These data also indicate that institutions must do a better job with promoting UR opportunities in the arts. My inquiry attempted to fill this gap.

**Summary**

In this literature review I examined the theoretical concepts, constructs and empirical research related to this study. In the first section of the review I provided context for what is known about the perceptions of art graduates regarding their art training, and the ways in which they perceive their identities as “artists” beyond the
college experience. Because the primary research question in my study centers on artistic identity, in the second section, I presented an overview of the literature dedicated to the construct of identity including foundational theories, what is known about identity formation and college students, and a consideration of models such as self-authorship and possible selves. In section three, I reviewed studies that more specifically explore the construct of artistic identity. I concluded the section with research that focuses on the construct of creativity. In the final section I addressed the practice of undergraduate research, the context for this study, including the scant literature dedicated to UR in the arts.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

...narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there like life itself (Barthes, 1982).

A self is probably the most impressive work of art we ever produce...For we create not just one self-making story but many of them (Bruner, 2002).

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore how undergraduate art majors engaged in an undergraduate research experience construct and navigate artistic identity/identities, and the role that creativity played in this process. In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the epistemological and philosophical principles that guided my inquiry. In section two I describe the narrative methodology I followed in this study. I present details regarding the methods of data collection and analysis in section three. Section four outlines the context for the study and participant selection. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the role of the researcher, trustworthiness and validation procedures in narrative inquiry, limitations of the study, and ethical considerations. To review, the research questions I investigated in this study were:

1) How do undergraduate students majoring in the arts negotiate/construct their identities as artists?
   a) How does participation in an undergraduate research experience in the arts influence the construction of identity as artist?

2) What role can creativity play in the formation of an individual’s artistic identity/identities?
**Epistemological Orientation**

My approach to data collection and analysis was guided by an epistemological orientation that is relational in nature. That is, the stories and experiences of the researcher and participants, or “ways of knowing” that were shared and examined over the course of this inquiry were co-constructed by both parties, and constantly evolved during (and through) the research process (Josselson, 2013). Because I investigated the ways in which participants were “making themselves” as artists, and since I aimed to identify factors that potentially influenced the process of self-making (Bruner, 2002), a relational epistemological orientation was most appropriate for this study. Furthermore, a relational orientation was most appropriate because I perceived identity development as a social, varied, and mutable phenomenon (Abes & Jones, 2013), and as a process of becoming (Hall, 1996). Finally, exploring the research questions through a relational epistemological orientation was most suitable due to the potential to capture rich and distinctive information regarding the identity formation process.

**Narrative Methodology**

Because I endeavored to explore the notion of artistic identity/identities in this inquiry, I used a narrative methodology (Abes & Jones, 2004; Chase, 2011, 2008, 2003; Josselson, 2011, 2013; Josselson & Lieblich, 2003; Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 2008) to investigate the research questions, and to guide the collection and interpretation of data. Scholars in a variety of disciplines have indicated that narrative inquiry is uniquely suited to exploring identity (Abes & Jones, 2004; Chase, 2011, 2008, 2003; Josselson, 2011, 2013; Josselson & Lieblich, 2003; Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 2008). Scholars have also identified narrative inquiry as an ideal methodology for examining the
construction of the self (Bruner, 2002; Chase, 2003; Josselson, 2011; Mishler, 2004), and how individuals make meaning from their experiences (Abes & Jones, 2004; Chase, 2003). Narrative inquiry was best suited to this research project because as Chase (2003) has noted, “the form and content of a person’s story must be socially recognizable if it is to be meaningful to self and others” (p. 80).

Although many narrative researchers follow the work of Clandinin and Connelly (1999), whose philosophical orientation is grounded in Dewey (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999), my point of reference for the narrative method included scholars who have employed narrative inquiry to study identity (Bruner, 1986, 2002; Chase, 2003, 2005, 2011; Josselson, 1996, 2004, 2011, 2013; Mishler, 1990, 1999, 2004). From this perspective, narrative inquiry is relational (Josselson, 2013), and is utilized as a method to “access people’s identity” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 7). More importantly, it is grounded in the literature on identity development and linked to the notion of a narrative identity. McAdams, Josselson, and Lieblich (2006) describe narrative identity as

“stories people construct and tell about themselves to define who they are for themselves and others. Beginning in adolescence and young adulthood, our narrative identities are the stories we live by” (p. 4).

In contrast to paradigmatic ways of knowing, which center on universal truths and generalizations, narrative inquiry concerns “pluralism, relativism, and subjectivity” (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 2). These characteristics illuminate how narrative ways of knowing involve reality as “constructed”, and “co-constructed” by the researcher and participant. Moreover, as Lieblich and others (1998) have indicated, stories:
“shape and construct the narrator’s personality and reality. The story is one’s identity, a story created, told, revised, and retold throughout life. We know or discover ourselves, or reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell (p.7). This sentiment is echoed by Bruner (2002) who stated that the notion of “self-making” is a narrative art that is formed from both internal (inside) and external (outside) influences. The inside represents one’s ideas, beliefs, and subjectivity (p. 65), while the outside is characterized by cultural influences, or “models of what selfhood should be, might be, …shouldn’t be” (p.65). Moreover, Chase (2011) defines narrative as “meaning making from the shaping or ordering of experience” (p. 421). Narrative inquiry is therefore best suited to explore issues of identity formation, the content of identity, and the ways in which one’s identity changes over time, and the elements that might influence one’s identity. Furthermore, following Josselson (2013), I interpret the narrative approach to the data as relational in nature, that is, the researcher and participants co-construct stories and experiences. For instance, as Josselson (2013) has argued, the narrative interview may be interpreted as an “evolving and constructed interpretation” (p. 2).

Two key principles guided the narrative methodology I used in this inquiry: first, the notion that individuals “make sense of experience, construct the self, and create and communicate meaning through narratives (Chase, 2003, p. 79). Second, the idea that narratives are “social in character” (p. 79). Through a narrative methodology I aimed to explore the emergent and interconnected “processes” of identity formation and creativity. In addition, narrative was most appropriate for examining how participants experienced and made sense of their artistic selves, and how creativity played a role in their artistic identities. The methodology I employed in this study represents a combination of
psychological, sociological, and visual approaches (Chase, 2003, 2008; Josselson, 2013; Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 2008), and was appropriate for two distinct reasons. First, in this study I sought to explore the ways in which participants might form an artistic identity, and how creativity might influence this process. Along with the traditional narrative data, interview text, (Chase, 2011), I also collected and analyzed visual data in the form of multi-textual journal entries, which added further context and rich information to the participant’s emerging narrative. The visual data were drawings, collages, and other forms of visual expression that participants included in their journal entries to compliment the written text. The visual data were instructive for examining how participants represented and communicated their selves using various forms of expression. I also collected participant self-reflection essays at the end of the research experience, which helped me to determine how individuals contemplated their development as creative/artistic individuals, and how they made meaning of the program at the conclusion of the study. Designing the study to include various forms of data yielded more nuanced interpretations and possibilities for analysis than interview data alone. Second, and more importantly, the collection and analysis of visual information was appropriate because my study involved art majors, whose primary form of expression and communication is visual expression. Together, the multiple forms of data supplemented my understanding of how participants made meaning of their experiences.

In the next section of this chapter, I outline details regarding data collection and analysis.

As I mentioned above, a combination of psychological, sociological, and visual approaches comprised the narrative methodology for my study. I outline each of these below. Researchers who employ the psychological approach consider how the stories that
people tell affect their lives. Emphasis is placed on what the story is about including its plot, character and sequence, and how the content of a narrative embodies personal identity (Chase, 2008). The ways in which individuals revise their stories and their lives over time is also central to this approach. Josselson’s (1996) longitudinal, psychological narrative study, which I discussed in chapter two, exemplifies this approach. I collected and analyzed participant interview data, reflective essays, and journal entries, which included both written and visual text, to determine how participant perceptions of identity and creativity shifted over time while participants were engaged in an undergraduate research project.

The sociological perspective comprises the second approach embedded in the narrative methodology. This approach emphasizes how stories and personal experiences emerge from an interaction between the individual, the society, and culture. Specifically, the sociological approach focuses on how individuals construct the self (or their selves) in relation to sociocultural discourses, and the ways in which individuals incorporate or resist these discourses through the stories they tell (Chase, 2008). Mishler’s (1999) work on the identity formation of craft artists, which I discussed in chapter two, is an example of the sociological approach to narrative inquiry. Because I underscore the influence of sociocultural factors that might impact the identity formation of artists including prevailing artistic myths, and how “creatives” navigate the field and the domain, the sociological perspective was critical to examining the research questions.

The third approach embedded in the narrative methodology is the visual (Keats, 2009; Riessman, 2008), which has been defined as an intentional, reflective, active human process in which researchers and participants explore and make meaning of
experience both visually and narratively (Bach, 2007, p.281). As I mentioned above, participant stories emerged from both textual and visual expression.

**Methods**

**Data Collection**

I collected three forms of data: interviews, “artist” reflective journal entries (which included both written and visual text), and a final self-reflection essay. I describe the types of data and data collection procedures below. I also kept a journal during the course of the study to reflect on my research process, to clarify my role as researcher, my position as the research instrument, and to assist in the analysis and interpretation of the data (Janesick, 2016).

**Interviews**

I conducted two in-depth interviews with each participant. I conducted the first interview at the beginning of the undergraduate research experience, and before the participants traveled abroad. I conducted the second interview at the end of the research experience. Scholars suggest that up to two interviews are sufficient if the researcher is “competent” and organized (Josselson, 2013, p. 53). I built trust with the participants (and also a sense of community between the participants) through multiple mechanisms including group (and optional individual) meetings and discussions, and reflective writing activities. Engaging in these activities from the beginning of the experience resulted in a strong sense of community among the scholars over the course of the experience. Because I sought to capture how participants described their identities through their individual narratives, and how these stories might shift over time, I used an in-depth interview format (Chase, 2003, 2008). The flexible format of the in-depth
interview method facilitated more nuanced discussions with participants, encouraging interviewees to respond in personally meaningful ways during the interviews (Riessman, 2008). Moreover, because I sought to understand “the processes of the phenomena of interest”, the in-depth interview format was most appropriate (Josselson, 2013, p. vii).

I developed comprehensive “interview guides” for the first interviews (Chase, 2003), which included a list of “working” questions (see Appendix A and B for interview protocols). The interview guides were essential for addressing the major and supplementary themes related to the research questions (Chase, 2003), and included questions that focused on identity development (Freeman, 1993; Josselson, 1996; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Mishler, 1999), competence and a sense of purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), and creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, 1999; Abuhamdeh and Csikszentmihalyi, 2004). The guides also included “probe” or follow up questions, which I used during the interviews to explore participant perceptions around their study abroad and research experiences, early memories/experiences of being artists or making art, and future career goals and aspirations. While these questions yielded additional data related to the first research question, i.e., the formation of an artistic identity/identities; the sub-questions identified critical information related to the second research question, that is, participant perceptions regarding creativity in this process, and the ways in which participants portray their self (possible selves) through their individual narratives. Finally, I field-tested several of the questions composed for the first interview with six students who participated in the research program in a previous year.
I began the first interviews with a visual exercise called relational space mapping (Josselson, 2013). Following Josselson’s design, I asked participants to locate themselves on a map in relation to words/ideas/roles such as “artist”, “creativity”, “student”, “mentor”, “mentee”, and “researcher” (See Appendix B for Mapping Instructions). The relational map activity introduced the major themes of the discussion, and invited participants to focus on the points or issues that had personal meaning to them (Josselson, 2013). I began interview one with an opening or “little q question” (Josselson, 2013) designed to make a connection with the participant and her/his personal life experiences. As Josselson indicates, the little q question should “be near the participant’s experience: it should ring bells in an area of the participant’s mind that he or she is comfortable talking about at the outset” (p. 43). At the beginning of interview one, I proposed the following little q question: “Please tell me what it means to be an artist”.

Following the first interview, and after an initial analysis of the data, I crafted interview two guides, which included questions that revisited and built upon specific themes and issues raised during the first interviews. I also included future oriented questions, which encouraged participants to make connections between their experiences in the program and future endeavors such as a career aspirations and graduate school (See Appendix C for Interview Two Protocol).

I recorded all interviews using two separate audio recording devices. I used two devices as a precaution to avoid the potential loss of data as a result of equipment malfunction. I uploaded the audio files to a secure drive on the institutional network. Each interview ran from 60-90 minutes, the standard length of qualitative interviews
(Seidman, 2006). I transcribed all interviews verbatim. To better organize the data, I transposed the transcripts to large easel pad sheets using colored markers. I organized the data on these sheets to facilitate the coding process, and to help me “see” the data more clearly and identify primary and secondary codes/themes.

**Artist Reflective Journals**

One way to capture the possible nuances of an individual’s experience is through the collection and analysis of multiple texts. The collection and examination of visual data enhanced my understanding of how art majors constructed, navigated, and explored their possible artistic selves. Participants in this study kept an artist’s journal during the experience to reflect upon and explore their research progress, record ideas for the final research-based art piece, and contemplate how they might be developing as artists through the research process. I collected and scanned participant journals at three points over the course of this study.

Unlike traditional artist sketchbooks, which include mostly sketches or drawings with minimal text, the artist reflective journal included a combination of written and visual texts. Participants responded to three journal activities (See Appendix D for Protocol) during the research experience. I designed these writing activities to encourage reflection throughout the experience, and allow participants to archive the many facets of their research journeys and creative endeavors. For example, at different points in the experience, journal prompts invited participants to represent/record reflections about their artistic selves, their creativity, and their level of competence as artists. I invited participants to communicate their ideas and thoughts in visual terms because I sought to understand the *unsayable* elements of their identities and ways of knowing (Rogers,
The rationale for including visual data collection was, in part, influenced by Eisner’s (2002) thinking around the arts and the creative process. Briefly, Eisner (2002) described the artistic process of creation as evanescent (p. 11). As he indicated, the process of inscription (creating art) allows the individual to explore ideas, experiences, and one’s emotional selves (p. 11). Furthermore, inscription may be interpreted as a conversation between our inner selves and the world. Thus, by examining the act of creation (i.e. making art), in this case in the form of reflective artist journal entries, I wanted to further understand the process by which an individual might make meaning from the act of creation, and how the process of inscription might inform individual notions of identity and creativity.

Finally, works of art are social and cultural forms. I examined the visual portions of the participants’ journal entries as a way to investigate how they were navigating the research and creative process during the experience, and how they saw their “selves” emerging within this process. This examination provided insight into how participants made meaning from their experiences in visual and expressive terms, and it exposed how that meaning emerged from both “internal and external narratives” (Banks, 2001, p. 12) and reflection. A thorough discussion of reflective practice is presented below.

Final Self-Reflection Essays

Scholars have noted the importance of teaching and learning strategies that assist students in “shifting their frames of mind” from reliance on external formulas (authority figures) to more complex ways of making meaning from their experiences (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013, p.868). More specifically, scholars have noted the power of reflective practices such as journaling and other forms of reflective writing for
illuminating students’ inner lives. For instance, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2010) noted that techniques such as mediation and journaling encourage deep contemplation around issues such as developing a sense of purpose and self-awareness (p.77). In a collection of essays edited by Kaplan, Silver, La-Vaque-Manty, and Meizlish (2013) additional reflective techniques such as design plans and exam wrappers demonstrate the value of these strategies in regard to student learning outcomes. I observed and explored the meaning making processes of participants through the process of reflection depicted in the journals and essay products. Participants composed a self-reflection essay at the end of the research experience to record their thoughts and opinions regarding the entire undergraduate research program experience including what they believe they learned about themselves as artists, students and researchers. (See Appendix E for Protocol). The task was designed to capture participant reflections about the experience retrospectively, and to understand which elements of the experience were most relevant to participants.

Earlier conceptualizations of reflection as described by Dewey (1933) and Mezirow (1981, 1998) underscored the important connection between reflection and learning. However, recent empirical research has further illuminated the value of specific reflective writing activities such as essays and journals. For example, Rai (2012) studied the positive relationship between emotion and reflective writing (Rai, 2012), while others have focused on strategies for assessing reflective writing in order to expand the practice throughout the curriculum (Kember, McKay, Sinclair, & Wong, 2008; Lew & Schmidt, 2011). In addition, Fink (2013) has defined reflection as students’ ability to “think about the things they are doing” (p. 115). Moreover, he
explained the power of reflection in terms of one’s ability to move from “meaning-receiving beings to meaning making beings (p. 118). In addition, engaging in deep reflection has the capacity to challenge and change one’s initial ideas and beliefs and bring an individual to new ways of thinking.

Lastly, in a discussion concerning creativity and reflection, Kaufman and Gregoire (2015) noted that cultivating creativity involves time for personal reflection and inner exploration. The authors noted results of recent studies involving individuals who lead “creative” lifestyles. Individuals who kept a journal, pursued photography as a hobby, or started a business, tended to be “more open minded, imaginative, and intellectually curious…..and they also report a greater sense of well-being and personal growth (p. xxxi). The collection and analysis of multiple forms of data including textual such as the self-reflection essay, assisted me with understanding the many layers of identity, and how participants made meaning from their experiences. Having outlined the reflection component, next I describe data analysis procedures.

Data Analysis

I analyzed and interpreted three forms of data including interviews, “artist” reflective journal entries (which included both written and visual text), and a final self-reflection essay. Below I outline details regarding the methods for data analysis.

In contrast to typical narrative methods, which tend to focus on the collection and analysis of a single text (i.e. interview data), my study included the collection and analysis of multiple “texts” (Keats, 2009); written, in the form of participant reflective writings; verbal, in the form of interview data; and illustrative, in the form of pictorial journal renderings. Through a multiple text method I sought to explore the emergent and
interconnected “processes” of artistic identity formation, and the factors that might influence these processes. I was also interested in exploring how sociocultural influences might shape a student’s artistic identity/identities and sense of creativity through familiar “myths” or images of the artist. Lastly, through the collection and analysis of various textual forms such as participant writings, art work, and interview narratives I endeavored to understand the multiple layers and nuances of identity formation, and the potential role creativity played in this process for each of the participants.

I used a holistic-content approach to analyze the interview data (Lieblich et al., 1998). The first part of this approach, the holistic component, refers to the unit of analysis. This approach includes the analysis of individual sections in relation to the whole (p. 12). The holistic approach is appropriate when the researcher seeks to understand the development of the individual in a particular context. In this study, I aimed to explore how participants constructed and navigated an artistic identity/identities within the context of an undergraduate research project. In addition, the holistic-content approach brought into greater focus the role of creativity in this process. For example, beginning with the little q question introduced above resulted in the emergence of various parts and pieces of the participant’s narrative that contributed to one’s artist identity/identities. In the analysis I was able to relate these parts and pieces to the larger issue of artistic identity formation. The second part of this method, the content component, involves understanding the substance of an account from the narrator’s perspective (Lieblich et al., 1998). It also focuses on the meaning of a story including the images used to convey a story, and/or the motives, traits displayed by the narrator (Lieblich et al., 1998). In my inquiry, the content of the data revealed certain tropes and
metaphors used by participants to tell the story of artistic identity/identities. For example, several participant’s identified specific metaphor’s to describe themselves as artists.

I adapted the five-step process for holistic-content analysis enumerated by Lieblich and others (1998) to analyze interview data. I began the analysis by reading each transcript several times to understand the general focus or theme of each participant’s story. Next, I recorded initial impressions of the story, and pondered questions such as: Are there contradictions in the story? Can multiple “voices” or “selves” be detected in the story? How are these voices narrated/constructed/navigated? Did the narrator provide lots of detail in regard to one portion of the story and less detail in others? Why might this be the case? In the third step of the process I identified a specific theme or focus in each narrative that could be traced throughout the story. For example, a particular issue repeated or shared in great detail throughout the narrative. I also discovered that important themes or foci concerned what was not said (Lieblich et al., 1998). In the fourth step, I “marked” the themes in the transcript. This process entailed reading each one separately and repeatedly (p. 63). The final step involved making conclusions, noting transitions between the themes, and making note of omissions, and the ways in which the story is “told” by the narrator (Lieblich et al., 1998). Interpretation is likewise central to data analysis procedures and I describe this element below.

Hermeneutics, or the study of interpretation, is a critical feature of narrative data analysis. Josselson (2004) outlines two hermeneutic traditions that guide narrative inquiry: a hermeneutics of faith, and a hermeneutics of suspicion. A researcher who follows a hermeneutics of suspicion “problematizes the participants’ narrative and strives
for explanation beyond the text” (p.1), while one who relies on hermeneutics of faith focuses on examining “the various messages inherent in an interview text, giving “voice” in various ways to the participant(s)” (p. 1). While it is possible to apply both traditions to an analysis (Josselson, 2004), in this study, I analyzed the data from the perspective of the hermeneutics of faith as I sought to explore the subjectivity and meaning-making involved in the narrative process (Josselson, 2004).

Finally, a point of clarification is required regarding the method of analysis employed in this study. The method of analysis described above does not simply involve finding superficial themes in the data; rather, the participant’s story reflects the deeper sociocultural context in which the narrator lives, and exposes the multivocal-self (Josselson, 2011). I identified specific themes in order to understand the complex, “whole” individual, which assisted me with understanding participant “artistic selves”, and how creativity played a role in this process.

I analyzed participant artistic journal entries using methods adapted from Riessman (2008) and Keats (2009). In the first phase of the analysis I employed a method outlined by Riessman (2008). Riessman (2008) identifies three areas or “sites” for visual analysis in narrative inquiry. The first site concerns “how and when the images were made, the social identities of the image-maker and recipient, and other relevant aspects of the image-making process (p. 144). The second site includes the examination of the formal elements of the image including color, composition, arrangement, and medium, and the third site involves audience responses to the image (Riessman, 2008). In phase two, I conducted a “relational reading” (Keats, 2009) of the data to determine relationships among and between the data. My analysis of the artist journals included a
fourth area, in which I studied the distinct relationships between the images depicted in the journal entries and the written text. For instance, I examined how the image(s) supplemented the text (or not), and how the visual and written forms were organized on the page.

I organized the written text of each journal entry in two ways. First, I transcribed and organized the text in Excel spreadsheets. I made notes about the visual data and how the various forms of text intersected within the entries. Second, I transcribed each journal response to large easel pads using colored markers. This process allowed me to deeply engage with the data and to recognize specific themes and trends. It also facilitated a relational reading (the final step in the process) between the various forms of collected data. My analysis concluded with a “relational reading” (Keats, 2009) between and among the all data forms. I compared journal entry responses (visual and written) in relation to the interview texts and reflection essay texts. This process entailed both intratexual readings, exploring the textual relationships in regard to a single participant (Keats, 2009, p. 191), and intertextual readings, exploring the textual relationships among the entire group (Keats, 2009, p. 191). I conducted this analysis to determine both individual and group themes in/across the data, and to identify/ “see” themes/issues that might have been less visible/ distinguishable in the interview data for example.

I further analyzed participant final reflective essays using a “matrix” or rubric developed by Hubbs and Brand (2010). The matrix was developed as a tool to assist students and instructors in “forming a common language to analyze and critique student reflections” (p. 63). Moreover, organizing information within the matrix can demonstrate movement from “basic understanding towards integration of knowledge” (p. 63), as it
moves along a continuum from superficial to analytical reflection. I used the matrix to supplement my understanding of the trajectory of participants’ reflective practice and learning over the course of the inquiry rather than as an evaluative tool to assess the “quality” of content.

**Study Context**

**Program Overview**

My inquiry involved students who participated in an undergraduate research scholarship program developed by the Office for Undergraduate Research at a large research university in the southeast of the United States. For confidentiality purposes, I shall henceforth refer to the institution as Southside University. Designated as a *very high research activity* institution by the Carnegie Foundation, Southside University is a large university with a total system enrollment of more than 48,000, and more than 30,000 enrolled undergraduate students on the main campus. Student success, research and preparing students for a globally competitive environment are at the center of the university’s mission and vision. The undergraduate research scholarship was developed to support the mission and vision of the institution and to provide additional opportunities for students in the arts to engage in undergraduate research.

Since its inception in 2012, thirty-three students (this number includes the cohort studied here) have participated in the undergraduate research scholarship program. Each year, between six and ten students are selected to participate in the program. The undergraduate research scholarship program is comprised of two key elements: financial support, and instruction in research skills and professional development. Under the direction of faculty mentors, and the scholarship program director, students who
participate in the program develop and produce research-based art projects from idea to installation.

The undergraduate research scholarship program is a two-semester initiative, which involves a study abroad trip to Europe (sponsored by the College of the Arts) during the summer semester, and the completion of a research-based art project during the fall semester. Scholarship recipients are selected at the end of the spring semester and attend two research meetings with the program director before traveling abroad. While abroad scholars are enrolled in a minimum of six credit hours of related coursework, and are also enrolled in a 0-credit research course associated with the program. Scholars also blog about their research while abroad, and meet with faculty mentors to discuss research progress.

During the fall semester, scholars are enrolled in at least nine credit hours of coursework, and are enrolled in a 0-credit research course associated with the program. Scholars attend bi-weekly seminars with scholarship program director to develop their research topics, learn about the research process, and create research-based art projects. Scholars also receive instruction in professional development skills. For example, scholars practice written and oral communication skills through reflective writing activities and group discussions, and they learn what a curriculum vitae is and how to create one. The program also encourages scholars to reflect on how research skills can be applied to other areas of their lives including a career or graduate school.

Program learning objectives include:

- Create a research-based art project
- Compose a research proposal
- Design a research project web page
- Present research findings at Southside University Undergraduate Research Fair
• Participate in the logistics and installation of an art exhibit
• Document the research process and practice the art of reflection in “artist journals”
• Participate in a professional discussion panel and learn about creative careers

During the course of the undergraduate research scholarship program scholars produce the following work products: a research proposal, writing activities such as reflective essays and journal entries, create a research project web page, create a research poster, develop and produce a research-based art project. During the fall semester, scholars also consult with faculty mentors, scholarship program director, and campus partners such as Writing Studio consultants.

Selection of Participants

Although qualitative studies often use the term sample, and more specifically purposeful sampling to describe participants in a study (Patton, 1990), I describe participants in this study with reference to the term selection as it more accurately exemplifies the tenets of qualitative research (Polkinghorne, 2005). Furthermore, as Polkinghorne (2005) explained: participants and documents for a qualitative study are not selected because they fulfill the representative requirements of statistical inference but because they can provide substantial contributions to filling out the structure and character of the experience under investigation (p. 139). In this inquiry, the experience under investigation concerned participant perceptions of artistic identity formation of art majors engaged in an undergraduate research experience, and the influence of creativity in this process. Finally, selection involves the ability to gather sufficiently rich data to understand the experience (p. 140). I employed the multiple text method of data collection and analysis to collect rich data.
Participants in this study represent a sub-group of students who enrolled in a summer study abroad opportunity offered through the College of the Arts, which is open to students in all disciplines. While the majority of participants in the program have traditionally included art studio and art history majors, in recent years, non-art majors increasingly comprise majority enrollment in the program. All students enrolled in the study abroad program are eligible to apply for the undergraduate research scholarship considered in this inquiry. Participants in this study included students selected to receive the undergraduate research scholarship. Ten participants were involved in this study. This number is consistent with the literature, which recommends between five and thirty participants for narrative research. (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003). In addition, the number and composition of the group of participants in my study yielded data that illuminated diverse perspectives regarding what it means to be an artist.

Sample

Participants in my inquiry included nine women and one male. Two women were African-American, one woman was Hispanic, and seven participants were White. Seven participants were studio art majors and three were art history majors. Eight out of ten participants were transfer students. Three participants were completing their first year at Southside University, four were in their second year, and one participant was completing the third year of study. Another was in the fourth year of study, and one participant was completing a post baccalaureate degree. Two participants were pursuing minors. Five individuals in my study were first generation college students. In the next chapter I introduce each participant through a narrative “sketch”, which includes information about
the participant’s background, how she/he came to study art or art history, and initial ideas around creativity and engaging in research.

**Reflexivity: The Role of the Researcher**

*Like the artist who uses paint and brushes or the dancer who uses movement, the qualitative researcher uses many techniques as tools to ultimately tell a story.* (Janesick, 2001).

In qualitative research reflexivity involves “critical self-reflection of the ways in which the researchers’ social background, assumptions, positioning and behaviour impact on the research process” (Finlay & Gough, 2003, p. ix). In addition, it involves explaining in detail how the researcher co-constructs research findings (Bruner, 2002; Finlay & Gough, 2003; Josselson, 1996, 2013; Lieblich et al., 1998). Throughout the research process I practiced critical reflection as a way to understand my position as a researcher and my relationship with and responsibility to participants.

In the epigraph above, Janesick (2001) uses artistic metaphors to explore how intuition and creativity figure prominently in a researcher’s métier (work). As a trained art historian and occasional artist, I thoroughly embrace this metaphor. In the article from which the epigraph above was excerpted, Janesick (2001) recounts how the artist Ellen Lanyon describes the creative process as mutable rather than fixed. For Lanyon artistic problems are solved through experimentation and problem solving. Thus, as I have argued throughout this paper, creativity (like the process of identity) is not a fixed state but rather a mutable process that involves inquiry and discovery. I view my process and approach to research in a similar way, and my interest in creativity and artistic identity has its roots in my background and worldview.
The decision to study artistic identity and creativity emerged from my personal interests and “worldview” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). I hail from a creative family in which art and culture was held in high regard, and the making of art highly encouraged. Further, I grew up surrounded by several creative family members, and I have long been curious about how these individuals, specifically those who self-identify as “artists”, have navigated their creative identities throughout their lives. For example, over the years I have watched my brother, who self-identifies as an artist, experience great successes and also many rejections as an artist. I have been astounded by his resilience, and how he navigates his multiple “identities”. He is always an artist but his artistic identity encompasses much more than simply a talent for creativity (painting, drawing, et cetera). The creative part of who he is seems to be intimately connected to how he “sees” himself and how he “operates” or “is” in the world. In addition, the ways in which he makes meaning from his experiences or his ways of knowing are informed or framed from a particular orientation. In a similar way, the art majors with whom I have worked over the years in this program have demonstrated similar epistemological and ontological orientations.

It seems that for both my brother and for the students with whom I have worked, their artistic selves are varied, mutable, and context specific, and it is this complexity I sought to explore through this research project. Finally, although it has taken me many years to acknowledge my own creative self (in the past I was not convinced that I was artistically creative), I now embrace this part of my identity and openly share this part of who I am with others including students with whom I interact. Thus, I came to this
research project with certain views and opinions about art and creativity, but throughout my inquiry I have attempted to remain open to other perspectives and ways of knowing.

**Trustworthiness: Evaluation and Validation**

In the broadest sense, the notion of validity connotes the “credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other account” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 106). However, validity in narrative inquiry encompasses much more than credibility issues. For instance, Mishler (1990) redefined the notion of validation as “the process (es) through which we make claims for and evaluate the “trustworthiness” of reported observations, interpretations, and generalizations” (p. 419). He defined trustworthiness as the degree to which a community of researchers can rely on findings for further work (p. 419). In Mishler’s (1990) view, this process is better understood with reference to validation rather than validity. Furthermore, the emphasis on trustworthiness rather than “truth” relocates validation from the realm of objective, neutral reality to the socially constructed and mutable space of discourse and experience. In addition, judgments of trustworthiness shift and change over time.

Following Mishler (1990), Lieblich and others (1998) outlined four additional criteria for evaluating narrative inquiry including width, coherence, insightfulness, and parsimony. These criteria also encompass the “threats to validity” addressed by Maxwell (2005) and Polkinghorne (2007). Each of the four criterion listed above will be employed in this study in an attempt to combat the threats to validity. Lieblich and others (1998) define width as “the comprehensiveness of evidence”, which involves both the quality of the interview and the interpretation or analysis (p. 173). To achieve these criteria, I have included extensive quotes from participant stories, and I present alternative explanations.
Coherence refers to “the way different parts of the interpretation create a complete and meaningful picture (p. 173). I endeavored to meet this criterion by clearly explaining how the parts came together to form a meaningful “whole”, and by demonstrating how the resulting whole relates to existing theories and previous research. One additional point must be addressed regarding the criterion of coherence. In my analysis and interpretation of participant stories I did not seek to construct a single (coherent) narrative of self; rather, for me, coherence involves my ability as the researcher to bring together a narrative that highlights the varied nature of the participant’s story (Josselson, 2013), to expose rather than conceal the detours and contradictions within the story, and to highlight what we can learn from this ambiguity (Riessman, 2008).

The third criterion I employed to combat threats to validity was insightfulness, or “the sense of innovation or originality in the presentation of the story and its analysis (p. 173). It has been noted that narratives represent “artistic production and creation” (Mello, 2002, p. 233), and that the process of narrative data analysis and interpretation is a creative endeavor (Josselson, 2013). Thus, insightfulness largely involves my ability to present the stories of participants in creative and novel ways. I accomplished this task through the multiple text approach, which exposed variation and multiplicity in the data. Finally, Lieblich and others (1998) define parsimony as “the ability to provide an analysis based on a small number of Concepts, and elegance or aesthetic appeal” (p. 173). I sought to achieve parsimony through cogent but thorough descriptions, interpretations and analyses of the data. In addition to the criteria enumerated above, I used two additional mechanisms to achieve validation and trustworthiness of the data: triangulation and peer review. I achieved triangulation through the collection and analysis of multiple texts or
forms of data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), in this case interviews, participant writings and visual texts. I also invited a peer reviewer (critical friend) to provide feedback of my analysis of the data, which facilitated an additional lens for interpretation (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This process involved a series of conversations centered on my approach to data analysis. The critical friend did not review the raw data. Lastly, I kept a journal during the course of the study to reflect on the research process and to clarify my role as a researcher, my position as the research instrument, and to assist in the analysis and interpretation of the data (Janesick, 2016). Finally, it must be noted that I came to this research project with certain views, opinions, and a distinct worldview. While I have made every effort to combat these biases, it is nonetheless critical to clearly acknowledge this circumstance here.

**Limitations of the Study**

Four limitations must be acknowledged regarding this study. First, my inquiry of artistic identity/identities was limited to students at one institution. While my discoveries may not reflect the experiences of undergraduate students at different types of institutions or those enrolled in other art programs, the aims of my qualitative research did not include a search for universal truths and generalizations. Rather, I sought to explore how the each participant’s identity story emerged from *distinctive and individual* experiences (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Second, unfortunately, my study only included one male. Additional male voices would have provided a more balanced perspective regarding the experiences and perceptions of undergraduate art majors. Third, my inquiry included a small group of students who participated in a combined research and study abroad experience. The outcomes reported here may not reflect the
experiences of all art majors, since these types of high impact experiences are not commonly shared by all college undergraduates (Ray, J. & Kafka, S., 2014). Fourth, I conducted a multiple text narrative inquiry in which I became the research instrument through which the participants stories emerged. The results of this study must therefore be understood from the perspective of a relational approach in which the researcher and participants co-construct stories and experiences. (Josselson, 2013).

**Ethical Considerations**

**Consent**

I obtained approval to conduct this research from the institution’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix F). I conducted the informed consent “speech” with all participants at the beginning of the research experience (during the first meeting). The speech included a brief overview of the research, and an explanation regarding privacy, confidentiality, and clarification regarding the voluntary nature of participation. Signed consent forms were scanned and stored on a secure institutional drive. Hard copies of the consent forms were destroyed.

**Data**

At the beginning of the research project I assigned each participant a “working” pseudonym. During the second interview I shared the working pseudonyms with participants and provided an opportunity for participants to select a pseudonyms of their choice. All files related to the project including participant writings, interview transcripts, and scans of visual texts were stored on a secure drive on the institutional network or in the case of printed documents filed in a secure office. At the end of the study, I destroyed all interview tapes.
Summary

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore how undergraduate art majors engaged in an undergraduate research experience constructed and navigated an artistic identity, and the role that creativity played in this process. In the first section of this chapter I detailed the epistemological and philosophical principles that guided this narrative inquiry. In section two I described the narrative methodology employed in this study. Details regarding the methods of data collection and analysis were discussed in section three. In section four I outlined the context for the study and participant selection. I concluded the chapter with a discussion of the role of the researcher, trustworthiness and validation procedures in narrative inquiry, and ethical considerations.
CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANTS: NARRATIVE SKETCHES

The purpose of this multiple text narrative inquiry was to examine how undergraduate art majors construct and navigate their artistic identity/identities, specifically while engaged in an undergraduate research experience. As part of this process the influence of creativity was also explored. In this chapter I include a narrative “sketch” for each individual that includes information about the participant’s background, how she/he came to study art or art history, and initial ideas about creativity and engaging in research. The content for the sketches derives from data collected before the study abroad trip and at the beginning of the research experience. Each sketch details the participant’s thoughts regarding what they hoped to learn or discover by participating in research and study abroad. The chapter concludes with a visual representation of demographic information for each participant (See Table 1).

Participant Demographics

Demographic information was collected during the interviews. My inquiry included nine women and one male including two African-American, one Hispanic, and seven White participants. Seven participants were studio art majors and three were art history majors. Of the three art history majors, one participant was a practicing artist who indicated that she selected art history as her major because she thought it would be more practical than art studio for pursuing graduate school. Another art history major entered
college as a studio art major but changed her major to art history prior to beginning course work. Eight out of ten participants were transfer students. Three participants were completing their first year at Southside University, four were in their second year, one participant was completing the third year of study, another was in the fourth year of study, and one participant was completing a post baccalaureate degree. Two participants were completing minors. Five individuals in my study were first generation college students.

Ashley

Ashley entered college as a studio art major and never thought about majoring in anything else. While she did not consider either of her parents creative, for her, making art was a constant from an early age. Growing up she “got the most” out of school assignments such as art projects or coloring pages. Making art was something that she always wanted to do, as a child she was surprised to discover that others did not share her passion for art. Although she had briefly contemplated becoming a doctor during middle school, once she entered high school everything changed. In her sophomore year she enrolled in a required fine arts course. The combination of a highly supportive teacher and the freedom to create and experiment with art in this class solidified her desire to pursue art in college. She enrolled in additional art classes in high school and quickly decided that she would apply to college and major in art.

Soon after Ashley entered Southside University she gravitated towards a distinct artistic style. She was interested in this style because it allowed her to separate herself from what others were doing, and to create work that was totally different from what her colleagues were making. Ashley described her body of work as being primarily
influenced by personal reflection and meditation rather than a concern for social issues. For Ashley, the role of creativity in being an artist involves “being unique” and different from others. She also perceived creativity as “creating your own answers to general questions.” In regard to creativity in her life, the way she dresses, cooks a meal or reads a book all involve an element of creativity. At the beginning of the undergraduate research experience, before fully engaging in the project, Ashley described research as challenging because she thought about it was very formal and academic. However, through her research project she hoped to better understand the reasons for why and how she “creates”. She also viewed the research as a way to understand more about herself. In regard to the study abroad component, she was quite nervous about travelling outside the country for the first time but was looking forward to experiencing how being in another country and different environment would change her as an artist and a student.

Christine

Christine’s path to art was a long and complicated “journey” and “evolution. Growing up, singing was an acceptable artistic form of expression for her parents however they strongly discouraged drawing, a pastime Christine adored and pursued throughout her childhood despite her parents’ protests. In Christine’s family the concept of art was very narrow and primarily included religious imagery. She had only recently started to embrace the reality of her life, that she was an artist. Before she came to that acceptance she always felt that she should “be doing something else that was more productive, something that was financially more better.” She explained her journey as involving the acceptance of her “illness”, a condition she shared with other members of her family. For Christine, art provided a way to work through personal challenges, and
express what she had inside. Christine began her college career at a local community college with the intention of pursuing a teaching degree. During her second semester she enrolled in a drawing class. The experience in this class, particularly the strong support of her drawing professor, provided “validation” for her art, something that had been missing in her early life. Her professor helped her see that her art had value and also encouraged her to pursue her passion for art. After much contemplation she decided to shift her academic focus to art.

Christine made a distinct connection between creativity and who she was as an artist. For Christine, the notion of creativity was bound up with childhood, and the absence of “play”. Creativity involved connecting with her inner child and tapping into the inquisitive, curious, and explorative nature of a child. In addition, creativity in her life (outside of making art) was linked to “being able to be flexible with solutions to problems with my family, …being able to think of alternatives.” In the last few years she had “transformed” from a “very narrow-minded opinionated person” with a narrow vision to being able to think about things differently. This transformation was in part linked to creativity. Creativity also involved the ability to “accept more of other people and accept the different aspects of them that maybe aren’t traditional.”

Christine’s art making was guided by a combination of her personal experiences and struggles, and social issues. Since taking up art full-time she has dabbled in various mediums including drawing, painting and collage. She had also become very interested in making art from using found objects. This approach prompted her to re-think her idea of what art is and what it can be. Finally, at the beginning of the research experience she believed that doing research would allow her to experiment with materials and
techniques. She also wanted to explore how people communicate with and through art and how art might “change people”. She hoped that the research project would help her be more reflective about her work and think about “why” she was doing what she was doing. In regard to studying abroad, Christine believed the experience would help her gain more “perspective” on herself, who she was, and how she functioned in relation to being a “global citizen”, artist and woman. Finally, she was a bit nervous about how the experience would change her but she was excited to embrace the change.

Deborah

Deborah, an international student, was completing a second bachelor’s degree in studio art at the time of this study. She had been engaged in artistic endeavors including music and dance from a young age; however, while she appreciated music, it was not “her thing”. She preferred making things with her hands, and she enjoyed the “craftsmanship” involved with sculpture and painting. When Deborah made things she was intrigued by the connection between the brain and visualizing the end product. She also enjoyed experimenting with color and what it could convey she was thus drawn to painting early in her life.

After graduating from high school Deborah pursued a degree in business and had worked in the field for a number of years before returning to college to pursue a second bachelor’s degree. She had selected international business because she wanted to travel and see different cultures. She wanted to use her creativity to “solve problems within companies”, and “think outside the box.” However, once she “got into it” and secured a job in the field she realized that it was “just business”. She quickly discovered that she was not fully committed to the field of business. Although her job was rather humdrum
the best parts of her job involved opportunities to engage in creative activities such as production.

While pursuing her first bachelor’s degree Deborah had enrolled in a drawing class. Shortly after beginning the class she “was sold” and decided “I want to do this. I just want to drop business. I want to start doing art.” She described this decision as extremely difficult because in her country fine art was not necessarily acknowledged and appreciated by the public. Moreover, individuals who pursued art simply worked under a mentor and developed their craft but there was no formal training involved with becoming an artist. The lack of support for and acknowledgement of professional artists in her culture was one of the primary reasons she had not pursued art after high school. There was always a “fear of studying art” because of the connotations associated with the profession in her country. Her parents had advised her “don’t quit business”, finish the degree and if you decide you still want to do art then follow your passion”.

For Deborah, the role of creativity in her art also involved “translation”. Creativity in her life was simultaneously a way to “show our true selves and to help others see”. Deborah has explored various themes and topics in her work. At the time of the first interview, she was primarily concerned with her work as social commentary, specifically from the “female perspective”. Through her art she endeavored to give voice to women to express themselves. She was also struggling with the tension around being a “female” artist specifically because her work explored the female body.

Finally, Deborah was hopeful that engaging in research would help her to further develop her writing skills, particularly writing about and documenting her art. She hoped that the research experience would help her “put in words- what I really- who I am as an
artist and how that process goes.” Regarding the opportunity to study abroad, Deborah indicated that it would provide an opportunity to grow and become more educated about different cultures.

Jeanene

An art history major and self-described craft artist; Jeanene’s love of art began in elementary school with an “amazing” teacher who made art fun. In middle school, she continued to have positive experiences in art classes where she was encouraged to do projects the way she wanted to do them, as she explained “in my own way”. As a child, Jeanene enjoyed art classes because it provided both social and creative outlets for her self-expression. For example, she recalled that the most important part of art making in those years was the social aspect, speaking with other students and with her teacher while she was engaged in the creative process, the art making. When she entered high school she began to ponder possible professions that would allow her to combine making art and working with people. A negative experience with a “bad” art teacher in high school cemented her desire to pursue art therapy as a future career. Although she considered the teacher a good artist, she believed that the teacher’s classroom management style, which entailed having students work in silence, did not promote artistic expression; moreover, it created a negative atmosphere. This negative experience combined with other difficulties she was facing at this time resulted in a lack of self-confidence and confusion about her future path.

High school was a difficult period for Jeanene. When she entered her senior year she was uncertain about her ability to pursue college. She was concerned about her GPA, and did not think she could be competitive for college. There was also tension about the
cost of college. As she indicated, she came from “a poor family, a big family, didn’t have the money.” However, half way through her senior year things began to change. She decided “You know what? I could go to college.” The thought of being the first in her family to attend college provided motivation to work hard and persevere. During that difficult period, Jeanene realized that going to college would be best for her future and so she worked hard to improve her grades. Her interest in art therapy came about after researching several career paths including social work. She finally decided that a career in art therapy would allow her to pursue her passion for helping people and art making.

After graduating from high school Jeanene began her college career at a local community college. She entered college as a social work major but later changed to liberal arts. After completing her associate’s degree she transferred to Southside University to complete her bachelor’s degree. She decided to major in art history rather than art studio, which was her initial preference, because she believed that an art history degree would offer a more reliable path to graduate education and employment. At the time of the first interview, Jeanene was planning to enroll in at least one art studio course the following semester to pursue her passion for art making.

Much of Jeanene’s art emerged from a desire to work through family issues. Making sculpture provided an opportunity to sort out/through family tensions. In addition, she told me that her art came from an interior place rather than a concern with external issues. For Jeanene, sculpting a figure or a scene from a block of clay occurred through creativity. The creative process or creative ability is what allows the form to emerge from the clay. Jeanene defined creativity as inspiration based on one’s individual perspective. To illustrate this idea she used the example of an art assignment. While all
students in a class will receive the same assignment, the final art works will vary immensely based on the artist’s unique vision and inspiration.

Finally, in thinking about how participating in a research project might influence who she was as an artist and her art making, Jeanene indicated that doing an artistic research project would allow her to think about the “why” and “how” she was doing things rather than simply doing it. She was also excited about the upcoming trip because as she had never travelled out of the country. She was hopeful that the trip would allow her to get out of her comfort zone, try and see new things and then apply the new information to her work.

Meagan’s path to art was difficult, expensive and at times very confusing. A transfer student who began her higher education experience at a for-profit art institute, Meagan described her initial college experience as expensive and undemanding. The lack of rigor within the educational environment and the curriculum prompted her to question her long-held desire to become an artist. At this point in her life she had no direction and no passion for her studies. The art institute had recruited her aggressively while she was in high school and encouraged her to pursue gaming design. While she was not necessarily interested in this area of study the recruiters made her feel welcome and during the recruiting process told her “We need you at our school.” She enrolled shortly after graduating from high school and took one year of coursework before abandoning the institute. Meagan left the institute with a large sum of student debt and no transferable credits. Looking back on her decision to enroll in the art institute, Meagan believed that
although the experience was costly and difficult at the time, it nonetheless helped her
grow as an individual, and to rethink her status as an artist.

After leaving the art institute Meagan enrolled at a local community college. She
briefly considered becoming an art teacher but after a few classes decided it was not the
right fit. She shifted her focus to digital arts and obtained an associate of science degree.
Upon graduation she secured a job at a printing company and held the job title of
“Artist”. Meagan described this moment in her life as “major”. On the other hand, she
also admitted that the Artist title felt like a “lie” because she had “dropped out” of art
school. She explained that it had taken several years to move beyond that experience and
that for a long time the experience had colored the way she thought about herself as an
individual and as an artist. While Meagan was interested in digital art and was working
in the field, her true passion was drawing and sculpture. She decided to continue her
education and pursue a bachelor’s degree in studio art at Southside University.

At the time of our first interview Meagan described being primarily drawn to
sculpture, and that she enjoyed producing busts even though she found the process rather
difficult and complex. Meagan defined creativity as more than just an idea; it involved “a
drive”. Moreover, she described the role of creativity in her life with reference to the
relational map she had completed before our first interview. To represent the relationship
between herself (the artist) and creativity she had drawn little waves between the two
because as she explained creativity is not always easy to get to.

Meagan described how engaging in undergraduate research was different from the
typical cycle of simply creating art for a grade; rather, participating in the program
provided motivation and an opportunity to think about history and what others were
doing. Meagan was a returning scholarship participant, and this would be her second experience with study abroad and undergraduate research. She was excited about returning to the now more familiar environs. As she explained, the first trip had a “tremendous” influence on her as an individual and artist, and she felt a strong desire to be part of “this world or near it.” Moreover, she indicated that being in an environment that “loves their artists and celebrates them and doesn’t mock them, …it’s such a different tone”. Meagan surmised that the impact of the second trip would most likely influence the technical aspects of her project. She also described being more focused participating in the experience for a second time.

Morgan

Morgan, an artist with a love of science, had changed majors twice before settling on art history. Morgan grew up with “a lot of rules and restrictions”, which “hindered her creativity” but it (creativity) was always “innately there”. She recalled doing visual art as far back as elementary school when her teacher challenged her to copy master paintings. She remembered going through the book of master paintings and being “at peace with everything”. At that point in her life portraiture was her favorite genre and she continued to make art and take art classes through middle and high school.

Beginning in middle school she also began to explore science. The schools she attended emphasized the importance of math and science and she was strongly encouraged to participate in science fairs (winning several competitions and prizes), and quickly became immersed in the science culture at her middle and high schools. She described this culture as highly competitive, and although she was successful in this
environment she viewed the experience primarily driven by winning and “doing stuff that didn’t appeal to me”.

In high school she considered a number of professions including marine biology, architecture, and interior design. Morgan’s deliberation process regarding which major to pursue in college entailed a certain amount of pressure from her family, and she was encouraged to select an academic track that was “practical”, and one that would lead to a career in which she could “make a living”. After graduating from high school she enrolled at a community college and studied science (she also enrolled in a few art classes) before transferring to Southside University to pursue a bachelor’s degree. When she transferred to Southside, Morgan’s initial intention was to pursue a career in design and so she matriculated as a studio art major. However, prior to beginning classes she switched her major to art history because she felt that an art history degree was more “practical”, and would allow her to develop some of her other strengths such as writing. After she entered Southside University she also stopped making art and she was conflicted about not being able to express her creativity. She described this cessation as a loss and painful. Something that had come to her so naturally before was gone.

Regarding creativity, since she did not dance anymore (she had studied dance for a number of years as a teenager), and she did not create art, the only way that she could access her creativity was through the way that she lived her life. Morgan described it as “walking with creativity”. In addition, creativity involved the ability to “think outside the box” and “bring something new to whatever you are doing”. It also entailed the ability to look at things from a different perspective. Morgan’s artistic decisions involved looking at things that have already been done and then doing them in a different way. In addition,
her approach to art making is an attempt to “capture the beauty in things” rather than a focus on political or social issues.

Morgan indicated that the opportunity to engage in research during her undergraduate career was allowing her to do what she wanted to do. She also described it as providing the opportunity to “facilitate my growth as a researcher, as an art historian, and as an artist.” She explained that the experience would allow her to finish her degree “strongly”. Regarding the study abroad trip, Morgan hoped to immerse herself in the cultural identity of the city and be inspired. She was excited about the applied nature of the program, the ability to do hands-on research overseas, and the ability to combine study abroad with research, just like her art history professors.

Patricia

A studio art major who began her academic journey on the pre-medical track, Patricia hails from a family of medical professionals and artists. Patricia’s interest in making art began in early childhood. As a child, she enjoyed painting and drawing, and later became interested in photography by working as a model, and was strongly influenced by a family member who taught her the technical aspects of photography. From a young age Patricia was gently encouraged to pursue a medical career, and thus began her academic journey at a community college with the intention of becoming a physician. What she described as a “turning point” in her life came while completing her associate’s degree. During this time she became a mother and returned to photography by taking “side jobs”. She explained this period as follows: “…during that college experience and my associate’s period was really what transformed me, I think, into an artist, rather than someone who makes art on the side.” Another experience during this
period cemented her future trajectory towards art. During her second year of college one of her biology professors made a comment in class that had a profound impact on her, which subsequently prompted her to rethink her life and career trajectory. The professor indicated that students who did not feel a connection to the course content should reconsider their decision to pursue a medical career. It was at this point that Patricia decided to complete her associate’s degree and then transfer to Southside University to pursue her passion for art.

Patricia sometimes felt insecure about making art because she lacked the foundational art courses, and training in the “formal techniques” that many of her colleagues at Southside learned as studio art majors. She discussed her circumstance and perspective in terms of coming from a different field and “frame of thinking”. This frame of thinking included a sense that her work was not as “good as those who have these formal techniques.” She further described her frame of thinking as linked with a specific artistic style. In addition, she indicated that socio-political issues primarily influenced her body of work at that time. Patricia defined creativity as an ability to take existing ideas and present them in novel ways. Moreover, Patricia indicated that creativity permeated all aspects of her life, and she often applied creative strategies to quotidian tasks such as keeping her children on schedule or making dinner.

Patricia ruminated on how participating in an undergraduate research project and the opportunity to travel abroad might impact her as a student, artist and individual. Before being accepted to the program she never thought about research in terms of art. Now, through her own research project, she had the chance to investigate an idea that “could potentially be important to other people.” The opportunity to conduct research had
provided a boost in confidence regarding her artistic talent, and she talked about the
research experience as holding the potential for self-discovery. Finally, Patricia hoped
that the study abroad experience would help her to sort out what was missing within
herself. She explained how it might allow her to “tweak” aspects of herself as an artist
and perhaps even make her work more powerful.

Rebecca

Rebecca has always “loved” science and making art. When she was younger she
would make art to celebrate special occasions like birthdays, and she referred to this as
her “art as gifts” period. She was also a committed doodler and would fill school
notebooks with a variety of studies people and other interests. In high school, Rebecca
enrolled in an art class and spent many hours perfecting her projects. She was also a
member of the art club. Beginning in high school, she gravitated toward a career in the
medical field because she had experienced the pain and suffering of family members who
had dealt with illness and she wanted to help people.

Rebecca began her undergraduate career at Southside University as a biology
major before switching to studio art. During her freshman year she had a talk with her
parents that would change the trajectory of her academic career and her life. The talk
came about because she was “stressing” about which specialization to select within
biology. What did she want to do in the field of biology? She put this question to her
parents and received a surprising answer. She presented the various options to her parents
who did not offer a strong opinion regarding which she should choose. They did however
have a strong opinion about her interest in art and suggested she pursue art because that
seemed to be her passion. She took their advice. During her first year of college she remained biology major but enrolled in a few art classes to find out if she “liked it”.

Rebecca’s first year in college was difficult because she was torn between pursuing biology, which would allow her to “help people” but at the same time she did not want to abandon her passion for art making. Enrolling in art courses during this difficult time helped her realize her commitment to art. Rebecca described her artistic style as varied. At the time of our first interview, rather than settling on one direction in her work she was more interested in examining a diverse array of techniques, styles, and approaches. As she explained, her professors had encouraged her to find her own unique “artistic niche” in preparation for graduate school; however, she found this tradition to art making restrictive, and she was conflicted about making a decision to select and stick with a particular style or approach. Rebecca described her ideas about creativity from the perspective of art making and in her life. As an artist, creativity involved the ability to solve a particular problem and to make new connections. Outside the realm of art, creativity was a particular skill, the ability to convince or persuade others. Rebecca indicated “…having these skills is like part of you as an artist also. So working in a restaurant even, if you have a terrible customer, and it’s like, how can I artfully rearrange this conversation so that everyone’s happy?”

Finally, Rebecca described participating in undergraduate research as a unique opportunity to explain the “process” behind the work of art. She was hopeful that producing an artistic research project would invite the viewer to engage with her work on another level, and facilitate a deeper understanding of the work of art. It was difficult for Rebecca to speculate on the potential impact of the upcoming study abroad experience on
her art, and how the experience might influence her as an artist. She explained that “Well, I know it will change, but I don’t know how. I have no idea ‘cause I haven’t experienced it yet.”

Stuart

As a young man, Stuart was interested in art and sports. After graduating from high school he lived in a few different places before enrolling at Southside University where he initially pursued a business degree. He had selected business following the advice of family members, and with the long-term goal of joining the family business after graduation. A transitional moment came while he was enrolled in an elective art class in college. He described the experience as bringing to light capabilities for which he had not previously been aware. He also credited the experience in this course with helping him make the decision to change course and major in art studio with a business minor. Stuart’s decision to minor in business was both strategic and practical. He explained that the strategies and foundational principles related to business are easily adapted to the arts making it easier to navigate the art world.

Stuart described himself as a formalist, preferring to attend to line, tone and value in a work. He indicated that he was primarily drawn to complexity, and difficult (and precise) mediums such as drawing and printmaking. Stuart’s artistic decisions were largely guided by critical thought and a response to world events. He defined the notion of critical thought as involving deep thought and perception. Regarding creativity, at the time of our first meeting, Stuart was initially perplexed about how to discuss it in his life and art making. He described creativity as involving objectivity. Stuart viewed the relationship between creativity and art making as something that he was “battling
against”, and constantly trying to achieve. Stuart also indicated that creativity could be understood in terms of innovation, expansion and deconstruction.

As he prepared to embark on his research project, he had thought a lot about the connection between art making and research. Stuart held the opinion that conducting research in the arts could potentially provide an opportunity to break the accepted wisdom about research could be or what it could accomplish. In regard to what he might gain from the study abroad experience he hoped to become more aware of the world, and he was convinced this would positively influence his art making. While he could not be sure exactly how the experience would impact his artistic process he was convinced it would “enhance it”.

Victoria

An art history major and self-proclaimed non-artist, Victoria recounted fond childhood memories of visiting art museums and festivals with her family. Her passion for studying art began in earnest once she entered high school and enrolled in an advanced placement art history course. She was particularly fascinated with non-western art and the link between art and cultures of the world. She admired her teacher’s passion for art, and this in turn helped her develop her own passions and interests. In addition, over the course of the term she discovered that art history was a “thing”, and because she liked history and art she decided to pursue art history in college. During this period, when she spoke to others about her passion for studying art, and her desire to pursue art history in college, she was often met with bewilderment and received responses such as “Oh, you can’t make this a career.” However, her parents were very supportive and after
graduating from high school she entered a community college and majored in humanities before transferring to Southside University to pursue a bachelor’s degree in art history.

Regarding creativity, Victoria believed that as an art historian it was imperative to think critically and creatively to get her points across. Creativity thus involved being able to see things from different perspectives. In regard to creativity in her life, Victoria indicated that she was engaged in various campus activities that provided opportunities to interact with students from a variety of disciplines. She explained that such interactions often resulted in the assumption that she was “creative” and would “bring something else to the table”. Victoria felt that creating a work of art as part of her research would be a new challenge, and would give her the opportunity to think about the research in a different way. Rather than limiting herself to “just being an art historian”, she wanted to use the experience to engage in deep reflection regarding the development of the final piece. She wanted the art piece to be “a reflection of my own personal idea.”

Victoria discussed how participating in undergraduate research might influence her process. She indicated that participating in the experience would allow her to use both her “art history brain” and “new artistic brain”. She was also interested to discover how she would navigate the research process. For example, would she approach some aspects of the research from an art historical perspective and others from an artist’s perspective or would the two merge in the research process? Victoria was apprehensive that anything she could make would be considered art since she did not think of herself as artistic or creative, however, she believed that she would need to “embrace the fact that what I could create would be art. I need to be okay with whatever I do.” In regard to the opportunity to study abroad, Victoria believed that the experience would make her”
independent and …more self-sufficient”. She also thought it would open her mind to new ideas and this would in turn benefit her research project.

In this chapter, I presented a narrative “sketch” for each participant in order to establish details regarding each participant’s background, how she/he came to study art or art history, and initial ideas around creativity and engaging in research. The table below (Table 1) includes a summary of participant demographic information including gender, academic standing, major, and plans to attend graduate school.

Table 1 Participant Demographics

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<th>Pseudonym</th>
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<th>Major</th>
<th>Previous Travel</th>
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CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

My research project endeavored to investigate how undergraduate art majors negotiate/construct their identities as artists. I also considered the role of creativity in this process, and how the context of undergraduate research influenced identity formation. In this chapter, I present the major findings of my inquiry. In the sections that follow, I discuss each research question along with the corresponding themes that emerged from the data.

The questions of interest for this study were:

1) How do undergraduate students majoring in the arts negotiate/construct their identities as artists?
   a) How does participation in an undergraduate research experience in the arts influence the construction of identity as artist?

2) What role can creativity play in the formation of an individual’s artistic identity/identities?

Research Question One

*Who I am is based on the beliefs I have developed not the cultures or traditions my race/skin color connects me to.* (Morgan)

*Being an artist to me now is to understand that we all have a voice that needs to be heard somehow and that voice is rooted or formed by all of the voices we have heard in our own trajectory.* (Deborah)

The first research question considered how undergraduate students majoring in the arts negotiate/construct their identities as artists. For the participants in my inquiry, the notion of artistic identity/identities emerged from a variety of sources including
significant life experiences that shaped her/his artistic “becoming”. Other influences such as the local and global art environs, and the influence of social identities such as gender, race and class in particular also played a key role in the formation of artistic identity/identities. I identified two primary themes related to question one: significant life moments, and the notion of artistic self. I further identified sub-themes related to each primary theme. I documented three sub-themes related to the first theme, significant life moments. These sub-themes, which included an awakening in art class, bumps in the road, and art history or not art history, further explicated the significant life moments experienced by participants. The sub-themes clarify precisely how significant life moments shaped participants’ artistic “becoming”. I also identified three sub-themes related to the second primary theme, the notion of artistic self. These included the influence of social myths of the artist, the salience of social identities such as race, class, and the influence of the artistic milieu of the university art department and the larger art world. Examining these factors assisted me in understanding the ways in which participants were constructing and navigating their artistic selves over the course of the study, and what being an artist meant to each participant.

The first interview and journal entries, composed at the beginning and end of the research program, provided data to illustrate how participants described their “artistic selves”. At the end of the research program participants composed reflective essays to document their perceptions about the experience, and what they learned by participating in undergraduate research.

A distinct characteristic of narrative inquiry is that data does not emerge in a neat and tidy fashion. My study was no exception. Participant narratives were multilayered,
and evolved over the duration of the study. While I organized the data around distinct primary and sub-themes in this chapter, the reader will observe that the themes presented are in fact interconnected, multilayered, and relational. Moreover, the three sub-themes I identify below may be conceptualized as facets (or paths) along a similar continuum (or road) towards artist. To put it another way, the sub-themes demonstrate the diverse ways in which participants experienced significant life moments that influenced their individual artistic identity/identities. Below, I outline each of these primary themes along with their corresponding sub-themes.

**Significant Life Moments**

Discerning the details and trajectory of each participant’s life, particularly in regards to how art and creativity played a role in their lives, was key to contemplating the factors that influenced their decisions to pursue art as a life path. Most participants identified a variety of early life experiences (between childhood and the beginning of college), some positive and some negative, that were significant in shaping their budding artistic identities. Embedded within the primary theme are distinct transitional events, or sub-themes. The sub-themes demonstrate how significant life moments moved participants closer to their artistic selves.

The first theme is “awakening in art class”. Several participants described experiences in an art class in high school or college, or how key individuals such as art teachers, shaped their ideas about being an artist. Five individuals in my study: Ashley, Christine, Deborah, Rebecca, and Stuart participated in an art class during high school or college, which set them on a creative path. The second sub-theme, “bumps in the road”, is exemplified through the narratives of Meagan and Patricia. For example, Meagan’s
transitional moment was not associated with an art class but a negative early college experience. This experience motivated her to persist in art despite this adverse experience. It also cemented her recognition that she “was an artist”. Patricia’s transitional moment occurred while she was enrolled in a biology course at a community college. The experience emboldened her to contemplate her life trajectory. It also provided the impetus to switch directions in college, and realize what she did not want for her future.

The third sub-theme that emerged from the primary theme, significant life moments, was “art history or not art history”. Jeanene and Morgan, the two art history majors in the study who were also artists, experienced different types of transitional moments that shaped their creative trajectories. These moments involved making difficult decisions related to attending college or selecting a major. The decision to pursue college was Jeanene’s transitional moment. Morgan indicated that selecting a college major, which involved setting aside the artistic part of herself was a highly significant event in her life. Victoria’s significant moment involved the decision to pursue art history while she was still in high school. I discuss each of the sub-themes related to significant moments in detail below.

**An Awakening in Art Class**

Enrolling in an art class in high school or college prompted Ashley, Christine, Deborah, Rebecca, and Stuart to “see” themselves as artists. In addition, receiving recognition and support from their instructors nurtured their artistic abilities, and inspired each of them to discover their value as creative individuals. Ashley began to take art more seriously because she thrived in the class environment, and felt supported by her art
teacher. This experience elevated her thinking and approach to art beyond just fulfilling credits, and was instrumental in her process of selecting a college major. She described interactions with her high school art teacher as igniting a “hunger” “I guess my interaction with her and then continuing to take art classes as well kind of just moved along my kind of hunger.” The hunger Ashley described was put on hold only temporarily during her first semester in college, when she experienced a brief moment of doubt about her chosen major. After discussions with peers, who had suggested she consider other majors, Ashley briefly contemplated switching majors; however, after speaking with her parents, who acknowledged her “hunger”, (and noted that abandoning it might lead to unhappiness), she decided she was on the right track and never looked back. Ashley’s narrative illustrates her decision-making process around the desire to pursue art, and how she rejected suggestions from peers and instead held to her desire to pursue art.

Christine had a similar experience in a college art course, which eventually motivated her to switch her major to art. While enrolled in the art course, her perceptions regarding her artistic abilities and value as an artist began to evolve. In this course, and for the first time in her life, she received positive feedback for her work. She described this as a pivotal moment:

my professor…was so supportive and so encouraging and…I feel like he gave me the strength to look at the things that I was doing and see that they had value… he was like, ‘You should consider going into art and I think that if you got some really good training, you could be exceptional if you wanted to be.’ That was very conflicting for me to kind of get through that.

Christine’s conflict was twofold. First, by abandoning teaching (education was her major at the time) she felt she would lose her long-standing desire to work with children in her
professional life. Second, her larger concern centered on what her family and others would think about her once she made the decision to pursue art. The pressure she felt from others (and how she responded to this pressure) will be discussed in a later section.

Like Christine, Deborah’s experience in a college art class resulted in her decision to switch majors, and similar to Christine, her decision represented a very difficult “struggle”. Deborah’s struggle was primarily linked to perceptions of the artist in her native country and family expectations. She described her struggle as follows:

Back home…there's no degree in the fine arts. You just do it if you want to do it or you just find a mentor and you become a mentee. But it's not wealthy and I guess there's not, like, a huge thing for artists in my hometown. So I always had that fear of studying art. But I always had that drive and that passion, and the only thing my dad told me was, ‘Don't quit business. Finish business, and if you still want to do art, then follow your passion.’ So that's what I did and I had their support and they, actually, pushed me to lose that fear that I had. Because if I had their support, I had, like, everything I needed, kind of.

Deborah’s experience in the art class, which included the support of a passionate professor, and receiving recognition for her work, allowed her to feel “at home” within this environment, and strongly influenced her decision to pursue a second degree in art despite sociocultural perceptions around the persona of “the artist”. The above quote also demonstrates how Deborah balanced family expectations with her own desires. Rather than abandon her passion to pursue art, Deborah took her father’s advice and finished the business degree but then quickly moved forward with pursuing her own agenda to study art. This illustrates how Deborah was moving closer to more complex meaning making structures (Boes, Baxter Magolda, & Buckley, 2010).

Ashley, Christine, and Deborah’s experiences in art classes demonstrate how each of these individuals wrestled with making their own decisions in regards to pursuing their passions for art. Although Christine and Deborah experienced struggles along the way,
these circumstances did not discourage them or cause them to reconsider their decisions to pursue art degrees. For Christine, receiving positive feedback for the first time regarding her artistic production gave her the confidence she needed to pursue her passion. This “sense of mastery” (Josselson, 1996) related to her métier was important to her artistic “becoming”. In Deborah’s case, although she followed her dad’s recommendation to finish the business degree, his support provided the impetus she needed to follow her own path and pursue a second degree in art. Her experience illustrates how she became more aware of her “internal voice” (Baxter Magolda, 2001), and how she navigated the balance between external demands and personal desires.

During freshman year Rebecca had an intense conversation with her parents, who encouraged her to switch majors from biology to art after observing her strong passion for art making. Rebecca described this conversation as pivotal in giving her the confidence to believe in her decision to follow a creative rather than a STEM path. In contrast to feeling at home in the art department, Rebecca’s first art class in college after switching majors was challenging and strange. On the first day of class she arrived on time and noticed that most students were late. In addition, there did not seem to be a real structure to the class, and at first she did not recognize the young professor in the assembled crowd, whom she described as a transgendered male. Her initial impressions were not positive; however, once she got to know her peers she indicated that: “…they started teaching me about different art things, and it was like changing my perspective on a lot of things. And just seeing how the art student is a whole different type of person.” Several of the students in that first class eventually became some of Rebecca’s closest friends. As the above excerpts illustrate, this event in Rebecca’s life prompted her
reconsider certain beliefs she had formed about the image of artist (and art students in general). However, once she entered the environs of the artist, she began to re-evaluate her beliefs and think differently. Over time, being an artist felt more comfortable and natural. Rather than relying on external formulas to dictate what an artist is or does Rebecca instead began to examine her own beliefs and trust her internal voice.

Stuart’s journey to artist also began with an influential art course. However, in contrast to the experiences of Christine and Deborah, Stuart’s subsequent decision to switch majors did not involve a struggle or conflict. On the contrary, it was a moment of “liberation from family expectations.” Stuart’s family had encouraged him to pursue a degree in business so that he could join the family business after graduation. Until Stuart enrolled in the art course he was on track to meet those expectations. His experience in the art course changed everything. Rather than following the expectations of others, this life event set him on his own path, which he was directing:

I took…a drawing class, and I wasn't even taking it seriously. But the experience …really opened me up to capabilities…that I wasn't necessarily aware of. I just remember my last project critique…it was such a transcendent experience….my professor was… excited about how far I've gotten for the course and just how capable I am and how I didn't know that I was that capable. Because he pushed me and I think-- that was such a profound influence on my whole art career…I think without that class, I wouldn't even be in art.

He articulated his decision to pursue art as a crossroads:

It was definitely at a crossroads. It was like,…Do I go down the path that I feel obligated to or do I make my own path? And…deciding that I was going to take my own path, automatically it was just such a sense of fulfillment….I am the only person pushing me towards this path….It's like, okay, let me make this path of mine out of just pulling stuff out of my head…That phenomenon just flabbergasts me. I just find it so inspiring.

Before enrolling in his first art class, Stuart’s career path had been strongly influenced by his parents’ vision of him joining the family firm. Stuart’s experience in the art class
dramatically changed his perspective, and provoked him to seriously consider his future life path based on his own beliefs and desires. As he noted, this awareness gave him a sense of fulfillment and was deeply inspiring. Stuart’s narrative, like the other participants I have discussed thus far, reflects how he was moving closer to making decisions guided by his own values and beliefs. Stuart’s narrative also demonstrates that he was firmly in the crossroads phase of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

For each of these individuals, transitional life moments were associated with self-discovery related to experiences in an art class, or the influence of an art teacher. Although Christine, Deborah, and Rebecca expressed feeling initially conflicted about switching majors, their positive transitional experiences further propelled them towards their passions for art. Moreover, the “conflict” described by these individuals is consistent with the developmental dynamics related to the phases and process of self-authorship (Boes, Baxter Magolda, & Buckley, 2010). For instance, each of these narratives illustrates how participants were working through the epistemological, interpersonal, and intrapersonal dimensions as they struggled to find their “selves”. The transitional moments I described above reflect how each participant made important decisions about her/his life and future trajectories. These were largely motivated by personal goals and needs rather than following recommendations from external influences such as the opinions or suggestions of family members for example. While several participants consulted with family and friends during the decision-making process, their personal life experiences brought into focus what they wanted for themselves and their futures. As a result, each individual decided to pursue art as a life
choice. I shall return to this point later in this chapter in my discussion regarding the theme of artistic self.

Bumps in the Road

The second facet or sub-theme along the continuum of significant life moments involved bumps in the road along the journey to artist. In contrast to the participants I discussed above, whose significant moments involved positive experiences with an art teacher or art class, the transitional moments experienced by Meagan and Patricia were largely negative in nature. Meagan’s transitional moment was associated with a disappointing early college experience. However, rather than quell her desire to become an artist this incident had the opposite effect, and resulted in the acknowledgement that she “was an artist”. Patricia’s transitional moment occurred while she was enrolled in a biology course at a community college. She had no connection with the professor nor did she connect with the environment or course content. Consequently, this event prompted her to contemplate her life trajectory. It also influenced her decision regarding what she did not want for her future.

As I noted in her narrative sketch, after high school Meagan enrolled in a for-profit art school and dropped out after one year. Meagan described the incident as extremely costly, and she felt that it did not provide the rigor or training she had expected. The impact of this event was evident throughout Meagan’s story. When I asked her what it meant to be an artist she recounted her experience at this art school:

To be an artist seems like it was something I fought against for a long time, especially like after high school. I tried to go to art school, and it was a horrible fit for me…so I was kind of like, ‘Oh, I guess I’m not an artist!’
She also discussed the environment of the school and how she felt as a student:

…but it felt fake…everyone was getting straight A’s. There was not competitiveness. There was no critique. It was kind they’re just shuffling you through these classes, and it felt very-- I’m like, ‘Oh, is this what art school’s like?’ So it just made me feel like, ‘Well, maybe I’m not an artist.’ So I…spent a lot of my 20s just floundering. Like I had no direction after that.

Although Meagan had a sense of her artistic identity from an early age, for example she indicated that hanging around other artistic students in high school was “the first sense of identity”, this negative, initial experience with art school, at least for a temporary period in her life, challenged the notion of what an artist is and an artist’s value, which at the time provoked her to question her identity as an artist. The way that Meagan processed this life event shows how during this period, she was strongly influenced by external factors, in this case what others in the art school environs were telling her or how they were making her feel. This experience resulted in internal doubts about being an artist.

Once she transferred to Southside University and encountered a different learning environment, and was pursuing fine art rather than graphic design (which she had pursued in community college), her ideas about herself as an artist and the future began to evolve:

So I came over to Southside…doors just opened since I just decided that I was an artist, and really wanted to be one. But I just went about it a different way…Which seemed like the only way at that time. But doing studio art now, it feels like I can become the artist that I wanted to be.

Meagan’s negative life experience illustrates how she persisted despite facing initial failure and uncertainty about her decision to pursue art, and more importantly about being/becoming an artist. Rather than serve as a barrier, this experience provided a way to conceptualize her life path. It also reinforced her belief that she was an artist.
By making her own decision to pursue studio art she set aside external influences and began to attend to her inner voice (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

Similar to Meagan, Patricia struggled to find her herself early in her college career before transferring to Southside University. Patricia’s family had encouraged her to pursue a medical career so she initially entered college as a biology major. While Patricia initially attempted to follow her family’s career advice, her decision to switch majors did not necessarily involve a struggle with family perceptions but rather concerned making the right personal choices for herself and her children:

So it happened to me in college. I realized that being in the medical field was kind of depressing for me… once I had got [to]…the class you took before you fully immersed yourself in it [the major]… a professor said, ‘If this class-- if you feel like you don’t have a connection with it, then you might want to reconsider.’…And that was the point I just realized that I really want to be creative in my life… I don’t want someone telling me what I have to do, or what I have to make, or the message that I have to give. So I think that college-- during that college experience and my associate’s period was really what transformed me, I think, into an artist, rather than someone who makes art on the side.

For Patricia, this transitional moment led to the realization that she was following someone else’s path rather than her own. Once she set aside the expectations of others and began to embrace her own ideas and desires she began the process of embodying her artistic identity. She further explained this experience in terms of oppression; specifically she felt others had imposed this path on her. She also indicated how it was stifling her voice:

I was tired of oppression, and it was in many forms, and it wasn’t necessarily a negative sort of thing. It was oppression to…force you into a direction…But I felt creatively oppressed, and I think that feeling that oppression, and knowing what it’s like to not fully being able to communicate what you’d like in the way that you’d like to, was what was like, ‘You know what? I need to be able to do something where I can say what I want to say…I think oppression during my college experience was what really told me…You need to do something that’s not going to have that sort of negative cloud over you.’
This excerpt further clarifies how Patricia battled and ultimately rejected following external formulas. The oppression she faced helped her identify her own values and vision for the future, and the ability to do things from her own perspective. Patricia’s narrative clearly illustrates how she was mediating external influences in the process of *cultivating her internal voice* (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

Meagan and Patricia’s narratives demonstrate how in contrast to some of the other participants, negative rather than positive life events drove them to thoroughly embrace an artist path. In addition, unlike some of the other individuals, Meagan and Patricia made their decisions with limited input from others. For instance, although Meagan’s family fully supported her decision to attend college, as a first generation college student, her family could not offer opinions on this topic since they did not share similar life experiences with college. In addition, parallel to Stuart’s experience, while Patricia initially attempted to follow her family’s wishes, she ultimately rejected this advice and made the decision to pursue art and become an artist.

**Art History or Not Art History**

The third facet or sub-theme along the continuum of significant life moments involved major decisions. For Victoria, Jeanene and Morgan, the three art historians in the study, these transitional moments concerned either the desire to pursue college, or selecting a college major. Victoria entered college with the intention of pursuing art history. Jeanene and Morgan had started their academic careers as studio art majors. Morgan switched majors just before her first semester at Southside University because she believed that an art history degree would more appropriately align with her future
career goals. Jeanene selected art history instead of art studio for similar reasons. Jeanene’s transitional moment was the decision to pursue college. On the other hand, Morgan knew she would attend college but was conflicted about her major. After much contemplation she selected art history. However, this decision forced her to set aside the artistic part of herself, and caused much internal conflict during her early college career.

A turning point in Jeanene’s life occurred just after graduating from high school when she suffered an illness and was confined to her home. During her illness she passed the time making ceramics as a way to cope with the isolation of being separated from her peers. She described this period as a pivotal moment because she felt isolated, unable to participate in graduation events with her peers. At this time she started a small craft business, which provided a way to stay connected with what she loved to do, ceramics. During this period she was also grappling with the decision to attend college:

…when I first started my senior year of high school, I did not think college was for me. And I’d always struggled with math, and that always brought my GPA down. Part of it also was financial side of it; you know, poor family, big family, didn’t have the money, no way I could go to college. And then about halfway through the year, I decided, ‘You know what? I could go to college.’ I was actually the first in my family to go to college. And you know what? College isn’t for everyone. But… I just kind of decided for myself that maybe I should, just for the best future.

This quote reveals Jeanene’s determination to pursue college despite financial barriers. She had also struggled with a perceived lack of confidence in her academic ability, which initially prevented her from entertaining the thought of attending college. However, she eventually came to believe that she could pursue a college degree and she noted that she came to this decision primarily on her own without much input from her family.

Jeanene’s narrative is consistent with what is known about students with lower levels of privilege (Pizzolato, 2003), and the ways in which high-risk students conceptualize
college decisions. Like Meagan, Jeanene was the first in her family to attend college. While she described her family as supportive of her decision to attend college, they were not necessarily involved in the decision-making process “… like my family wasn’t too involved in it. I mean they’re happy for me of course but…I really didn’t get a whole lot of help in decision factor. It was kind of just like do what you want.” Lastly, although Jeanene did not begin her college career as an art major, part of her decision-making process around attending college was thinking about how she could combine her dual passions for making art and helping others to forge a successful career. After completing her associate’s degree she transferred to Southside University as an art history major.

In contrast to Jeanene, who at various points during her high school career was unsure that she would attend college at all, for Morgan attending college had always been a future goal. Settling on a major however was a challenging decision. Beginning in middle school, Morgan was heavily involved in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) focused education and participated in multiple science fairs and competitions. Although she “loved” science in high school she decided that the competitive atmosphere, which involved being constantly compared to peers, was not fulfilling nor was it something she wanted to pursue as a career. Thus, similar to Jeanene, Morgan explored additional options that would combine her passions. In Morgan’s case, she was seeking a major that would allow her to combine her passion for art and science. The decision-making process was a struggle because she attempted to please her family by selecting a “practical” major while striving to remain committed to her personal aspirations:

Struggle, yeah…my mom, she’s very supportive, she’s like ‘I just want you to do something you love.’ But of course, that’s kind of said with an undertone of ‘You
need to make money, you need to make a living.’…initially I started off in very practical careers, like architect,…marine biologist, advertising agent, …interior design, all of these practical careers.

Similar to Christine and Deborah, Morgan’s decision-making process related to pursuing art was fraught with reservations that stemmed, in part, from sociocultural beliefs around artists and creative lifestyles. However, in contrast to other participants who made the decision to switch to art after initially pursuing other majors, Morgan switched from art studio to art history just before beginning her first semester at Southside University.

Morgan described the switch as difficult:

I started off as a studio art major. I think what I was thinking then was that it [art history] was just more practical, and that I was strong in writing and communication…it would capitalize on some of my more positive qualities more than solely creative work.

By selecting a “practical” major Morgan was largely following the advice of others rather than making her own decision based on personal values or needs. While she recognized that she was uncomfortable with this circumstance, at this point in her life she continued to rely on external formulas (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). The excerpt above illustrates how Morgan attempted to convince herself that the trajectory of art history was more practical (and important) than pursuing her creative aspirations. Once she was focusing on art history she quickly realized that she felt obliged to shut off her creative side:

…it was just so difficult… I felt like that part of my brain just shut down…I was so focused on writing …that it was just like…I don't relate to the creative side of me as much as I use to-- as much as I started off my university experience.

She further articulated the inability to “create” once that was “shut down”. When she did create it was difficult and “painful”: 
It was painful because when you sit down to a blank piece of paper or canvas and you're just like I don't know what to do. And something that used to come so naturally and so easily now it's just gone.

For Morgan, the decision to abandon art studio and pursue art history was significant, and had considerable consequences in regards to who she felt she was at the time. Her decision was strongly aligned with the specific “frameworks and structures” that directed much of her life up to that point. From a young age, Morgan had followed the expectations and guidelines set by others, and had often set aside her own feelings and desires to fulfill these expectations. By switching majors she was remaining within the boundaries that guided the “structure” of her life. However, over the course of the study, Morgan broke from these frameworks and began making decisions based on her own perspective and her own voice. I shall return to this point in a later section.

Lastly, Victoria entered college firmly committed to pursuing art history. She had been introduced to the discipline while in high school, and was intrigued by the possibilities inherent in the study of art, and the passion it engendered in her teachers. Victoria’s significant moment involved the decision to pursue art history in college, which came about while she was still in high school. The decision also coincided with the death of her mother, and she found comfort and solace losing herself in art. She wrote about this experience in her journal:

When I decided to major in art history I was a senior in high school and seventeen. My mother had just passed away and I was lost. I thought that becoming lost within the past or consuming my mind with objects from the past, would ease the pain I was presently feeling. I thought that art would take me away to a new world, somewhere I could never physically go as it no longer existed, or only existed in the artist mind. I would look at a piece and be transported somewhere different, into a new undiscovered realm...
Victoria believed that studying art history would allow her to stay connected to her mother. Unlike most other participants in the study who switched to art after initially pursuing other majors, Victoria began her college career committed to becoming an art historian. She remained firmly dedicated to this path during the experience.

The significant life moments and corresponding sub-themes I have identified in this section illustrate the range of life experiences that influenced participants’ identity/identities as artists. Ashley, Christine, Deborah, Rebecca, and Stuart experienced positive events such as impressionable art classes, which set them on their paths to artistic lives. Meagan and Patricia experienced negative life events, which solidified their commitments to becoming artists and pursuing creative lives. For Jeanene and Victoria difficult life events during high school shaped college decisions. Morgan’s decision to abandon her personal, creative aspirations in order to pursue a “practical” career led to her feeling estranged from her creative self. All of these significant life moments point to unique transitional moments or “crossroads” in their developmental journeys that compelled them to set aside or reject entirely more traditional academic paths in pursuit of “unconventional” majors including studio art and art history. Although participants were aware of the negative consequences of becoming an artist including the lack of financial stability, and pursuing a degree with limited career options, in most cases, these external influences did not prevent them from making the decision to pursue creative lives. On the contrary, the majority of participants rejected these external pressures and made the decision to pursue their passions and listen to their own voices. Finally, the significant moments that shaped participants’ artistic identity/identities illuminates the processes involved with individual meaning making structures. As the narrative excerpts
above illustrate these processes represent a continuum rather than a linear progression. Moving from external to internal ways of knowing is complex and fluid. As evidenced in the narratives, some participants made progress in one area but retreated in another before moving forward again. In the next section, I discuss the second primary theme related to the first research question, the notion of artistic self.

Artistic Self

*My artistic self is constantly shifting and evolving in a process that is still very new to me. I think of myself as having an "artist within" who has been marginalized all of my life.* (Christine)

*I think my artist self is awake.* (Meagan)

In earlier chapters I noted how throughout history the image of the “artist” has been built around certain sociocultural myths. I have also discussed some of the ways in which the artist is understood in society, how artistic training impacts the artistic persona, and how artists are portrayed within the art world. My inquiry endeavored to explore what it means to be an artist, particularly in regard to undergraduate art majors. The second theme that I identified related to the first research question was the notion of artistic self. For most individuals, the artistic self evolved significantly over the course of the study. At the beginning of the study several participants did not feel a strong connection to their artist selves. However, by the conclusion of the program, the majority expressed becoming one with their artist selves; they no longer felt a separation between their artistic selves and who they were as individuals.

I identified three sub-themes related to the notion of artistic self, including the influence of the social myths of the artist, the salience of social identities such as race, gender, and class, and the impact of the artistic milieu of the university art department.
and the larger art world. Each of the sub-themes (to varying degrees specific to each individual) shaped and informed participant artistic selves, and contributed to the formation participants’ artistic identity/identities. Moreover, it is important to underscore that the sub-themes I discuss below did not emerge as separate entities; rather, they intersected, and at times weaved together within the participant narratives. This is consistent with what is known about the process of identity formation including the mutable nature of identity, how identity shifts over time, and how identity is influenced by time and context. In the last section, Being (Becoming) an Artist, I discuss how the sub-themes or components of the artistic self came together through participant narratives.

The Influence of Social Myths around the Artist

In western societies, popular concepts of “the artist” remain linked to persistent myths about the artistic persona. Some of the most enduring myths include the artist as genius or touched by neuroses, the idea that making art is a difficult and solitary endeavor, and the notion that the artist is a unique individual with mystical creative powers (Sawyer, 2006). The influence of such myths varied among participants in my inquiry, however, ultimately, most balanced and/or overcame these myths in order to discover or understand who they were as artists. Ashley, Christine, Deborah, Jeanene, and Stuart used terms such as unique and different to describe, “What it means to be an artist”. Ashley indicated that being an artist was something she was “born with”. Christine noted that artists have a “different way of thinking than others”, and Deborah, wrote that artists see the world “under a different perspective than the regular person does”. Stuart echoed this line of thinking and pointed out that artists have a “natural
ability to think critically”. Jeanene explained that artists see different ways to do things, and Rebecca described making art as a “natural talent”.

The degree to which each participant acknowledged and associated with these myths varied. For example, while Stuart, Meagan, and Morgan were certainly aware of the myths, this awareness did not prevent them from pursuing their creative aspirations or becoming artists. Stuart explained his ideas related to the myth of the starving artist:

You know, I think starving artist…I always interpreted it as… being hungry … not satisfied with what you’re getting from the world, so you’re going to pull some more stuff out of it…But then there’s also just the traditional starving artist, because you’re poor. And that’s pretty popular.

He further explained that one should not abandon art for financial reasons:

…if you believe it.. I guess it’s just back to that whole mentality of where you hold yourself, and what you believe is going to happen…even though if you’re not making it [money] from your art, you still need to keep making your art. There’s plenty of non-art-related jobs that you can do, and still maintain the studio practice.

Stuart’s comments reveal that he was not willing to accept or be defined by these myths. Rather he came to his own understanding about how the myths influenced him as an artist. His remarks also show his thought process around understanding himself, his values and beliefs, vis-à-vis the external world.

Meagan related these myths to the circumstance of all college students noting that:

There's a whole trope of starving artists, struggling artists, depressed artists, artists-- crazy artists…I think that they do fit most artists,…but they …fit all college students. If you really think about it, it's really just like a college sort of reality. You're tired and depressed and broke. That's what it is, but as far as art goes, you're all these things, and it's kind of like just part of the identity of it, I guess.

She did not view herself in comparison to the stereotypical artist but rather rejected the stereotypes in favor of viewing and presenting herself as a different kind of artist who
was drawn to the academic features of art rather than pursuing the traditional paths of the artist:

I’ve learned basically that I’m a very motivated person and a driven person. I’m a different kind of artist than...the stereotypical one. Like, not the gallery artist, but I’m an artist who likes to problem solve, and I like to research and I like to talk about it and organize it in a cool way and show it.

Morgan wrote about struggling with these myths from the perspective of an art historian and artist:

As an art historian… I was taught that the true artist and their identity are hidden underneath layers of stereotypes…that society has created to categorize creativity. The artist has no regard for societal structure, is often poor, and starving. These are just some of the qualities/factors associated with the artist…that I've struggled with. They have often distorted my idea of what an artist truly is.

Nonetheless, by the end of the program, the myths had not prevented her from freeing herself from the “frameworks” that had structured much of her life. On the contrary, at various points in her narrative she talked about her “unique perspective as an artist”. A point to which I shall return in a later section.

Ashley, Rebecca and Jeanene’s narratives also addressed the notion of uniqueness, being different, and the ability to be innovative. For instance, Ashley noted that “one of the reasons it scares me to be an artist, because I think that I will have the same ideas as other people.” She added: “I have a deep desire to be unique or have an original idea.” Moreover, Rebecca noted that being “original” and “innovative” is critical to being a successful artist. She also wrote about artists as possessing a “natural talent” and being “gifted”. Jeanene explained that (student) artists “think differently” and she gave the example of course assignments to explain this circumstance. Jeanene’s view was that while students in a studio class might be assigned the same topic, the diversity and
difference among the final products demonstrated the students’ unique vision and approach. She concluded that this element separates artists from other individuals.

Finally, in comparison to other participants, at the beginning of the study, Deborah and Christine’s ideas concerning the prevailing myths of the artist were most strongly connected to negative connotations. Over the course of the study however their perceptions around the myths shifted significantly. I share excerpts from Christine’s narrative as evidence of this evolution in thinking:

…when people ask me what I do I do say I’m an artist and then I get the response that I’ve always felt, which is you’re good for nothing, you’re unemployed, you don’t do anything with your life, you’re a bum…many times I do feel those things but…

Her perceptions shifted significantly over time:

The myths…the stereotypes, the bias…all of those things I think contribute to my viewpoint …but I think that my awareness of it now is different…then there comes the second aspect, which is just accepting what I am and who I am, and then once those two things have come together there’s still that anxiety about being an artist, but as far as if I’m comfortable with it…I definitely feel it’s significantly more comfortable.

She explained coming to a place where she felt comfortable shedding the myths:

…the more I reflect,… think critically,… analyze and interpret… those biases, those myths, those beliefs about who we are as people regardless…the more I explore those things the more I become accepting of that…the more I reflect…the more likely I am to really let go of those myths, and I think in a lot of ways that I have already begun that shedding process because if I hadn’t I would never be here because I would think artists are losers who-- whatever that I heard growing up.

By the end of the program, Christine became more willing to embrace who she was as an artist. This acceptance involved rejecting the myths and stereotypes of the artistic persona, and exploring possibilities beyond these narrow categories through reflection and careful analysis. The comments above demonstrate how the myths influenced
Christine’s internal meaning making process regarding her conceptions of “the artist”, and more specifically her thinking in regards to herself as an artist. During the study she came to reject the negative social connotations of the artist. She instead began to embrace the positive aspects of her artistic self. Although Christine was cognizant of external influences she was beginning to separate herself from them (Boes, Baxter Magolda, & Buckley, 2010) in order to become an artist.

At the beginning of the study, Deborah also equated the persona of the artist with mostly negative connotations. She was thoroughly aware of the myths as she was making her decision to pursue art:

But in [my country], it’s just like... literally, the starving artist… and are not funded well. So it’s like a vicious cycle. If we don’t value in the artist, I feel like that it’s what creates a bad thought in society about what artists really are and why they need them. So I feel like that would be one way why that struggle is real, and the fact that there’s not many professional degrees in universities that you can have access...

She explained how her upbringing informed what she knew about artists:

I grew up in a family where they haven’t been really exposed to the arts, or they don’t understand that much…, or they…don’t pay attention… that you could live a good life as an artist,…it’s just something that I didn’t know while I was growing up with my family. So it was finding about that, and then coming here and being exposed to my first real art class, in a real university, I just felt like that was-- there is a profession, and it is a profession…

As the above excerpt illustrates, the negative connotations associated with the artist dissipated when Deborah discovered an alternative perspective of the artist as a “professional”. The discovery of new information allowed her to cultivate her own beliefs and point of view (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Deborah thus began to see herself differently as an artist, and this gave her confidence to pursue her artistic aspirations and begin to make her own way as a creative individual.
While several of the most enduring myths were woven into many of the participant narratives, most individuals in my study made use of the myths to work through constructing and navigating their artistic identities. By the end of program none of the participants had yielded to external pressures related to pursuing art. Rather, each persevered in their desire to pursue art related careers despite the lack of financial stability and other related negative connotations. Participant narratives demonstrate how each overcame and rejected these externally defined notions of the artist, and how they confronted the myths to develop an internal sense of identity, which involved a deep exploration of self. Christine’s story serves as the most profound example of this circumstance. While she vehemently rejected the artist label at first, by the end of the experience she had come to terms with her artistic self and sense of identity.

Gender, Race, Class, and Artistic Identity/Identities

But it's who I am, and I'm a woman, I'm a woman and I feel identified with the struggles of other women, either good or bad, like I also go through the same things every day (Deborah).

I feel like in my life, sometimes, I’m not as heard as much I maybe like to be, or--you know, and I feel like also relating this to being a minority; just being black in America. I don’t think-- and a woman, at that. I don’t think our voices are heard; or they’re heard, but they’re ignored (Patricia).

The only thing that I don't like about being a female in the art world is when other people assume that I got help or I got an award or I got something because I'm a girl or because I'm pretty (Rebecca).

As I outlined in the introduction and literature review, in this study I conceptualized identity as socially constructed (Torres et al., 2009; Weber, 2010), and shaped within and in response to the larger political and sociocultural environment in which the individual resides (Abes & Jones, 2013; Torres & McGowan, 2016).
I further envisaged identity as a process of becoming (Hall, 1996), and one that involves constant revision (Josselson, 1996). Following Yon (2000) I view identity as “continuous” and “incomplete” (p.13), and as a complex negotiation between the individual and society (Josselson, 1996). These hallmarks of the identity formation process are clearly visible (in different ways and to varying degrees) in the excerpts from the participant narratives I have outlined thus far. To review, two of the female participants in my study were African-American, one was Hispanic, and seven were White. In this section I discuss the influence of social identities, specifically gender, race and class, on the formation of artistic identity/identities.

In what follows, I discuss the dynamics around social identities primarily from the perspectives of the women in my inquiry. While my point of departure for each discussion is gender, other social identities such as class and race intermingled with gender in and through most of the narratives. As aforementioned, these elements/systems did not emerge as neat, separate entities; rather, they intersected at various points. For example, much of Patricia’s identity narrative was informed by her various statuses as a woman artist, mother, wife, student, and daughter. However, these statuses were likewise entangled with her complex identity as an African American. Deborah’s narrative was informed by both her extensive experience living abroad as a female of color, and by her upbringing in a “macho”, Latin culture. Although each woman was unique with respect to gender, most shared the belief that being a woman in the art world was difficult for various reasons. The most common of these involved perceived gender inequities within the environs of the art world. For instance, Christine indicated:

…as a woman I feel a little bit embittered because I feel like this is an industry where it’s difficult for a woman to shine because so much of it …is powered and
controlled by men. There’s not a lot of representation for female artists, it’s a much smaller number than the men anyway.

Deborah stated:

…I find unfair the fact that,… there's not really famous art-- like, historically placed women artists,…and I feel like now it's changing and there's a lot of women in the art scene. But still it's mostly, you know, dominated by the male, and like that it's always been traditionally the male gaze.

Ashley explained “[being a woman artist] does cross my mind. I think maybe less often than it should, because the art world is not necessarily fair or favored towards women.”

For some participants, gender was central to their stories about being/becoming artists, while others did not believe this facet played a large role in their artistic identity/identities (although they did recognize that being a woman in general was difficult in other ways).

To varying degrees, race and class intersected with gender in how the women constructed/navigated their identities. I detail this circumstance below through participant narratives.

*Dimensions Associated with Being a Female Artist*

The stories shared by the women in my study revealed the complex nature and influence of social identities in regard to artistic identity formation. For several women, their identities were intimately connected to relationships with others (Josselson, 1996). For Christine, these relationships were painful and challenging yet influential in shaping who she was and who she was becoming. Patricia’s identity was strongly linked to deep relationships with her children and her desire to set a positive example for them as a woman of color and as a creative individual.

Christine’s difficult family history, which included substance abuse, sexism, and financial struggle, was central to her narrative. During the study, she became increasingly
at odds with the beliefs and values of her family. She described a particular view held by members of her family to explain this circumstance. Some members of her family believed that government social programs designed to help those in need were “evil”. Christine did not understand nor did she agree with this point of view. Recently, she had witnessed the financial struggles of several family members, and felt these struggles were unnecessary because assistance was readily available. She described how she felt guilty about not doing enough to help family members as they struggled through these issues. She also explained how hard it was to balance her own well-being in the midst of these personal crises. The excerpt below illustrates how, by the end of the program, she was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with accepting her “roots”, which involved the values, beliefs, and expectations of her family:

…now I have a lot more compassion for myself especially when I look back to what has been going on,…that compassion… extends to myself as my identity as an artist because I think that so much of how I felt about myself was based on the roots in my childhood about who I was, who I was expected to be as a daughter, as a wife, as a sister, an artist, as somebody who’s creative.

She was also conflicted about balancing traditional gender roles with her position as an artist and making art:

…when I’m painting this past weekend I did not cook dinner; I did not clean the house. I did not conform to my traditional roles that I was…raised to be thought were my job…I felt really guilty…for not doing the dishes…realizing that there is a guilt associated with committing to my work and if I’m committing to my work and my career then I am failing in my duties as a wife.

Christine recounted a recent incident at a relative’s house that impelled her to ruminate upon her family’s worldview, and her increasing discomfort with these views “I left from that experience feeling very angry and feeling like this is wrong the way we’re thinking of things; it’s just-- it’s not working.” Christine’s narrative reveals how her meaning
making was shifting to internal formulas and also the ways in which social identities, specifically gender and class, informed her identity/identities as an artist. As she indicated, for most of her life “who she was” had been predicated on the expectations of others. Christine’s narrative illustrates how she was “revising herself” (Josselson, 1996) as she was beginning to embrace her artistic identity/identities. She was starting to move away from external expectations and toward a stronger sense of self, which was emerging from deep contemplation about her own values and beliefs. At times she felt conflicted about making art because engaging in artistic endeavors meant not carrying out her “duties” as a woman, however, she continued to pursue art making despite the complications it caused with her family and within herself.

Like Christine, Deborah struggled with balancing her creative endeavors and society’s expectations around gender (and culture/ethnicity). At the time of this study Deborah’s artistic oeuvre centered on exploring the female body:

I come from a culture where…the female… there's still a lot of limitations. It's a very conservative country and even though…we're seen as, "equals," it's not quite like that. So I…like to…make female versions of what real women, what strong, like, powerful women would be without caring about, like, what other people would judge upon them… that gives me the freedom to express and create this reality that it's not quite the way it was back home. But it's my new reality to me, and with the cultures that I've been at, the places that I've been at, the people that I have met, all of this has a lot of, like, weight within my persona and, like, my way of looking at people and the way I do art.

Deborah’s narrative reveals how she was using her creativity, specifically the exploration of the female body, as a way to reject the gender inequity she experienced within her culture. She noted how portraying strong women provided freedom of expression to create an alternative reality. Deborah’s story also shows how she was working through her ethnic and gender identities to construct her own reality based on personal beliefs and
values (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). She had considered multiple perspectives and views and was working towards her personal expression through an artistic examination of the female body. She also realized the incongruence between what she was told about “gender equity” in her culture, and the reality she experienced as a woman within her culture, which defied this narrative. As a result, Deborah portrayed women in her work because she wanted to give voice to the struggles and experiences of women. A recent comment by one of her male professors, which Deborah had interpreted as sexist, provoked her to think more deeply about artistic production and gender. She reflected on her artistic production as privileging the female gaze in response to the objectifying male gaze (Mulvey, 2009):

…it's who I am, and I'm a woman… and I feel identified with the struggles of other women…I also go through the same things every day. So I feel like it has a bigger voice, because I'm related to that person as opposed to disconnected voyeuristic, sexual way.

Deborah’s life experiences as a woman and artist were also bound up with her family background, and the stereotypes and expectations of women in her country:

Being a woman…it is really hard. Coming from a family…raised by a macho…Latin parent. So being a woman in my household…being a woman in [my country] is hard, ’cause you have to live up to certain standards… like stigma --just like a standard of beauty... the way that women should behave in society, and even women judge themselves based on that. So I feel like it's really hard…that's why I just wanted to get out of my hometown. But I do believe there’s hope for women in the art world…

By the end of the program she had decided that one of her primary life goals was to become a female leader to set a positive example for other women. For Deborah, this was extremely important:

…that's why identity is so important to me, 'cause you know, we have to really think deeply on who we are and who we want to be… before I didn't believe that I could be a leader, but I'm really motivated and I really want to be a leader. And I
really see myself managing people and changing society in some way. So I really see myself as a future female leader in the art world.

Deborah’s remarks show how her thinking had evolved during the program, specifically the dissonance she felt between previously held beliefs and original points of view she was forming through new experiences. She had come to reject the cultural expectations and limitations of “being a woman” that had previously informed her thinking. She replaced these ideas with new information, and created an alternative image of herself, which involved possibilities regarding what a woman could be and accomplish. In her final essay she wrote about her future plans, which involved a strong desire to break down the traditional barriers of the art world. Her entry further demonstrates a rejection of “traditional” societal views and stereotypes around the artist. In the face of these challenges Deborah had made the decision to persist:

I have learned that my main…purposes in life are to help and lead people…to create a difference in society, to eradicate stereotypes, and to break molds. As a contemporary female artist, which now I can say without fear that is who I am…we no longer have to listen to that single voice that we have had to listen to traditionally; the one of the male white artist; we have options now! I know minorities are still struggling to be heard, and to be paid and treated equally, but there is a glimpse of hope that in the contemporary art scene these voices are now being heard, respected, and admired…

Deborah’s perceptions regarding the influence of culture on identity were complex and often conflicting. She had initially indicated that one’s culture “explains a lot about who we are”. During our first conversation she stated, “We are our culture”. However, during the second interview, when I reminded her about her previous comments regarding culture, Deborah stated that her ideas had changed substantially. Her comments reveal how she was coming to terms with her ethnic identity:

I feel like culture does affect me in the way that…I recognized that feminism had to be a way out of like the machoism in my country…So I feel like that way my
culture … it's a huge part of who I am, but it's not what represents me as a person. I feel like I'm being affected by other cultures. … I do feel culture is part of our identity but it’s not completely it…

She further explained how her life experiences shaped her identity. Her remarks illustrate the complexity of her thinking around her personal beliefs and values, and how multiple perspectives were shaping her identity/identities:

What do we decide to take in and to leave out and what experiences to leave and which may unfortunately happen to us that will also make us stronger and that’s what I feel that identity is more rooted into….I think more of my identity that’s reflected is the one as a female artist rather than [connected to my ethnic background].

The identities of participants in my inquiry were intricate and emergent. Patricia’s story, like those of Christine and Deborah, further illustrates this circumstance. Patricia’s identity was largely influenced by her various statuses. Since beginning her studies at Southside balancing her “roles” seemed increasingly overwhelming. During the program she was learning how to manage the numerous expectations in her life. She was also beginning to deliberate who she was becoming as an artist, what she wanted for her future, and the example she wanted to set for her children. As I discussed earlier, at the beginning of the study she felt that the role of “artist” was the most neglected part of her identity. “…as far as identity, it’s hard to pinpoint, “Who are you?” …With so many different labels… mom, wife, daughter, student, artist… to juggle,…artist is something that I have control over”. She had decided to pursue the research program because she wanted to become “one person”. “I feel like right now, I’m like two different people. I’m the artist and then I’m just me. But I want to be this one person,… the person that is an artist, not the person and the artist”. Patricia had applied to the research program because she felt that something was missing in her life. At the beginning of the study she reflected
on how her life experiences had impacted who she was and how she was struggling with her status as a black woman in America:

...growing up, I’ve had so much happen,...that has continued to change the way I feel about myself, or... contradict an idea that you’ve had about yourself. And then you’re like, ‘Well, who am I now? What has this made me? What kind of person am I...because of this life change or this new thing that I’ve found out?’ And I think I’ve always been battling with this,...I hate to use race, because I feel like-- you know, sometimes race has nothing to do with it, and sometimes race has everything to do with it. And I think just being black in America, and an artist and a female, it’s like it’s so many different things. I feel like sometimes I’m not taken as serious as other people.

The conflicts Patricia was experiencing as she attempted to balance her various statuses with being an artist evoke Mishler’s (1999) explication of a “conjunct identity”, or the ability to balance two strong motives in one’s life. In this case, Patricia attempted to be a good mother and a successful artist. She was also struggling with her position as a female artist of color. For example, she described how being a black artist in a department with a white majority influenced her art and how she thought about herself as an artist:

I feel like... I feel like sometimes there’s not an audience where I am, currently, for the work that I’m making, because I make work based on my life experience....a lot of my work is based on being a mother, or being... you know, being black. And I feel like, within the art department here,...it really narrows the scope of who can perceive my work and really understand what I’m saying.

Patricia’s comments are consistent with recent studies that consider the impact of the college environment in relation to racial identity (Johnston, 2014), and the frequency with which students from certain backgrounds consider their racial identities in regards to college experiences (Hurtado, Alvarado, & Guillermo-Wann, 2015).

During the second interview, when I asked her to explain, “What it means to be a black, female artist,” she returned to the theme of oppression. In the excerpt below she
clarifies that the oppression she felt previously was related to her status as an African American, however, exposure to a different culture had shifted how she saw herself:

…in that regard sometimes I do feel oppressed. But I feel that having exposure to this culture outside of the one that I’m used to, and seeing the diversity of artists… I think that that really sort of changed my perspective on being a black artist. I always felt like I didn’t really have the audience for my work, but I think that this experience really helped me find a way to project my voice… I’m more subtle in what I’m saying….But I think working in this way, for me has helped me to be less sensitive about who I am, and more empowered about it. More empowered being a female black artist.

This shows how Patricia began to discover her artistic voice in part by resolving the dissonance between her previously held beliefs related to the artistic persona and new information she encountered while abroad. Observing how artists of color communicated their messages through their art in locations outside of the United States assisted her in expanding both her thinking around and position as an artist (Johnston, 2014). In addition, being exposed to a different culture contributed to Patricia’s ability to cultivate her artistic self. By the end of the program her ideas about race and being an artist had evolved further. Like Deborah, Patricia felt that her identity as a female artist was more salient than that of an artist of color:

I think now.. I think about myself less in terms of race, and in terms of the artist. I feel like just the artist… So sometimes I feel like it’s counterproductive to even mention race…being a factor sometimes. At this point I think it’s more successful when I can maybe attribute this… component of myself through the work, without being so vulgar about it sometimes. But I think definitely being a female artist, to me is very important.

The complexity of how she thought about “who” she was becoming as an artist is evident in the following excerpt. She described how starting a publication to support artistic women of color would be a way to “cope” with the situation:

I’ve been really thinking about like, what’s next. And thinking about myself as an artist, and how I felt like I wasn’t being heard at that time. I really want to create a
publication, where I highlight female, minority and upcoming artists…even though we’re women, we’re important, and even though we’re minorities, which is important as, you know, the next artist. So I think that thinking in this way has allowed me to cope, and allowed me to sort of triumph over the way that I felt about not being heard. And just to sort of project something better,…And try to offer something more to other people who may feel like this. And even artists who aren’t minorities,…just female artists in general are very underrepresented in terms of galleries, museums,…publications… I think that this will be a good way for all women artists to sort of unite, and encourage each other to keep working and keep striving.

Patricia’s remarks demonstrate how she was attempting to navigate her social identities in order to persist as an artist. Although she indicated that being a female was more salient to her artistic identity/identities, her narrative reveals the salience of her status as an African American. The complexity of which is highlighted in her comments about “coping” with this part of herself. Patricia’s remarks demonstrate the intricacies of social identities, and how they manifest within one’s self-concept.

Morgan’s self-discovery involved breaking free from the “frameworks” she grew up in/with. In an earlier section I described Morgan’s struggle with selecting a major, and how she was beginning to break free from the “structures” that had guided most her life. Morgan’s narrative vividly reveals that the frameworks and structures from which she was attempting to break free were largely bounded by gender and race. It must also be noted that in her first few journal entries, and during our first interview, she did not discuss who she was with reference to her social identities. However, by the end of the study, these identities emerged as highly significant. For instance, Morgan articulated her process of becoming through/with reference to her hairstyle, a physical characteristic that was essential to her identity.

The decision to take out her braids while on the study abroad trip framed Morgan’s identity story. To explain, she had observed that the city in which she was
residing attempted to “tame nature” through pristine landscapes and verdant vistas. She felt uncomfortable in the environment and constrained in her body, her braids. She noted the physical pain that resulted from her attempt to conform to social norms:” it hurts to fit in with other people and abandon who you are just to fit into this whole mold and idea”. She further described her braids in relation to culture and identity. The following excerpt shows how Morgan was rejecting societal “norms” (Baxter Magolda, Abes, & Torres, 2009), and the process by which she was constructing her identity:

I felt completely displaced… my hair was like an example of it…my hair is part of my identity and I put it in the in style to make me blend in because I'm obviously not blending in with my curly wild hair, and I put it in those braids in order to make it easier…. after a while it got on my nerves because it was like I feel so restrained in this city. I feel so restrained even in my own body… the African American culture your hair is a part of your identity. One reason that originally you put chemicals on your hair to have it straightened was to blend in with society so that you could get jobs… And that was way back in the day,…and now it's like am I taming my hair to fit in with society again? Like am I regressing that much to where I can't be accepted for who I truly am…. Morgan’s comments about her braids reveals her complex “conceptualization of race” (Johnston, 2014), which involved an amalgam of references to biological and cultural markers but also social constructions and power dynamics (Johnston, 2014). This conceptualization is further revealed in Morgan’s discussion regarding her response to and engagement with (or in her case lack of) the art she was exposed to on the study abroad trip. This experience prompted her to think about creating a research project that reflected who she was, and one that communicated her individual perspective:

I saw that I wasn't really identified in art or art objects. So there was nothing really telling me how I needed to be…I didn't see myself in a lot of those works. I'm, like, …I'm just going to create my own work that views me how I want to be me. Because nobody else is telling me how I should be. So I might as well not conform to what other people's views of themselves are…because… I can't be blonde-haired and blue-eye and a Swedish princess even though that's what
you see in the works of art. You're, like, I can't be that. Why am I trying to be that?

The excerpt above underscores how Morgan was coming to terms with the dissonance between external ways of knowing, which had guided most of her life, and new ways of thinking and being based on new knowledge and experiences. This circumstance is further evident in Morgan’s experience with “the woman on the metro”, a significant event that occurred one day on the study abroad trip. At last she saw herself reflected in another woman. This encounter had a profound impact on Morgan’s perceptions about her identity. She explained the experience of seeing the woman:

I didn't see anyone who looked like me in artwork. So I remember being at one Métro stop and seeing this…she looked like a model,…and she had hair that was bigger than mine. I mean, it was huge and she had this cute child and I'm, like, that's what I want to be like…She's over there doing her own thing. So I want to be more like that. And I think that was the first time I saw myself in-- where all these images of everything and everybody from every culture are, I saw myself in that lady on the Métro...And I think seeing her, it was just-- it's natural for me to be this way…. She just blew away society's terms because even though she's lived in the same environment that has all these art pieces that don't reflect her, she made her own image of herself.

In addition, as the excerpt below illustrates, the woman in the metro represented an alternative image to western sociocultural perceptions of “the black woman”. This experience encouraged Morgan to expand her understanding about who she was as an African American woman:

And if you look at Vigée Le Brun's pictures of her and her child and then you put a portrait of that woman and her child on the opposite wall, it's two different stories…. And …when you think about the singular story that you're told about the African-American woman…in the United States at least, you only really have one idea-- or maybe one or two ideas of the African-American person's story. And seeing another story of another person with the same skin tone as me, with the same hair type, in a different country is-- that's a different story than I've been told my entire life.
Seeing this woman encouraged Morgan to perceive and appreciate her value as an individual. It also helped her work through the various layers of her identity as an African American woman. After this experience, she no longer felt that being black was a “curse”. Morgan’s comments demonstrate a clear evolution in her meaning making process. Rather than simply accepting the predominant narrative that had previously shaped her ideas about herself as an African American woman, she was beginning to make meaning from her own frame of reference. She now considered a positive alternative to the predominant paradigm. This idea is clearly expressed in Morgan’s observation regarding the ability to be individual and different from others. She decided that just being like everybody else was not an aim to which she aspired:

… seeing her in this metropolitan, cosmopolitan environment was, like,…I have a place in the world….and it's my role as an African-American, as a female, as an artist to present my perspective because it's unique and it's important….And the fact that I saw her as a mirror for me shows that I now have the ability to present that whole new perspective that hasn't been tapped into, because I have this broad understanding of myself, of nature, of society, of the different groups within society, of how we fit in. It's an asset… I used to think of it as a curse. I used to think that being African-American…being a woman, you're already down a few notches. Being African-American, you're at the bottom of the barrel. And now, it's, like, no. My perspective is unique, it's valued, it's global, and I have to use it. Yeah. I think that helped me to really view myself in a different way and my identity in a different way…Because it was like a mirror. It's-- you can choose to be like the 5 billion people that you're seeing walking by or that one person that stands out to you. And you're, like, I'd rather be her. I'd present my unique perspective than just be a carbon copy of everything else.

Meagan, Jeanene, Ashley, and Rebecca’s experiences likewise revealed the distinct complexities (and intersections) of race, class, and gender in regard to artistic identity formation. For example, being the first in their families to attend college emerged as a significant factor for both Meagan and Jeanene. Ashley contemplated how she would balance her various roles in the future, particularly her ability to pursue artistic
endeavors while being a good mother. Rebecca articulated specific challenges she faced as a female in society. These challenges involved frustration with how men perceived her accomplishments. To further articulate these circumstances, below I discuss excerpts from Meagan, Jeanene, and Rebecca’s narratives.

Sometime after Meagan dropped out of art school she decided to give art school another shot. She articulated the experience of returning to school and how her family reacted to her decision:

I really wasn't focused on school for a couple of years….I was still making art during that time…like for myself. So…it never went away, but it was really hard to choose that again, because I am a first-generation college student. So, to go to art school, which was a huge expense-- they put a lot of faith in me for that. It was a huge blow to have to drop out. So, it was kinda like, ‘Oh, you're gonna try that again, eh?’ It-- they've always been supportive, but it did feel like cheapened, I guess. But it did feel really good to be surrounded by people that were unsure but still moving towards the same kind of direction….It felt good, and it felt like I was really working towards something again.

While Meagan was out of school she was working full-time. It was during this time that she realized her passions lay elsewhere. She wanted more for her future:

During the time after I dropped out of art school…I worked in a factory for a year…and I was just so lost. I was like, ‘This can't be life,’ but it is for some people, and they're happy with that. They like routine and security, and we make great money, but it's like, do you have any life? …it took me a long time to realize I'm just-- I hate routine. I don't like doing the same thing every day.

Recognizing her dissatisfaction with the current trajectory of her life, Meagan decided to enroll at a local community college to make progress towards her associate’s degree. She enrolled in one or two classes at a time and paid for them out-of-pocket. The decision was tough and she found it difficult to speak with her family about her desire to pursue a college degree:

…when I decided I wanted to do an art degree at the community college that was a hard decision…But my family, they were… like ‘Yeah, go ahead. Do it.’

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They want to see me succeed at whatever I want to do. They just don't really have the background…to… advise or… know what I'm talking about, so,…the decisions that I've made to further art education have been hard, but they've pretty much been all on me, but they felt good to make. It felt like I was going in the right direction.

Returning to college made her feel like she was “working towards something better”.

This desire was related to her refusal to “settle” in life. She pointed to her next goal, graduate school, as evidence of this desire. In her final journal entry she ruminated on her past life, and was looking forward to future challenges. The excerpt below underscores the ongoing personal tensions she was grappling with at the time:

I am alive and awake and jittery. I feel hopeful and nervous and like I just wanna give up and work in a factory. I look at the listless sort of dormancy I used to live in with a little bit of envy. Also, I know that my life is never going to be like that again, and it makes me feel insanely proud of myself. It's not a feeling I am used to, and it's uneasy. GRADUATING always seemed far off. I've come farther than anyone in my family ever has, and they are also very proud. As an artist it scares me because more and better is always expected, and that creates a lot of pressure. I love who I am becoming…

Meagan’s narrative illustrates how she formulated her own beliefs about what she wanted for herself and her future career rather than following the pre-determined life paths that some of her friends and family had pursued. As she moved through the program, her determination to attend graduate school and create a different life for herself became a primary focus. I shall return to this point in a later section. As a female artist, Meagan felt a sense of “security” within the environs of the art department since the majority of students were women. Meagan’s perception stands in sharp contrast to some of the other women who believed that the contemporary art world continued to be dominated by males. For example, she described the environment as “different” for women than it used to be. On the topic of being a female artist, Meagan indicated that it was not a huge part of her artistic approach or oeuvre. Furthermore, her ideas about being a female artist
(and her artistic self) centered on a sense of equity regarding the final art product rather than a focus on her “position” as a “female”: “I don’t know if you could really look at anything that I make and think that a woman made it or a man made it”.

Jeanene’s story was informed by a strong desire to make a better life for herself. I already explained how Jeanene’s decision to attend college represented a significant life moment. While Jeanene was in middle school her parents divorced, and the family had struggled financially during and since that time. She indicated that her family’s financial challenges had a strong impact on various facets of her life. The family’s financial struggles came into sharp focus while she was preparing for her high school graduation.

In spite of these difficult circumstances she was determined to succeed:

You know, all the fees…the graduation cap and gown and…everything…I just put a lot of stress on my family which I felt bad about…I think a lot of it does kind of stem from my family and kind of just trying to do better for myself from there.

Similar to Meagan’s story, before transferring to Southside University, Jeanene had taken a job in order to support herself while pursuing an associate’s degree. Balancing work and school was difficult and there was virtually no time to make art. Consequently she did not “feel like herself”:

I was working like 40 hours a week and…college and another second job…and I had no time… I felt horrible…I talked to my best friend. I was like, ‘I just don’t feel like myself anymore’. And I was talking to her and…”I was like, wait a minute. How long has it been since I’ve made anything or done anything?”

When she decided to quit her job and focus exclusively on college, the decision created conflicts with her family. In the end, she persisted despite these challenges and pressures:

I’m so glad I left there…. and my whole family is very unsupportive in that stance and they were like, ‘But the money is good.’ And I’m like, ‘But the money is not my happiness.’ And that’s a key thing I think that I was missing is my happiness and I think part of that of course is not being able to make anything or…create
anything because I just didn’t have the time…that really was a struggle for me not having my family, you know, be supportive in that time when I was like but don’t you understand my grades are more important... So it was just really, really tough...

Rather than accept the opinions of her family, Jeanene listened to her inner voice and ultimately made the decision she felt was best for her future. As she noted, during this period she was at odds with her family because she realized her priorities did not align with theirs.

Regarding being a woman and an artist, Jeanene felt that her gender influenced the types of art she made. For example, she described some of her art as “girly”, and noted that this was perhaps how being a woman influenced her work. She indicated that “ladies are “expected” and “allowed” to be emotional” as compared to men. Furthermore, she believed that being in “touch with her emotions” helped her work through tough issues. She shared the example of making highly emotional art in the period after her parents divorced as a way to deal with a complicated relationship with her father, who favored a younger sibling. She had a strong desire to continue exploring emotion in her work. After the study abroad trip, she described herself as “constantly molding”, like a piece of clay. She had once again returned to exploring her emotions. At this time she was also processing her recent experiences, which to some extend had been overwhelming. She felt like an entirely different person once she returned from the trip:

I have really been relearning the new me since I have been home. I am NOT the same girl that left [in spring]. I feel different, I am more experienced. I think I act differently than before. My viewpoint on art has changed, I am a lot more accepting of different art forms than before I left. I am seeing America differently than before I left.

This comment reveals how Jeanene was starting to move towards accepting other perspectives, and how she incorporated those perspectives into her personal values and
beliefs. In addition, her experiences abroad were instrumental in altering her conceptions about who she was as an artist, and the creative possibilities for her work. Finally, when we discussed the future, Jeanene explained how she had carefully considered balancing having children with a career, and her needs as an artist:

I want to be there for my own children... whenever I have them... when they're old enough, ... I want to go back to working again... I want to be a stay-at-home mom, but the thing is, I want to be more than that... kind of my own needs as an artist, and then also just financially. But also, I want to be able to still have a career...

Similar to Jeanene, Ashley had thought about her future self as a wife and mother. She also pondered how she might balance those roles with that of artist. When she explained what it meant to be an artist she did so by speculating on her future self: “I think it's attaining the goal of dedicating my entire life to creating and to making”, and she added “Yeah, so even down the road, if I'm a wife, if I'm a mother, I will be an artist”. However, she acknowledged that this might be challenging:

... I definitely think that would be a struggle. So I wonder-- and I have thought about that. Becoming a mother, how much that would, ... influence the amount that I create art or to the level that I create art. But I would be dedicated to both, I think. I would hope to keep it still a very strong part of my life.

Like some of the other women in my inquiry, Ashley’s beliefs in regards to being a female artist involved a conflict with the label. She had not given much thought to being a female artist until she took a woman’s studies course in college, which “spurred that thinking”. However, despite thinking about it while enrolled in the class, she continued to work as she always had. The complexity in her thinking around being a female artist is evident in her comments concerning the label of female artist. In an attempt to avoid being “labeled” she tended not to think about it too much. She perceived the label as demeaning to women artists:
… I don’t want to think of my work as being,… this is the work of a woman artist. Like I am an artist. I don’t need to be labeled as a woman artist when a man can just be an artist and not a male artist, and that sort of thing. So, I think I try to not think about it as much because I don’t want to invite that kind of demeaning women…

Rebecca’s life experience as a woman in the arts was intricate and conflicting. Although she felt she had not necessarily experienced struggles as a female artist, she was bothered by the perceptions and assumptions of others, which involved prevailing gender stereotypes: “The only thing that I don't like about being a female in the art world is when other people assume that I got help or… an award or I got something because I'm a girl or because I'm pretty...”. She was also bothered (and angered) by the comments of a former boyfriend who suggested that she was successful at her job because she “was a girl”.

The complexity of Rebecca’s thinking around being a female artist is apparent in the following excerpt. To explain, during the second interview I asked her when she first began to “feel like an artist”. She indicated that she felt like an artist when she began showing her work in galleries. She recounted the experience of her first solo show, which involved creating a performance piece, her least favorite medium. It is curious that she selected what she described as a “feminist work” for her first performance piece. She explained how in this work she was exploring the objectification of women. Her story reveals how she was attempting to fashion an alternative view of women through her performance and how being a woman made her feel:

…I had made like a headpiece that was lit but I had a lampshade over it. So, I sat up on a podium in like a little, skimpy outfit. It was like fishnets and my wooden shoes and my lampshade. And I just like posed, and I was a lamp with my shoes. So, and I felt so awkward and so uncomfortable…with the lamp piece, that was like one of the stronger feminist pieces that I did, and my teacher was confused as to what the message was…So, it was more open-ended and the idea that,… I did
this, I got up here and I got on this outfit and I don't think that like I haven't had struggles being a female and that's probably because of the era that I'm in… And, so, for me, being a female artist, I'm just an artist, and I think that when I do make feminist work, it's... it's only recognizing that like women can be sexualized and things like that.

Sexism in the world of work was also part of her life experience. While working in a small shop, her duties required some heavy lifting. She described facing harassing comments from some of the male staff when she could not perform this task on her own.

She explained how they would point out her frailty as a woman:

like there was always little comments from them, but they were not-- they didn't bother me as much, because they weren't like malicious about it or anything. They're just like, ‘Oh, do you need some help?’ But, yeah. I guess,… there are struggles being a girl…

Although Rebecca indicated that being a woman did not necessarily impact her in negative ways, the experiences she shared contradicted this assertion. She thought about the distinction between the sexes in terms of biological differences, which involved balance:

There are some biological standards that like men can get stronger faster, women are more nurturing and loving and can be a lot more emotional. So, I think it's like this balance, and I think everything in life is this same sort of balance.

Lastly, Victoria’s life experiences as a woman likewise involved grappling with false assumptions regarding gender. In addition, she was often confronted with sexism and harsh criticism when she shared her desire to become an art historian. Numerous family members and other adults had repeatedly told her that pursuing art history was not a path to a successful career. In explaining her reaction to these criticisms, Victoria’s comments indicate how she rejected gender “norms”:
... you can't make this a career. You can't study this”. Moreover, it upset her that when others suggested alternative careers, it was usually framed in sexist terms “I've been told before..., even now,... I was told, "You should become a dental hygienist."... And I was, like, "Why not a dentist...”.

Victoria had not given much thought to being a female in her department because women represented the majority; however, a recent incident within the department challenged these assumptions:

‘Well, is that because of gender? That can’t be because of gender.’ I mean, I’m-- it just-- I think, in this field, that’s so progressive, and that’s so open and liberal, and all of these words, that that can’t-- that really can’t be a thing. So then I’m thinking to myself, ‘Well, is it? Do the men still dominate, even when there’s only a couple of them?’ So... I don’t know.

Victoria’s comments reveal how this event compelled her to reconsider her thoughts regarding gender equity within the discipline. While Victoria contemplated this new information, she had not yet come to her own decision about this circumstance and thus remained conflicted and confined to external formulas about gender.

In this section I have presented the narratives of the women in my study to illuminate how, for these women, social identities such as gender, class, and race influenced the formation of artist identity/identities. Perspectives regarding being a “female artist” differed widely among participants. For some, gender was a primary feature of their identity/identities. Others placed more emphasis on the quality of their artistic production rather than the circumstance of their gender. The identity stories of most women revealed how various social identities intersected within their narratives. For instance, the dynamics between race and gender is crucial to understanding Patricia’s artistic identity/identities, and Jeanene’s transformation to “artist” cannot be fully appreciated without understanding how she conceptualized her various statuses. In the following section I discuss how the local environs of Southside University art department
and the larger “art world figured into participants’ construction of artistic identity/identities.

**How Artistic Environs Inform Identity**

The final component related to the theme of artistic self involved how participants perceived the artistic milieu, which included a combination of their experiences within local environment of the university art department, what they learned about being artist from visiting artists and their professors, and knowledge (and perceptions) they had acquired about the larger environment of the art world while in college. Receiving recognition for their artistic endeavors, the perceived value of class critiques, and perceptions about her/his “fit” within the art department also figured prominently.

Nearly all participants indicated that they wanted to be recognized for their artistic endeavors. In previous sections, I discussed how receiving positive feedback and encouragement in art classes encouraged Stuart, Christine, and Deborah to pursue art. Additionally, Ashley described wanting to be accepted by the larger art world “my artistic self wants to be recognized in the art world, and to have tons of gallery offers and a piece in MOMA”. Patricia noted that her mentor and other professors noticed a change in work after she returned from the study abroad trip. This provided a significant boost of confidence in regards to how she viewed herself as an artist and her artistic production:

…sometimes… I would get criticism like.. I need to sort of focus on my vision more,… I see that in the way that they critique… respect the work, and they see that there is a transition from who I was before and now. Even my mentor told me that I’m not at all the same person I was before I left. Like he told me that now [there is].. a sense of sophistication and confidence that I did not have before.

Further, recognition from her mentor gave her confidence to see herself as an artist “I feel like I can hold my head up high, and say that I’m an artist”.

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Several participants shared their thoughts about the practice known as “critique”, which provides an opportunity for students to receive feedback on their artistic production from peers and professors. A critical practice in fine arts education, the critique involves feedback and discussion, and its primary purpose is to nurture technical and creative growth. Participants acknowledged the value of the critique, and noted how engaging in critiques engendered their growth as artists and as individuals. For example, Ashley indicated that validation for her work, and the ability to maintain a non-defensive attitude towards colleagues during critique were among the most beneficial features of the practice. Ashley also learned a lot about being an artist and how to dedicate herself to her craft from her professors and visiting artists who lectured about their artistic journeys. These experiences helped her to see her métier as a “life goal”.

Stuart described his first critique as “ecstasy”. He further described how it gave him confidence to believe in himself as an artist:

The very first critique I had in drawing,…my professor was giving me great critique. I just have never felt so-- it was almost like an ecstasy…and I was like, ‘Okay, how can I push this further?’…you know, when you hang something up on a critique, you don’t know if it’s going to fly or sink. And…to see him really evaluate the work as something that could compare to, you know, in competition, something like that. It really opened up my eyes to potential, how much potential I had.

Finally, several participants discussed their “fit” within the art department. Christine explained that during her first semester at Southside University she felt uncomfortable in art classes because she was older than most other students in her classes and therefore did not feel a connection with the other artists. Christine’s experience resulted in self-doubt regarding her position as an artist and her artistic abilities. Patricia described a similar lack of fit when she began her studies at Southside because she did
not feel she had the same training or background as the other students in the department. As aforementioned, this resulted in initial anxiety for Patricia regarding her ability to succeed in the program. In contrast to Christine and Patricia, Deborah described her experience in the art department as “finding her home”, she felt supported in the department from the beginning of her experience. The ways in which participants related to and functioned within the college environment, and the impact of these experiences, partially contributed to their beliefs around being artists at the time of my study. Understanding the environs in which participants operated provided context for illuminating how they were constructing their artistic identities.

**Being (Becoming) an Artist**

*I’ve actually come to a realization that I think the reason why artists make art, is because it’s the one activity that will teach you more about yourself than anything else you could do.* (Stuart)

*I think now what it means to be an artist is a whole lot-- there are possibilities I had no idea about before that seem very possible to me now.* (Meagan)

At various points during the study I asked participants to think about the question: “What does it mean to be an artist?” I opened each interview with this question, and participants also responded to this prompt in their journals. I asked this question repeatedly in an attempt to gauge how participants were feeling about themselves as artists during the program, how they identified with the label “artist” at specific moments in time, and how their perceptions were evolving while they were engaged in UR. Next, I present my analysis regarding how participants saw themselves as artists over the course of the study, and how this personal vision contributed to the formation of artistic identity/identities.
Ashley’s ideas about being an artist evolved as she progressed through college and was exposed to various ways of being an artist. For instance, she was deeply inspired by artists she encountered while attending visiting artist lectures in the art department. She observed how their entire lives revolved around being artists. These examples prompted her to more fully embrace the artist lifestyle. Exposure to different ways of living as an artist compelled her to consider how she would manage her life and work as an artist. She explained how she was beginning to see herself as an artist, and how she imagined her future artistic self as a mother, wife and artist:

I think I'm learning to see myself as that artist. Whereas, the artist self and myself are inseparable, they're the same thing...I think it's attaining the goal of dedicating my entire life to creating and to making.... so even down the road, if I'm a wife, if I'm a mother, I will be an artist.

During the second interview, Ashley further explained how participating in the research program provided an opportunity become a cohesive artist:

It has been, kind of, a slow process of looking at myself as an artist and not looking at myself as someone who makes art. But I think being in this program, especially, and after the reception last week, my friends and family who came, they were, like, “Wow.”

In her final journal entry she solidified her identity as an artist. She came to realize that being an artist was a challenging path, and that not knowing all the answers was not necessarily detrimental to her growth as an individual and artist:

Just that, an artist. I don't think I've made this strong of an identity/connection with that title before. I think that I am much more motivated and excited about what I do, and that I have chosen this life for myself. Yes, making art still scares me because I can never know exactly if it is right or wrong- art making is not a series of multiple choice answers where one answer is the correct answer- But I keep going unafraid of mistakes and missteps.

The above excerpts reveal Ashley’s process of becoming an artist; how she was balancing external information with her own developing beliefs and values to inform who
she was and who she wanted to be in the future. By the end of the program her identity as
an artist had come to the forefront, and had become a very salient feature of who she was.

Rebecca’s ideas about “what it means to be an artist” involved finding her niche in life. In a later section, I will discuss how Rebecca’s “niche” points to her sense of purpose in life; however, I introduce it here to demonstrate how Rebecca’s ideas around being an artist evolved by the end of the program. In her final journal entry she wrote about finding her “cog”, and how that made her feel. Similar to Ashley, for Rebecca, the “artist” became extremely salient to her identity.

Being an artist makes me feel like I found my niche. I am no longer so harshly questioning what I am going to do with my life because I am already doing it…If everyone in the world has a “cog” or area of function, I feel like the art field is my cog. You cannot fight where you fit, because then we don't have the best cogs…So long as I can always keep art in my life I will be happy.

By the end of the program, Jeanene no longer perceived a distinct separation between her various life statuses. Being an artist was not separate from her self; rather, it was part of who she was as an individual:

I…used to think of it more of like separately, you know, my student life, … my business, my art and now I….see my business as kind of just art. I don’t exactly separate. It’s still a business but I don’t exactly separate it like I used to…I think it’s a lot more blended now…And I definitely think as art as something that’s kind of in my everyday life and not just something like I used to think of it more of like when I had the time.

Issues such as accepting the artistic lifestyle and “artist” label were central to being an artist for both Stuart and Christine. For instance, Stuart described being an artist as his raison d’être. He explained that being an artist involved having “the bite”.

One essential aspect the artist has is the "bite". This is a bite of obsession that grows within you,…it pulls at you relentlessly to push…further and never stay still. Some people never find the bite in what they chose to pursue in life,…but as an artist if you don’t have the bite you won't get very far. This bite must never be
healed. It needs to fester and grow into your bloodstream, it needs to be why you get up in the morning.

Christine indicated that being an artist was strongly connected to the artist label, which she had initially viewed in negative terms. However, by the end of the inquiry she had embraced the label, and was beginning to accept the reality of being an artist. Similar to other participants, Christine’s ideas about being an artist evolved through a process of becoming, which was influenced by life experiences. The quote below illustrates the salience of the artist part of herself:

Now I think the label of an artist...I think of it more as an identity now than a label. I think label is not the greatest way to describe something... I feel like it's just a part of who I am that needs to be nurtured, needs to be accepted and,... I think that it is an identity for me.

She described her artist identity as a “drive” “…the courage to… go after what I want. I think maybe that ties into the identity of an artist,…because this is what I want for my life”. To describe her evolution towards artist she employed the metaphor of a flame:

My artistic self is constantly shifting and evolving in a process that is still very new to me. I think of myself as having an "artist within" who has been marginalized all of my life. I catch glimpses of her, usually when I am in my trance of creation, but she remains elusive still. I think she is scared of judgment, worried about being rejected. …I have to think of her…like a fire that grew weak and is slowly beginning to transform into a powerful source of light and heat. …I feel like my artist self is best seen as a heat and flame. I seethe on the inside, flame with passion for my subjects... One day I will be able to truly harness this artist within, but until then I will continue to reflect and grow.

The quote above demonstrates how, by the end of the program, Christine was conceptualizing the notion of the artist within. For her it was ephemeral and shifting, and emerged most profoundly during the act of creation. Christine’s narrative also illustrates how she found it difficult to access the artist within but also how she was strongly committed to fully embracing and embodying her artist self.
For Deborah and Patricia, being an artist was closely associated with being heard and giving voice to others. Deborah articulated this as the “spirit or essence” of the artist. This essence emerged from her unique life experiences, and the realization that her position as an artist stood in sharp contrast to the traditional “image” of the artist as White and male:

Traditionally, being an artist has been about the skill and the craft. About working for the church, monarchy, and the wealthy, white male as a white, male artist… contemporary art is about changing concepts that have already existed for so long…that are now being challenged by new ideas, from different cultures, and different groups of people who identify in a variety of ways. Understanding that in variety, and by listening to all different voices, there is a possibility of growth not only in culture but society in general. Being an artist to me now is to understand that we all have a voice that needs to be heard somehow and that voice is rooted or formed by all of the voices we have heard in our own trajectory. I still believe we have the responsibility and power to generate change and create a difference for the better.

Deborah’s thoughts about being an artist involved possibilities for alternative voices. She believed she had an obligation to make her voice heard in an effort to give voice to others who had traditionally been silenced and marginalized. She further explained these possibilities in terms of growth, and she extended the “root” metaphor in the image that accompanied this response (See Figure 5), which represents a paintbrush that morphs into the branches of a tree. The following text appeared around the image:

The artist is deeply rooted in the world, and her work is more like the top of the tree. The artist absorbs what comes from the depths, the beauty of the top of the tree in not the artist’s, the artist is just the channel.

Deborah’s artistic self was strongly connected to her experiences in the world, and how she processed and used these experiences to form her own values and beliefs around who she was as an artist.
Patricia likewise framed “what it means to be an artist” in terms of voice, however, her conceptualization was additionally informed by a lack of cohesion between her many statuses, which included mother, wife, daughter, student and artist. She addressed this circumstance in her first journal response to this question:

I have power. Being an artist gives me an outlet to freely express myself but I do feel a responsibility to be the voice that many don't have...being an artist is liberating...gives me a channel to let my inner most feelings and concerns come...
to light. Sometimes in my life, I find myself becoming lost in my titles: MOM, WIFE, DAUGHTER, STUDENT, and finally ARTIST. In being immersed in these titles, I feel "The Artist" tends to get neglected the most.

Patricia further articulated the lack of cohesion between her statuses in the image that accompanied this response. In the image, she used the technique of negative space to communicate the stark contrast between her status as artist and the many other statuses she embodied. (See Figure 6). The outline of a figure, which curiously includes no identifying characteristics, dominates the central image. Along the vertical axis of the figure appears the word “artist”, written in capital letters. The thick, black outline of the figure produces a distinct barrier between the figure and the many words/statuses that encircle the figure. The image serves as a visual articulation of Patricia’s sense of self at the beginning of the study.

Although Patricia wrote about having power as an artist in her first journal entry, the image that accompanied the text defies this sentiment. For instance, the nondescript figure, along with the solid barrier created between the figure and the collection of words, appears to more explicitly embody a sense of uncertainty around her artistic self. The contrast between the blank space of the figure and the word “artist” imprinted on the figure in capital letters further communicates this situation. Patricia’s image illustrates how she communicated the unsayable (Rogers, 2007) elements of her identity/identities in visual terms. Josselson (1996) points to this circumstance in her discussion concerning reporting on the parts of a women’s narrative that are not easily articulated with language. She notes that in many cases these non-textual elements “beyond words” is “what matters most” (p. 12). Patricia’s visual text likewise echoes the evanescent nature of the image (Eisner, 2002), the process of inscription (creating art), which allows one to
explore one’s ideas, experiences, and emotional selves (p. 11). Patricia’s “inscription” visually represents conflicts between her inner self and the external world. Visual forms of data are uniquely suited to capture the multiple layers and dimensions of participant identity stories.

Figure 3. Patricia’s visual response to journal entry “Being an Artist Means” (reprinted with permission).
By the end of the program Patricia had embraced the power of the artist. In her final response, she also described more cohesion with her artistic self, and how she was operating as an artist both within and in response to the larger society:

I have the ability to say things others can't...I have always felt being an artist gives us these powers but now I am more sure than ever that this aspect of being an artist is not only important but very necessary... Being an artist has given me an opportunity to show my kids that you can be creative and make a difference in this world. Being an artist means I am strong, coherent, and aware of the...world around me.

Patricia no longer felt that she was neglecting her artistic self; rather, she believed she could make a difference as an artist, and be a positive role model for her sons.

In contrast to some of the other individuals in my study, Meagan recalled identifying with being an artist from a young age:

When I was younger, in middle or high school, it made me feel special and let me fit into a group... the art kids had our own classes and hallway at school. I guess it was my first sense of identity.

Like the majority of participants, Meagan’s ideas about “what it means to be an artist” evolved over the study. In her final journal entry she wrote about the dedication required to pursue art as a life path. While I shall return to Meagan’s views around being an artist as a life choice or passion in a later section, the excerpt below reveals how Meagan made meaning of her artistic self, which involved reference to artistic myths and the personal struggles I described above. Personal (and difficult) life events had resulted in a firm belief in herself and a desire to be an artist in the face of numerous challenges:

I think being an artist professionally is a choice that means as much hard work, sacrifice, dedication... I think that as artists we make these sacrifices...but with a fraction [if any] of the respect earned by any other profession. It is uphill and thankless most of the time, but worth it to alleviate the frustration of not making art...dedicating your life to it is really hard, and nobody gives you credit for it
because artists are "suppose" to suffer, so if you can seek that out, face it and thrive somehow, that's what it means to be an artist in my opinion.

Finally, for Morgan, being an artist was linked to breaking free from structures that had been imposed upon her since early childhood. It was also the ability to see herself from her perspective, and to accept that her perspective was important and valid. The metaphor of nature guided much of her narrative around identity. This was in large part related to her commitment to a vegan lifestyle, and a deep concern for the future sustainability of the earth. She employed this metaphorical device in her first journal entry to articulate how she was thinking about her identity at that point in her life. At the beginning of the program she had not accessed her “true” identity, it was within her but dormant:

I didn't associate my identity with the word artist…I would describe my artistic self as a flower…delightfully contained in the pot, the bud is closed… How will the flower grow, what will it represent to the world. The identity of the flower is still hidden…Since art to me is about identity… Without understanding my own true identity, who I am, it is difficult to create, because I do not know the conditions that can truly facilitate my own growth. Right now I am an artist in a fog,… a young woman in search of her own true identity. Perhaps through art and experience I will find myself and what I desire.

At the conclusion of the study Morgan acknowledged that she had discovered her identity through a combination of recent life experiences. These included the encounter with the woman in the metro, which I discussed above, and the process of developing her research project, which encompassed a deep exploration of self and identity through portraiture. In her final journal entry she concluded “My artist self is my true self…My artistic self is much like nature, transformative, flowing, developing, growing, and beautiful in its true state”. For Morgan, identity mimicked nature; it too was mutable, fluid and constantly evolving.
The image that accompanied this text (See Figure 7) powerfully communicates Morgan’s conceptualization of identity through the metaphor of nature. Pasted to the journal page just below the excerpt I mentioned above appears a black and white photograph of a tree trunk, which is in sharp focus and viewed from above. The trunk’s “rings” or layers form the tree’s foundation, and there are many natural “breaks” and crevices in the trunk that communicate the age of the tree. Morgan’s initials are inscribed near the center of the trunk (redacted).

![Figure 4. Morgan’s visual response to journal entry “My Artistic Self” (reprinted with permission).](image)

The nature metaphor represented by the tree is particularly fascinating when considered within the context of dendrology. The Arbor Day Foundation website ([https://www.arborday.org/trees/RingsTreeNatomy.cfm](https://www.arborday.org/trees/RingsTreeNatomy.cfm)) includes a rather technical description of the “anatomy” of a tree, which for me recalls the “layers” of identity:
The outer bark is the tree’s protection from the outside world. Continually renewed from within, it helps keep out moisture in the rain, and prevents the tree from losing moisture when the air is dry. It insulates against cold and heat and wards off insect enemies. The inner bark, or “phloem”, is pipeline through which food is passed to the rest of the tree. It lives for only a short time, then dies and turns to cork to become part of the protective outer bark. The cambium cell layer is the growing part of the trunk. It annually produces new bark and new wood in response to hormones that pass down through the phloem with food from the leaves…Sapwood is the tree’s pipeline for water moving up to the leaves. Sapwood is new wood. As newer rings of sapwood are laid down, inner cells lose their vitality and turn to heartwood. Heartwood is the central, supporting pillar of the tree. Although dead, it will not decay or lose strength while the outer layers are intact. A composite of hollow, needlelike cellulose fibers bound together by a chemical glue called lignin, it is in many ways as strong as steel (Anatomy of a Tree, para 1).

Returning to the breaks and crevices of the “rings” featured in the photograph, the description above alters the simple concept (and image) of the tree trunk into a more powerful, complex, and poetic circumstance. The biological process related to the life of a tree echoes the regenerative process of becoming.

In contrast to the other participants in my inquiry, Victoria, the committed art historian, did not see herself as an artist. While this belief remained consistent throughout the study, her narrative slightly contradicted this premise at several points. During the first interview, when I asked her “what it means to be an artist”, she explained that she did not feel comfortable “placing preconceived notions on a group that I don’t associate with”. She also indicated that her ideas about what an artist “is” were still evolving. She added that while she sometimes had fantasies about being an artist, for instance she imagined herself “walking around taking photographs”, she did not believe that she had the requisite technical skill or imagination to be an artist. Although she was proud of the artistic research pieces she had created by the conclusion of the program, she still believed that being an artist “was above me”. However, she did acknowledge her
accomplishments and abilities. Victoria represents two aspects of the artist identity. First, her remarks demonstrate the doubt about artistic competence that can be part of this identity. Second, as a negative case, her narrative reflects the resistance that can emerge in response to the influence of societal myths around the persona of the artist.

As demonstrated in the narrative excerpts I discussed above, for the individuals in my inquiry, constructing an artistic identity/identities involved an amalgam of complex and varied factors related to their artistic selves. During the study, most participants came to see themselves (with much more clarity) as artists rather than “the artist” as a separate entity from who they were as individuals. For instance, Jeanene and Patricia described a “blending” of their various statuses and positions. Ashley, Rebecca, and Morgan described the merging of their artistic selves with other parts of their identities, and Christine was beginning to accept the artist within. Although Victoria remained firmly committed to her identity as an art historian, by the end of the program she believed she had a better sense of what being an artist meant.

For most individuals, the artist self encompassed several factors, including the myths of the artist, social identities such as race, class, and gender, and the influence of the environs within Southside University’s art department. Considering these factors together exposed the many intricacies involved with becoming an artist. In the next section, I address the second part of the first research question, which centers on the context of the study: undergraduate research.

**Research Question One Sub-Question**

The second part of the first research question considered how participation in undergraduate research influenced participants’ artistic identity/identities. I identified the
primary theme of “doing from my perspective” in relation to how undergraduate research (UR) influenced the formation of artistic identity/identities. This theme involved participant perceptions around the idea that engaging in UR provided an opportunity to make personal decisions regarding artistic and intellectual work. Participants also indicated that the experience provided a space for their artistic voices to be heard.

I further identified three sub-themes associated with the primary theme including a sense of competence, a sense of purpose, and a sense of belonging. The first sub-theme was linked to participant perceptions around artistic competence, and comprised several “layers” including an elevated sense of confidence and motivation. A strong sense of purpose marks the second sub-theme. Participants described their artistic selves with reference to and in terms of a “passion” and “desire” to pursue a creative life. A sense of belonging emerged as the third sub-theme. Participants articulated the impact of sharing the research experience with an intimate group of peers, and how this circumstance contributed to personal and artistic growth. Examining these themes illuminated how the UR experience influenced participants’ artistic identity/identities during the study.

The interview data and journal entries I collected during the research program established how participants viewed the UR experience in relation to artistic identities/becoming. At the beginning and end of the study, I asked participants to consider what they might learn about being artists, and their artistic practice by participating in UR. During the second interview, I also asked each participant to discuss her or his research experience with respect to future professional goals and creative aspirations. In the sections that follow I describe each sub-theme. I conclude the section by providing details
around how the sub-themes came together to form the primary theme: doing from my perspective.

**Sense of Competence**

In chapter two I discussed the vector competence as articulated by Chickering and Reisser (1993). Developing competence involves gaining intellectual and aesthetic sophistication, and building a repertoire of skills to comprehend, analyze, and synthesize. It also includes developing new “frames of reference” and more “points of view” (p. 45). Competence is derived from the “confidence that one can cope with what comes and achieve goals successfully” (p. 53). Finally, manual competence involves using the body as “a vehicle for high performance, self-expression, and creativity” (p. 54). For most participants in my inquiry, competence was bound up with motivation and a sense of confidence. Developing a sense of competence moved participants closer to having the confidence to “do”, that is, develop and execute an artistic research project generated from their own ideas and personal perspectives.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted that students who move along the competence vector “become less interested in memorizing and more interested in understanding” (p.57). As a result, they begin to engage more deeply with the material they encounter from their own frame of reference, and they begin to develop their own “opinions and thinking processes” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 57). This is precisely what occurred during the research process. I asked participants to describe their competence as artists at the beginning and conclusion of the study. For Meagan, Deborah, Ashley, and Jeanene competence involved the ability to “believe in and “push yourself” to accomplish more and achieve goals. Similarly, Rebecca, Stuart, Pat, Christine, and
Morgan described having more confidence in their own ideas, and having the ability to transfer this confidence to future goals.

Shortly after the study commenced Meagan, Deborah, Ashley, and Jeanene wrote about their level of artistic competence in their journals. Meagan and Ashley assessed their skills in the following ways “I’m pretty good”, “my skills are fair”, “my competence is “moderate’”. On the other hand, Deborah did not necessarily assess her level of competence but rather wrote about the ability to finish tasks and utilize her skills. Jeanene described her competence by comparing her strengths (sculpting) and weaknesses (drawing). At the conclusion of the research project Meagan described participating in the experience as “a little bridge” to the next phase of her life:

… this is giving me,… a really solid,… feel like a little bridge to the next part, whereas if I didn’t have this bridge I would be, like, swimming… I’ve learned basically that I’m a very motivated person and a driven person. I’ve stuck with, you know, I made a commitment to do research, and I did it twice. And loved it.

Meagan’s comments show how she was developing the confidence to try new things. She was also learning about her strengths, and she was thinking about how she could adapt her strengths and abilities to future aspirations. Her comments also illustrate how she was making meaning from these new experiences by engaging in deep reflection about what she was doing and why.

Deborah stated that the UR experience had helped her develop more confidence and belief in herself as an artist. She also appreciated the value of being “proactive”. The excerpt below shows how her thinking had evolved as regards to who she was and her abilities as an artist:

I still doubt myself, as what I do is the correct thing,… and finding the balance of being a good student and a good artist. But… I’m more confident, now, to say that I do believe that I am an artist…I’m more patient… a little less anxious… less
procrastinator…I feel like before I…struggled with like pushing myself to do something,…[now] more motivated, more proactive…by being more proactive…you manage your time better. You have time to think more wisely…

The theme of pushing oneself was also reflected in her final essay in which she linked this quality to learning about who she was an individual and artist. This demonstrates the process by which Deborah was becoming an artist, which involved considering multiple points of view, valuing new skills, and taking risks in order to grow:

…I…learned so much about myself as an artist, a woman, and…the kind of person that I currently am, and who I would like to become….now I know that I possess skills that I didn’t put into practice before and I also gained so many new ones…I learned that it is possible to be more open minded than you think you are, you just have to push yourself, read, learn, travel, lose the fear of misconceptions, get out of the box to learn more about yourself, who you want to be, and about other…groups of people, ideas, and cultures.

Lastly, when Deborah wrote about competence in her final journal entry she did so by linking her competence to future goals:

I have gained so many new skills along this process, and I have learned so much about myself and what I want to do after my undergrad, which is to get an MBA…I realize I possess analytical skills, time management skills, learn new things really easily if I put effort and focus. This experience has taught me to be free (er) and to know myself better and what I want. I know I want to give back to the community and grow and contribute to what makes art relevant in the modern society.

The excerpts above demonstrate the ways in which Deborah was developing the confidence to “trust” herself and her skills. The ability to trust oneself and to “see” one’s accomplishments and achievements results in a greater ability to “take risks” and “persist” at difficult tasks because there is a sense that success can be achieved (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The ability to achieve a sense of competence thus leads to a greater sense of identity.

At the end of the program, Ashley wrote about her competence with regard to the benefits of hard work and self-fulfillment:
…I am still not as skilled as I hope I will be, but I am becoming more motivated to work and work harder. I have found the saying ‘You get out what you put in’ to be one of the truest things in my life at the moment. I have been working the hardest I ever have in my artistic and academic careers - a lot of stress has been the bi-product, but I have been a lot more rewarded because of the time I have dedicated to it. My work has become one of the most important aspects of my life...

During the second interview she indicated how her level of confidence had evolved during the program. She was proud of her ability to successfully complete an ambitious project, and this gave her confidence about what she could accomplish in the future:

I learned that I'm much more capable than I thought I was….Looking back at the beginning of the program, I was just terrified. I didn't exactly know how it was going to turn out, what was going to happen. And then, so just seeing how far I've come in that journey and the completion of all of this, and taking the time to do it all… So… learning about my ability, and I think putting more faith in myself that I can do big projects...

She further explained her feelings about being an artist and having the motivation to keep moving forward:

I have chosen this path for myself, but have realized that it’s kind of chosen me,...just…understanding the thing that I’m a part of and the creation of artworks ties me into the bigger web of people throughout history that have created art….I think…the artist life has found a way to continue to encourage me to keep moving forward…a willingness to continue moving forward, a willingness to put in work and time and commitment to something that may not work out, but you’re willing to see if it will work out, pushing it just to the very end.

Similar to Deborah, Ashley described herself as developing, she realized that she was not yet “perfect” at her craft but rather viewed herself as an artist and her skills as work “in progress” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 82).

At the conclusion of the program, Jeanene felt more confident in her artistic skills, and expressed less doubt about her artistic endeavors as a result of participating in UR. She wrote about this in her reflective essay. The following excerpt illustrates how
Jeanene was becoming more comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty. Rather than reject this situation she embraced it in order to grow as an artist:

It helped me grow as a person to learn to overcome obstacles on my own. It is a great skill to have to problem-solve on your own. Upon returning home I was really struggling with getting back into the swing of things and feeling like myself. But what I didn’t realize was that this was a version of me and having this project to focus on really helped my transition. Then working on my art piece really pushed my boundaries as an artist…my project idea kept changing and growing. I had to learn to be confident in my ideas and that I really could achieve this goal to complete the project.

In the last journal entry she described the evolution of her artistic self from “crafter” to “artist”. She was beginning to see whom she was becoming as an artist, which concerned having the confidence to show her work at art shows, a primary feature of being an artist:

I have always thought of myself as a crafter who is also an artist. But now I am considering myself to be an artist first. This really changed things for me. I am now considering trying to get my work into art shows when prior to this I would have never considered that.

She wrote about her personal and artistic level of confidence at the end of the study:

I am so much more comfortable and proud of the work I have been doing. …My confidence in myself to overcome challenges has improved tremendously. Artist wise I have really worked on overcoming challenges and learn to fix problems one step at a time.

She expanded on these views during the second interview, and recalled how she had lacked confidence at the beginning of her college career:

…now, I'm a lot more confident in not just my projects, but also just in myself and also as a scholar … I'm very proud of myself… thinking back to my senior year when I was,...I don’t even know if I could go to college; I'm not that smart…this has really… inspired me to kind of push myself more…

Jeanene’s remarks illustrate how achieving a strong sense of competence around her artistic skills provided confidence in other areas of her life and a greater sense of identity.
For Rebecca, Stuart, Patricia, Christine, and Morgan, competence was linked to having more confidence in their ideas. Moreover, like other participants in the study, they discovered how they could transfer knowledge and skills gained through UR to future goals. When the study commenced, these individuals assessed their competence with descriptors such as “good” and “needs improvement”. Stuart equated competence with artistic growth: “Competence as an artist is knowing when you are being productive and when you are being redundant, this is crucial to growing as an artist”. On the other hand, Christine felt she had not achieved competence or mastery as an artist at the beginning of the study.

At the conclusion of the research project participant perceptions regarding their level of competence had evolved substantially. Rebecca wrote about her artistic research capabilities “I have become more comfortable with my process and methods. Though it is difficult to define “How to make an art research project,” I can now say this is something in [sic] which I am capable”. She further explained how confidence in her abilities had changed as a result of completing the research project. The ability to finish what she started had provided a large boost in confidence regarding her ability to successfully execute plans in the future:

it was so difficult to get it done in the time that I needed to, but I did. And that like motivates me… But knowing that like there were so many problems with this… it does give me confidence that I completed something that was one of my bigger feats….I was feeling down… because I had a lot of ongoing projects, but nothing was ever like completed…to finally have finished one of the large projects… I realize that I have to work on one project at a time,…So, yeah, it has definitely made me more confident…
At the end of the project, Stuart believed he had further developed his technical skills, which would help make him more competitive for future opportunities such as grants. In his final journal entry he described his competence as an artist as “very high”:

Very high. I am very capable of learning new technical skills and application … my competency will grow to a level of master after having ample time to concentrate on one area of technique,… and continue to elevate my competency as an artist. Next I plan to push what I have learned, elevate my competency and apply it to my future body of work. This way I may receive funding and support to conduct my own research in studio.

He described the impact of the research experience:

Definitely motivation. You are your own worst enemy when you’re trying to get a project done…the primary thing you’re pulling from yourself when you’re creating art, is motivation. And using that motivation to access this level of autonomy,… you know what to do, and now you can start really doing it to your particular style, method…

He further described his creative process while completing the project, and how it allowed him to see what he is capable of and how to apply these abilities to future goals:

There’s not so much second guessing. There’s a lot more confidence in the autonomy in a level of executing these things…. I'm telling myself, you need to make things bigger, more complex. You know, you have the means to do it, so do it. Keep pushing yourself… How you deal with the task of doing a project like this and it can show you what you're capable of. Now, when you see what you're capable of, then you have to take that and use it to your advantage….

Patricia described finding her potential as an artist. She wrote about this in her journal “I have found that I have more potential than I give myself credit for. Being a (artist) who often second guesses herself, I have gained a new sense of confidence and elegance which I can see in the work…” Like some of the other participants, she also described her competence in terms of gaining the ability to “push herself” beyond limits:

Substantial but continuously advancing. I am proud to be able to say I have acquired a sense of proficiency that was lacking in my artistry prior to my experience… The confidence I have developed has motivated me to push myself beyond limits I thought were restraining me. This shift has been present visually
through the work I make but also in the way I write about art or even in the manner I think about art.

She reflected on how she had evolved as an artist and what she had learned about herself and her abilities, and how she was thinking about the future:

Prior to my research experience, I was very unsure of myself in terms of being an artist as well as a researcher. I lacked the confidence I needed…but I was… ready to take on this new aspect of my academic career…. This [experience] gave me the ability to analyze the information with a more objective and critical eye. Through my research I have also gained the ability to identify and facilitate stronger connections within art and research. The skills I learned have given me the confidence to take on independent research projects and…apply to…artist residencies… this experience, it has… made me want to do more than just break the surface…It was difficult …I had points of struggle during this process, but I think my ultimate conclusion to be here now and feel really confident about who I am as an artist, and about the work that I’m making, and about this sort of plan I have for the future has really helped me to figure out what I think is important.

Christine shared how her confidence had grown during the experience. She linked this circumstance to her artist self:

…the biggest thing I came away with was this confidence… the ability to focus on such a huge project. That changes so much for me… And then another fundamental thing, the courage to really go after what I want. I think maybe that ties into the identity of an artist thing, because this is what I want for my life. I think before this, I was kind of like, yeah, that's what I want to do. Now I'm like, I'm going to get it. I'm going to make it happen. People say, ‘Apply to grad school. You might not get in’…If I want to get in, I'm getting in…I know I didn't feel that way before. …the fact that I went through and did all of that, just gives me the know-how that I can do that again, and maybe even do it better… to have that boost, that kick in the ass to say, you can do this, is really a game changer for me…

Similar to the other participants, Morgan described how she would apply what she learned during the program to future goals and aspirations:

…being able to…research, through your experience, and then bring what you have to the table and create something that's a product of your experience is-- that's the best thing…. because it’s valuing your experience, and it's not only valuing your experience but it's also allowing you to further your experiences in life. Like through this, graduate school is an option. ..a lot of doors are now opening that would have been closed before. So it's allowing you to value your
own experience, your own research, your own perspective, and then allowing you to experience things further that you may have not been able to experience without it.

The narratives of Rebecca, Stuart, Patricia, Morgan and Christine above demonstrate how artistic manual competence mingled with intellectual competence to strengthen participants’ perceptions of their artistic identity/identities. This “mingling” through the act of creation or “doing” was essential as it permitted participants to observe their present accomplishments and clearly link them to future success.

Finally, Victoria described her ideas around the notion of competence from the perspective of an “outsider”, a non-artist. For instance, below is how she described her level of artistic competence at the beginning of the program:

As an art historian I do not feel that my competence as an artist is very high. I know what I have learned and studied from my classes about artists and the different types of artists there have been throughout time, but describing myself as an artist comes with a struggle. ..I feel that as an art historian I have an outsider's view on what being an artist means, what it takes to become one…I am hoping that from this experience I can grow and gain words and ways to describe and represent my competence as an artist from actually creating something of my own and attempting to become an artist in addition to an art historian. I often envy art historians who also self identify as artists too... I feel that becoming an artist and being able to represent your understanding of what being an artist is in turn truly helps your ability to understand the history of art. I see this project as not only a way to help introduce me into the world of creating art, but also into a new level as a scholar and researcher. I believe that having accomplished my own research project that is independent from class will advance my skills as an art historian to the level I aspire to be, but additionally, creating something of my own will advance my skills as an art historian…I visualize this project as a chance for me to grow as a person, scholar, and of course artist.

When she responded to this question again at the end of the program she remained conflicted:

Unconfident. I may have created something… but I do not consider what I made art. I believe that it is creative and an accurate representation of my research but it is not art. I would label it art historical art. A visual representation of a theory. My piece was analytical and informative rather than expressive and abstract. My piece is not any less than the other nine created but it is different and unique in its own
way and right. I aspired to create something that was reflective and challenging and I believe I have created and achieved that goal.

Victoria’s response to this question points to an inner struggle between accepting her creativity and the tendency to reject labeling herself as creative or artistic. This struggle appeared throughout her narrative, and makes Victoria’s experience quite distinct from those of the other participants in my inquiry. The second sub-theme that emerged from my analysis of the data was a sense of purpose. I discuss this theme in detail in the next section.

**Sense of Purpose**

In chapter two I described how a sense of purpose as articulated by Chickering and Reisser (1993) is linked to one’s journey towards finding self. Factors such as considering vocational plans, establishing personal interests, interpersonal and family commitments, pondering one’s future self (or selves), and setting goals for the future are associated with this vector (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Furthermore, developing a sense of purpose specifically involves an individual’s ability to be “intentional”, to ponder one’s “interests and options”, to “clarify goals and to persist despite obstacles” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 209). Commitment to a particular cause, belief, or calling brings one closer to a sense of self and life purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

I asked participants to respond to questions related to a sense of purpose in their artistic journals. During the second interview, I asked participants to discuss future career plans in relation to what they had learned during the program. A majority of participants in my inquiry described being an artist and art making as a drive and /or passion. Furthermore, several described pursuing their artistic passion despite experiencing failures, mistakes, or challenges along the way. I expand upon each of these points below.
At the end of the program Morgan wrote about how making art made her feel. She associated this with her life’s purpose. The excerpt below reveals the triumphs and challenges inherent in her journey:

Making art makes me feel like I am exercising my life's purpose,… and like I'm contributing to society. I feel as if making art is part of my passion, it's not my only passion, but it's a vehicle for my creativity. …there are so many difficult aspects of life that need to be confronted or transcended and art making allows me to confront my reflection while transcending and working through my internal emotions and logic… Making art makes me feel like I am in control of my life. If I can create the beauty and depth present in my art in my life this makes making art an act of liberation and freedom. It places me back in control of my own life and my own destiny…. Making art makes me feel like I am bearing my soul. I place all of my passion into my work…I now realize that making art is a way for me to see myself and of course not everyone is going to like me or what I produce but as long as I appreciate who I am and what I create that is all that matters....Making art…is transformative/transformational which for me is what life is all about.

As the above quote illustrates, Morgan described the act of creation as deeply linked to her personal values and beliefs about who she was and how she related to the world. In contrast to her thinking at the beginning of the program, her values provided an important “frame of reference”, which allowed her to develop strategies to achieve future aspirations.

Morgan further discussed the transformative nature of art making in relation to how she imagined her professional future self. This future was characterized by possibilities and flexibility rather than narrow understandings based on external formulas. She also articulated how she would use her passion to shape her future on her own terms:

You can be an artist, you can be a consultant, you can work with art and nature and it all be incorporated…I'm creating my own job now, I saw pre-outlined career paths and now I'm like, 'I can do anything that I want to do. I don't have to go with a certain path.'…Now I just don't see…all these standard art history jobs that you search when you're like, ‘What to do with an art history major?’ But now you're like, ‘How do I create my own career?’ Because through this project I've learned how to use my creativity in the professional world,…like you can say,
‘I'm creative,’ but what have you done in your life to show that you're creative? …There's not one pathway that you can go….it creates more freedom and a sense of what you're allowed to do with your art history or art degree….Everyone has a similar college experience. You all take similar classes,…but it's what you do with it that really counts…

A theme that informed much of Meagan’s narrative involved a belief that being an artist was her destiny. As I described in earlier sections, Meagan’s journey had been difficult and expensive; however, she persisted despite the many setbacks along the way. She explained, “Nothing about being an artist has been easy or inexpensive, but I really know that it's what I'm meant to pursue”. She further indicated that the journey was “bittersweet”, “but it was also the path I wanted to be on the whole time”. In her final journal entry, she shared the experience of working in retail jobs and how this intensified her drive to be an artist:

Nobody can do what I do, or offer exactly what I can, and it makes me feel alive and present, and just useful as a human being…There are many others like me but none of them are me. In any retail or entry level job I've ever had I tried to portray that quality, but the truth is, with or without me, clothes get sold, customers get food, I'm not missed at all. It's almost like I could NOT see the bigger picture at all times, and it almost made me feel existentially depressed. Not "almost" it definitely did at ALL times! So for me, that constant dissatisfaction at my own worthlessness made my desire to create art a real driving force. …I think for a long time I just thought that that was how life was for normal, ordinary people like me. Now art makes me feel very determined to constantly improve, and I'm thinking about reality and the future versus just an escape from it. Art makes me feel important, if only to myself. Making art professionally and for school makes me just feel GOOD about myself.

Meagan’s comments reveal how she utilized life experiences to develop a strong resistance to accepting the usual, “normal” life paths pursued by others. By the end of the program she was determined to pursue her own interests and goals. She noted how the experience in the program encouraged her to crystallize future goals, and how it gave her a sense of direction for the future:
Honestly, if I had never done this....I’d be graduating and I’d be like, “I have no idea what I’m doing now.”...I might have applied to grad school, but what would I really have to offer other than just projects I’ve made for school?...I just feel like much more focused now. And it is inspiring. ..it’s made me,...the whole of it, has completely changed my life,... I didn’t even see it coming…

By the end of the program, Deborah was more focused on the future, specifically plans for graduate school. She had often thought about her decision to pursue a second degree in art rather than apply to graduate school after completing her business degree. In retrospect, she believed pursuing the art degree, and participating in the program was beneficial to discovering her artistic self:

...Sometimes I…regret that I didn’t go into grad school right away… but,…things happen for a reason… I feel like this [experience] allowed me to…meet so many people that are important to my life now and to know who I am as an artist, to know who I am as a person and to finally know and be decided on what I want to do and be sure about it.

Deborah had come to realize that art was indeed her life’s passion, and she was more confident about pursuing her passion at the conclusion of the research experience than she had been in the past. The following excerpt illustrates Deborah’s intentionality regarding future goals and her life’s purpose:

... the program has allowed me to focus, to not be afraid, to have a plan, and to take action. I am so inspired to follow a dream that I have blurred out of vision for some years but that now has come back in full focus. I want to go to graduate school…The experience has made it clear in my mind that the sky’s the limit, that I can and should believe in myself, that if I really set my mind to achieve a set of goals for a common purpose I can really do it successfully.

In response to the question making art makes me feel, she wrote about community and how this was connected to her passion:

... empowered, like I’m following my passion, like I belong to a community of individuals who also have a lot to say about life, its beauty, its injustice, and more importantly, we all believe in the possibilities, in what could be, and how to say it, do it, or make it happen.
I previously indicated that Stuart described being an artist as an obsession, a “bite”. He further explained it as a drive:

…it's what drives me. Everybody's got that pull to something in life that gives them validation for their existence,…if we find something that makes us feel connected to the world around us, it gives that activity or whatever more meaning, you know, it's like "Okay this could be why I'm here, I could be on this earth to do this..."

He also wrote about this in his journal “Being an artist…means…always trying to push oneself to be a more creative human…Being an artist means using self-motivation/determination to drive oneself and their artistic practice”. Like many of the other participants he too described having more confidence to tackle future goals and aspirations after the experience:

if I didn't have the experience, I probably wouldn't be at such a higher level. I'd be,…somewhere in the middle….Which would be bad… now, I'm ready for what I have in front of me…. I'm going to…use the research experience to…further myself in the art and education industry…it's not going to be easy by any means. I still have doubts and second-guessing of abilities to do stuff like that. But…it's like, yes, I can do it.

In an earlier section I explained how Rebecca described, “What it means to be an artist” as finding a “cog” in her life that gave her purpose. She further explained how being part of the artistic community helped her realize that art was what she was meant to do:

…Once I was emerged into the actual art environment, then I started to feel more comfortable… once I started to feel more comfortable, I felt like…this is where I should be, this is what I should be doing. And, then,… I think it's like things start falling into place once you're doing the right thing…And like doing art, like ever since I started, it was like a lot of opportunities came up…and it was just like, well,… I don't think I'd be doing this well in biology…And that's because I feel like this is more what I'm meant to do. So, I feel like I'm following the path that I should be following...
At the end of the study she was more confident about applying for grants because she had successfully tackled a large-scale project “…moving forward with grants, I’ll be able to formulate what my goal is, and tell them,…how I plan on doing it, while also having on my resume that I’ve done this before,…and I’ll feel more confident about it now”.

Rebecca’s narrative demonstrates how she was becoming more “intentional” about her métier once she embraced her “cog” in life. The ability to recognize her passion and work hard to accomplish her goals helped her think about how she could use her skills and experiences to achieve future success.

Ashley perceived being an artist as a “life goal”. At the end of the program she discussed future goals, and was considering the future in terms of possibilities rather than following a narrow path. Her experience in the research program compelled her to clarify her goals and solidify her plans for the future, which included pursuing graduate school:

…I have been thinking more…about grad school since the beginning of this program,…I’ve also been thinking what if I don’t even want to get an MFA. Maybe I want to do something else,… I think my thought process has kind of broadened since then.

The challenges Jeanene faced early in life including illness and difficult financial issues provoked her to excogitate upon life goals and what she wanted for the future. In her reflective essay she wrote about how conducting research helped her gain confidence and achieve goals:

I have experienced many changes as an artist and individual during this experience. This whole project really pushed me out of my comfort zone… I had to learn to be confident in my ideas and that I really could achieve this goal to complete the project.

Jeanene linked her future goals to her passion for art. As with several other participants she saw the future in terms of possibilities:
That's one thing I also learned from this project a lot, that art will never leave me, that I will never outgrow it. That's something that's been pretty constant in my life since I was a child...now-- it's definitely something that I really... need as my own sort of therapy. But in five years, I could see myself potentially being an art therapist or... an art teacher. So there's a lot of different possibilities.

Lastly, when Jeanene discussed future aspirations she did so with reference to how she would balance the responsibilities of motherhood with her desire to have a fulfilling career. This was another goal “I would love to get my bachelor's degree and then find a job as... an art teacher, work a couple years, and then...I want to be a stay-at-home mom. That's always been kind of my goal”.

Patricia described her passion and future goals in terms of what she gained from engaging in UR. She too recognized varied possibilities for her future:

...the research really showed me that there's more than one avenue...I was so literal in thinking... it's just this one street to get there,...and seeing that it's okay for things to change, it's okay for your ideas to change, and I think a lot of times I really felt ...like I was unreliable in my thoughts or my ideas.

She further noted:

...not only did this experience change me as a person, but it really changed my plans for the future...before this, I was more interested in just working. I think...I was just so ready to get out there and be an artist,...but after... this research, I'm... interested in applying for residencies,... this showed me, "Wow. I can totally do this. This is not unthinkable...it's totally doable," but also it has definitely encouraged me to go to grad school... This process really helped me to stay motivated to push through for something more, and not be content with the right now.

Like most other participants, realizing her potential and passion allowed Patricia to be more intentional about the future and set goals. In addition, she had more confidence to achieve the goals she set for herself.

Finally, earlier I noted how Christine described her artist identity as a “drive”. She explained how she perceived this drive as a force that would propel her to accomplish
future goals such as getting into graduate school “Now I'm like, I'm going to get it. I'm going to make it happen”. In her essay she wrote about future goals and her commitment to pursuing what she believed in:

I have also committed myself to becoming more involved in the community… I plan to volunteer and apply for internships, …and have become more involved on campus with student led groups and organizations. …Because of this research process I have taken the first few steps towards accepting myself as an artist and I hope that in the future I can support my peers, as I have been supported.

Similar to Morgan, Christine’s sense of purpose was linked to her personal values and beliefs. She spoke about how she intended to pursue goals to which she felt deeply committed on a personal level. This was a large part of who she was as an individual. Engaging in UR and linking the perceived benefits of the experience to future goals and aspirations aided most individuals in becoming more intentional about their future trajectories. By the end of the program most had also conceptualized a clear link between their artistic selves and their purpose in life.

**Sense of Belonging**

The third sub-theme that emerged from my analysis was the notion of belonging. This concept has been studied extensively in the literature particularly with regard to underrepresented students (Chang, Eagan, Lin, & Hurtado, 2011; Hurtado, Cabrera, Lin, Arellano, & Espinosa, 2009; Hurtado, Eagan, Cabrera, Lin, Park, & Lopez, 2008; Hurtado, Han, Sáenz, Espinosa, Cabrera, & Cerna, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al; 2007; Samura, 2016; Strayhorn, 2012; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). The construct of belonging emerged, in part, as a response to early research around persistence, retention, and integration (Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1993) which failed to consider the voices and experiences of diverse students.
In several studies, Hurtado and her colleagues demonstrated how a sense of belonging (in concert with addition key variables), specifically among underrepresented populations, was critical to student persistence and retention (Hurtado, Cabrera, Lin, Arellano, & Espinosa, 2009; Hurtado, Eagan, Cabrera, Lin, Park, & Lopez, 2008; Hurtado, Han, Sáenz, Espinosa, Cabrera, & Cerna, 2007). In an early study on this topic, Hurtado and Carter (1997) expanded on extant theoretical models and explored how background characteristics, combined with specific college experiences, fostered Latina/o students’ sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter (1997). The notion of membership emerged as a major finding in their study. Hurtado and Carter (1997) made a distinction between the act of participation and membership. Students made sense of the college environment through their experiences with peers and faculty, and this resulted in a stronger connection to and identification with the larger institutional environment. Additionally they found that specific college activities enhanced a student’s bond to the institution (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). My conceptualization regarding students’ sense of belonging is largely influenced by the construct as articulated by Hurtado and colleagues.

Hurtado expanded on these initial findings in later studies. For example, Hurtado et al. (2007) argued that a students’ sense of integration, a factor inherent to developing a sense of belonging, is shaped by a variety of external and internal factors such as the “characteristics” students bring to college, participation in formal institutional structures, the racial dynamics of a particular college, the influence of family and financial concerns, and the students’ assessment of competence (p. 848). While the study (and Hurtado’s larger body of work in this area) focused on integration and transition of first-year
science majors, the study also considered implications for diverse students in other majors and was therefore highly instructive to my analysis.

In addition to the research on belonging discussed above, another useful conceptualization was put forth by Strayhorn (2012). Strayhorn (2012) has made an important clarification regarding a sense of belonging and sense of community, and that is relevant to my analysis of the data. As he indicated, for college students, belonging is a “relational process” (3), which involves “students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering, or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group, and other on campus”(3). He further argued that a sense of community could only occur once belonging has been established (Strayhorn, 2012). In the context of my study, this distinction is significant as participants often used the term “community” to describe the sense of belonging they experienced in the program. Taken together, these conceptualizations of belonging assisted me with understanding how participants viewed themselves in relation to the environs of the institution, and also how they made connections with their peers in the program.

Participants described bonding with colleagues in the program through the shared experiences of undergraduate research and study abroad. In the literature review I presented empirical research related to the benefits of UR including increased persistence, and students’ positive perceptions regarding the value of mentorship, and peer support within the research environs. Thus, it is important to clarify the distinction between the construct of belonging from that of peer interaction related to UR experiences. Individuals in my study indicated that participating in UR helped them feel
more connected to the art department and the larger environment of the institution. Moreover, feeling a sense of belonging ultimately resulted in a stronger sense of artistic identity. This finding is particularly informative as much of the extant research on belonging demonstrates that students from different backgrounds experience this phenomenon in different ways and to varying degrees (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2012; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016).

Several participants recounted connecting with their colleagues through discussions around their UR projects while abroad. Meagan explained: “…we would be on the [train] and…be in a group talking. I felt just really inspired by everybody’s projects and they all were, they’re just brilliant….They’re great to work with”.

Christine indicated:

…there were times…where we’re talking about our research projects and when you’re in this moment it’s intense so working with the students… the collaboration aspect was great, the bouncing of-- off ideas. I remember being on the bus, …and being able to shoot ideas back and forth was just really exciting.

Jeanene had a similar recollection “I…loved being around everyone…all of us are really creative and… have great ideas… it was great being able to bounce ideas off each other and… make some really good friends. It's another big part of it too”.

Rebecca, Jeanene, Deborah, and Ashley explained how the program fostered a sense of belonging and “community”. Rebecca described working with other colleagues in the program. She particularly appreciated the opportunity to work with individuals outside her usual peer group:

…it was nice to be outside of my normal peer group…it was nice, because we…all started to get to know each other….for me,…I just love brainstorming sessions…knowing that like no matter what group of people I get into, like I want to help them and I feel like their ideas give me ideas and knowing that like it's not just our friends that help us out, it's just like the artist community and like
everyone has something that can be shared with somebody else and then like vice versa. So, I think working in a group like that is really helpful.

She further explained how the collaborative experience of the research program would help her adjust to graduate school. This excerpt demonstrates how Rebecca’s feelings of belonging extended beyond the research program to other contexts. At the conclusion of the UR experience she not only had more confidence about graduate school but she also felt a stronger connection to the larger artistic community. She explained how she had previously felt uncertain about adapting to this environment:

…realizing that a group of artists can all help each other out, even if we don’t all know each other, and that’s something that I’m worried about, ’cause I’m gonna be going to a different grad school, and it’s like, well, I don’t know if I’m gonna like the people there, or if they’re gonna be helpful, or if they’re gonna be mean…it gives me comfort knowing that everyone here was so welcoming, and ready to help you with your project …and give you advice, and tell you it looks good, and make you feel better about it…So just know that this community of artists is a lot more similar than I would expect…Being able to meet with them, and have an open environment that you can really talk about your ideas…

While Rebecca shared her apprehensions about fitting in with her colleagues in graduate school, Jeanene’s concerns were more present oriented. She described how the support she received from mentors, peers and other university staff during the program taught her that asking for help is “okay”. This alleviated concerns she had when she first transferred to Southside University, and the experience also demonstrated how she could be successful with the support of the university community. Jeanene’s comments show how she was beginning to set aside her previous uncertainties and thoughts about the ability to thrive at Southside. She credited feeling supported by the institutional environment as beneficial to her transition:

I learned that you can really rely on other students or certain faculty... I was just so uncertain when I came here…it's so,…great… that I got to experience this so
early in my bachelor's... I think that really is beneficial... because this definitely will help me, and also kind of teaches me to reach out for help when I need help.

Jeanene also described the relationships she developed with peers in the program as supportive and sustaining:

It was amazing... that's one of the things I loved the most about this... there was a lot of time to bounce ideas off of each other... with my mentor, and then, also, of course, with everyone else. I mean, we would literally be on a subway or a bus and be, like, what do you think about this and what do you think about that?... it was so funny and so weird to think we're doing this for a project that's in the fall... and we're just having our own conversation and it was... kind of a certain beauty to it.

As I mentioned in an earlier section, Deborah wrote about her “passion” with reference to feeling a sense of community with her colleagues in the program. The university art department was also a source of community and inspired growth. The following excerpt illustrates how she felt connected to the local environs of the department and the wider environment of the institution. More importantly, she linked this sense of belonging with the ability to be successful in the arts:

it’s growing together, as a community, and that’s why... I feel like the arts... it’s all about the community, and who do you know, and how can you get to places, and how can you help other people...

Deborah also stated how making friends with colleagues in the program helped her grow as an individual and artist:

...we were really tight, and we became really good friends.... So it's like knowing that we could share our ideas and grow and get ideas from others and to interpret them, to create something.... I think is just something really powerful... The more you listen to other people and take critique and like wisely, that's the best way to kind of grow.

She compared her experience as an artist with organized religion. As she noted, she felt no sense of community in regards to religion. On the contrary, participating in organized religion engendered feelings of alienation and judgment:
It was more like the gossipy and the just the feeling of like it wasn't a community. It was more like a judgment thing. And then eventually growing and learning that there's so many things that made no sense. Like this girl who couldn't get an abortion…how women are not treated right in the Bible and like all these stories that are supposed to be taken as metaphors, but people take it so vividly, and like fanatically. That's what made me not like it as much, even though I do believe there's a God or something that's above us, and that watches over us, but as long as we're good people and we do good, I don't think there's a need to keep going to church.

The sense of belonging and community that Ashley experienced in the program was associated with the value she placed on peer feedback. She indicated that the program helped her build collaboration skills, a competency she did not previously feel comfortable exploring with colleagues. Collaborating with peers in the program shifted her thinking, and she had come to understand how this skill could benefit her in future endeavors:

Although we were not necessarily working on the same projects, the whole group was excited to learn more about each others’ work and research. I think being in this community of likeminded people, whatever their discipline, allowed for me to ask for and give feedback to my peers…The program has in turn made me more comfortable in collaborating with others and more willing to ask for feedback, which is something I hope to utilize in whatever career path I choose.

Ashley also realized how building community among her peers in the program gave her confidence to model this behavior in her classes, which resulted in feeling more open to group projects and sharing ideas.

it enabled me to think more collaboratively, although we were doing…our own projects, that we were in a community together, and that we could kind of consult each other about what we were doing,… having that… small community… I definitely understand the importance of that kind of community, whereas before I think I tried to avoid group projects… I feel a lot more comfortable…initiating some kind of collaboration… throughout my classes, although there’s not much kind of opportunity to do like group projects, but even just in those classes feeling more comfortable to kind of spitball ideas off people,…hear what they have to say about theirs, giving feedback…
These excerpts show how becoming more connected with colleagues in the program resulted in a stronger sense of belonging to Ashley’s department, and the larger art environs.

Although Christine did not feel like she “fit in” when she initially transferred to Southside University, during the UR experience she became more comfortable with being an artist in part because she had gained confidence working with her peers in the program. At the conclusion of the study, she had developed a strong sense of belonging as an artist, which extended to the professional realm of the art world:

I am gradually becoming more accepting of calling myself an artist because of all the people I have met and worked with this last year who call themselves artists. Being with them has helped me to normalize my thinking in regards to the validity of the profession.

Christine described how her beliefs had evolved after a group meeting at the beginning of the fall semester. During the meeting participants gave short progress reports regarding their research and received feedback from peers. Christine explained that the sense of collaboration and support she received from peers during that meeting was a new experience, which helped her appreciate the value of her art and herself as an artist:

…when we came back, and when we were…talking and collaborating,… that had never happened in a collegiate setting for me before,…I think that's when I realized that I had something to offer that others were engaging with me because they felt I had something to offer. They wanted to help me and encourage me, and that we were here as a community together, instead of these isolated, strange caricatures of what an artist is. So…definitely, after that first collaboration, I started to become more accepting of, I am an artist.

She further described the perceived value of the collaborative experience and sense of belonging and linked the value of this experience to future endeavors:

…that collaboration function is something that I will need in the future to be successful, … I would also say that working with the peers is rewarding…I think that one of the best things about it was that all of us were experiencing this
together and having other people who understood how difficult it was and how much work went into it was a really comforting source— a source of validation…

Christine’s comments show how she became more connected to her colleagues in the program, and also her status as an emerging artist. By the end of the program she felt a greater sense of belonging to the wider environments of the institution and the art world.

In contrast to some of the other individuals in my study who described positive experiences within the university art department, Patricia and Morgan’s initial experiences were characterized by feelings of not fitting in. I previously explained how Patricia felt that the lack of diversity within the university art department made it difficult to communicate through her art and to be understood as an artist. At the end of the program, however, this situation had changed:

I think that was one of the most influential components of this experience. Because prior to this experience, I was like the typical symbol of the lone artist. Who just works alone... So being around other people who are constantly creating, and thinking creatively, …has really encouraged me to keep this sense of community going with other artists.

She also described being “closed off” before the UR experience and less open to collaboration. Participating in the program made her feel more like an artist. More importantly, she felt more accepted as an artist, a feeling that had eluded her when she first entered Southside:

I feel like I have more sense of community with my fellow female artists, which was not at all how I felt before…And I think that was just my own self, being very closed off. But I think because now I’m so much more open to talking about my artwork, and sharing ideas,…I think that that has allowed myself, as a female artist, to feel more accepted…But just to feel more.. accepted in this community. Whereas before I wasn’t really in the art scene like that. I was an artist, but I really didn’t hang out much with other artists. So a lot of times I would maybe go to an opening, but I would go by myself.
Most notably, Patricia explained how her perspective had changed regarding her previous feelings of not fitting into the artistic community:

> I felt like I was in this place where I really did not fit in.. beforehand…now I definitely feel a belonging to the community, and an acceptance for the work that I make. And I think that now that people see me more as an artist, I think my work is more respected… I think that people… feel like my work has more credibility than it did before. ...And the sort of criticism that I’m given…really shows the way that people view me as an artist. And in turn that has allowed me to see that…within…the academic artist community, I think my work has been elevated in that sense. So I definitely feel a belonging, and even in terms of my professors, I feel like they respect the work I make more….now I feel more cohesive in saying, ‘Hey, I’m an artist. I’m important, I matter, my work matters’.

As the above excerpt demonstrates, Patricia’s sense of belonging was linked to seeing herself as an artist but she also felt more comfortable with and accepted by the artistic environs of the university. She shared her thoughts about working with colleagues in the program, and how she viewed the practice of art making differently as a result:

> But I think having researchers who are…creating research at the same time that I am…And having them critique my ideas, my sketches, and just overall sitting down and working and talking with other artists, who are creating research and not just making art for art’s sake. Definitely is solely the reason why I arrived…where I’m at right now. I would’ve gone on a different path, and I would not feel as happy as I do about the work that I made now. And I think that was definitely consulting with them…

Finally, she articulated how the sense of community within the program shifted her thinking around “who” she was as an artist and possibilities for who she could become in the future. This represents a significant departure from how Patricia felt at the beginning of her career at Southside:

> …before I was often so discouraged and…insecure in who I am.. as an artist, and how I feel in relation to other artists…And not only have I felt like I’ve built a community of artists within this research, like my strongest, closest friends have come from this experience…And seeing how confident, and how… I can hold my head up high and say, ‘I’m an artist. And I will be successful. And I am a mother,
and I’m a woman, and I’m still making it happen. And nothing is going to stop me having this sort of view.’

In an earlier section I discussed how Morgan had conformed to structure for most of her life. She described not fitting in while studying abroad, and how her hairstyle made her feel uncomfortable. Morgan first began to “see herself”, appreciate her value, and hear her voice after the interlude with the lady in the metro who “looked like her”.

Morgan’s sense of belonging emerged most significantly from the experience of having her work on public display alongside her colleagues in the program:

There was no place for me really in the art world…So…seeing myself in this research process-- and people accepting my art and not being like, ‘What is this doing here?’ but like, ‘I'm interested in your research and what you're doing,’ and everybody's telling me how they appreciate it…the idea that comes to mind is all those male modernist painters…stereotypical male environment and you're like, ‘Wait, they appreciate me…You realize that's a black woman in that self-portrait.’… It's not what you normally see. So it certainly allowed me to see myself as part of the art world now…I'm able to see myself as like, ‘Hey, my voice is important in the art world because I have a particular perspective on things,… and my identity isn't going to prevent me from being a part of that world.’ …and through seeing my own art among all these artists you think-- you're like, ‘Fifty years ago that wouldn't have been possible for me to be even here,’ and to be showing in a gallery space with all these other artists who are different than me-- so now I'm a part of the art world.

Showing her art in a public space engendered a strong connection with her peers in the program, the environs of the university, and the larger art world. Morgan’s comments show how she felt a strong sense of belonging to this community.

In contrast to Morgan’s experience, showing her work in a public space had the opposite effect for Victoria. She did not accept that what she had created was art:

It’s hard for me to accept it and to call it art, when it’s surrounded by… the incredible work that the other scholars have done. So it’s hard for me to do that, because I look around, and I’m like, ‘No. No’…But…maybe that’s just something I need to work on.
While Victoria did feel connected to her colleagues in the program, unlike most other participants she did not feel a strong sense of belonging in relation to her artistic endeavors. In fact, displaying her work further alienated her from feeling like an artist.

Finally, Stuart and Meagan largely associated the notion of belonging and community with being part of a larger community of artists. Stuart indicated that he felt a strong connection between himself and the wider community of artists working in his discipline. He also felt a sense of community with his mentors:

When you can overcome something that’s a struggle to most, it just sets you apart. And it then puts you in a community, and then you feel like you’re a part of something. And then you feel like what you’re doing is supported by that community, and it’s supported by history and tradition…that’s more or less been the community I’ve been affiliated with,…the personal, one-on-one…And so it’s nice to have a role model like that, to…keep you driven.

Meagan described how working with colleagues in the program stimulated her passion and motivation:

I think that everyone’s, just brings out, a lot of good in each other in this group… Like, they would find me and ask questions and they were just very into it. And that made me get really into it. I think that kind of energy’s infectious.

Meagan wrote about community in her final journal entry. She was specifically concerned about the transitional period before entering graduate school, and how she would stay motivated and connected. The quote below illustrates how Meagan equated a sense of belonging and community with feeling like an artist. She also perceived how being connected to a community of artists was linked to success:

Before, I wrote about expressing myself through specific medium but also critique and artistic community. That's so important to me as an artist, to share and receive feedback. This time I write about the fear of getting caught up in life and losing that sense of community and belonging. I am very afraid of being cut off from that community after graduating and losing my focus and motivation and drive to...
continue building a suitable grad portfolio. The more I think about graduate school the more I want to apply.

“Doing” From My Perspective

Through this research project I aimed to determine how participation in an undergraduate research experience in the arts influenced an individual’s artistic identity formation. Moreover, investigating the experiences of students engaged in UR provided the opportunity to observe how “doing” research through the act of creation influenced the identity formation process. The theme of “doing from my perspective” involved competence, purpose, and belonging. Participants indicated that engaging in UR provided an opportunity to make individual decisions regarding their artistic and intellectual work, and provided a space for their artistic voices to be heard. The notion of doing for oneself through research resulted in a stronger sense of artistic identity.

At the beginning of the study most participants speculated about what they might gain by participating in UR. Several indicated that they hoped to figure out why they “do what they do as artists”; i.e. artistic and creative decisions. Others speculated that engaging in UR might help them better communicate their research (and their artistic production) to others. Below are comments shared by several participants at the beginning of the study in response to my question about what they hoped to learn by participating in UR:

Ashley stated:

I think I’ll…probably delve deeper into why it is I create what I create, and how I come to do that. I think it’ll be a good kind of reflection time,… I can understand more about myself.
Jeanene commented:

I've never really had the chance… to…step back and think about the why, or the how. I just kind of do it, and I think it would be beneficial to actually explore and figure out as to why I do what I do, and not just do it…

Deborah noted:

I feel like this research opportunity is going to help me put in words what I really-who I am as an artist and how that process goes…

Morgan indicated:

…through a project like this, I’m able to see where my strengths and weaknesses are, what I want to do, how I truly see myself and my professional self,…instead of just what other people and my professors see in me…because there’s a certain standard, but it’s your professor judging you and your work. It’s not you.

By the end of the study most participants described the research experience as providing an environment in which they felt encouraged and supported to make their own decisions about their artistic and intellectual work. To explain this circumstance, several participants contrasted the UR experience with coursework and assignments in their majors, which typically included targeted assignments that did not always allow for individual exploration or approaches. Others indicated that doing UR helped them use self-expression in new ways that offered additional “possibilities” for their artistic endeavors. To put it another way, doing research provided an opportunity to engage with concepts and ideas on a deeper intellectual level, and to develop further competence as an artist. As I indicated previously, the experience resulted in a greater sense of belonging as an artist, and a strong sense of purpose regarding pursuing art as a life path.

Creating artistic and intellectual work from one’s personal perspective based on individual ideas and beliefs was a critical feature of “doing from my perspective. Christine, Ashley, Rebecca, Morgan, Patricia described UR in terms of having the
freedom to explore, embrace, and communicate their own ideas. Most participants indicated that this way of working represented a significant departure from the structured arts curriculum. Christine learned to balance feedback from instructors with the ability to maintain her convictions about the direction of her work:

… I definitely feel …more comfortable after doing this research project…up until this point I’ve been creating things that have been structured and expectations from my teachers… I still think about what my instructors say as far as their guidelines, … I say, ‘This is the idea that I have’…I think having the confidence to say that…emboldens me I guess… but I feel like now especially after this process of doing…what I want, what inspires me, what I’m passionate about gives me…courage to… go after this artist that I want to be…

Christine’s comments reveal how the act of doing from her own perspective helped her develop more confidence in her own ideas and set aside external structures and expectations. This resulted in a stronger connection to her artistic self. In her final essay, she wrote about how taking control of her work was helping her to embrace her artistic self:

I knew I was accountable for certain things throughout the research process,…the direction and goals of the project were entirely my own. This gave me an awareness of my own personal strength to develop a body of work relating to an area I am deeply passionate about. …I also began to think of my school work as an extension of a greater portfolio and body of work that I would like to develop for the future. In many ways, I feel that it has set me free, because since starting the project I have spoken with instructors about the goals of each assignment…and making an argument for how I can interpret it to suit my conceptual ideas...

Similar to Christine, Ashley indicated that the UR experience had changed her perspective, she felt more confident about tackling her own ideas:

…because I see myself as an artist now…It kind of frees me… I feel like I’m allowed to explore things further, whereas before I think I was trying to put myself in my work without showing everyone that… I think I was coming at it from a very like narrow perspective, and now I can kind of reach my work, like head on, arms open. …my relationship with my work has changed in that I am more ready to do it. I’m more willing to tackle whatever my ideas are.
Rebecca articulated this circumstance by relating it to her struggle around creating her portfolio, and her desire to diverge from traditional portfolio conventions of including/representing only a similar body of work. To explain, a large part of the art studio curriculum is building a strong body of work or *oeuvre*, which the art world (granting agencies, graduate schools, galleries) uses to assess the quality of an artist’s work. In art school, students are encouraged to produce a “cohesive” body of work that demonstrates prolonged engagement with a particular theme, style or material rather than a diverse array of creative output. Although Rebecca had held this unconventional view prior engaging in the program, her experiences in the program provided further impetus to challenge the traditional approach to the portfolio and pursue her own vision:

…a lot of professors say that you should have a body of work,…so that… when you apply to grad school, they know what to expect from you… I hate that a lot…even though they keep telling me to do it, I'm just going to not do it and try to get into grad school because that bothers me and I feel like that's very limiting…I want to try to change my process in different ways…instead of producing like art student work, I can actually produce like contemporary-artist work.

Similar to Christine, Rebecca had gained more confidence in her work, which resulted in a stronger sense of artistic identity.

Morgan explained “doing from her perspective” with reference to breaking out of structure and changing her mindset. Similar to Rebecca, she wanted to explore her own path:

Without this whole experience…I would…still be working within the framework of my classes, instead of working within my own framework... it’s my own. It’s not outside of myself… through analyzing my research process, the way I view art, the way I do art, that has enabled me to formulate my own formula on what works for me, and that's something that you don't get through school because you're taught this is the way you're supposed to do it. You're not taught figure out which way works best for you.
She further explained how she learned how to embrace her own ideas and work outside the boundaries of what she was taught:

…in school…you're taught there's a certain format…when you have a project like this you're told there's really no format; we just want you to organize things yourself… you realize that there really are no boundaries of what you can think and how you can demonstrate your creativity in the way you work. It's up to you.…So I no longer work within those guidelines that were demonstrated through school… you just have to figure out what way you have to go, and before I was just doing things the way I was told.

In a previous section I described Morgan’s perceptions regarding her artistic self and how she came to accept herself. This acceptance extended to her ideas about coming to terms with her own perspective. Engaging in research provided a venue in which she could begin to observe and articulate her own perspective:

…before I didn't think my perspective was important and I thought that other perspectives were more important… now, I'm, like,…what's my perspective and what's my take on it and how can I translate that into a piece of written work or an art piece?...it's less of me trying to copy what other people are and more of me putting myself into my work…It's definitely liberating because you're, like, I don't have to hide anymore whatever I'm trying to put forth…It's acceptable to put your ideas forth… if I didn't have this experience, I don't see how…my opinion wouldn't matter…this experience, totally opened my eyes, not only to research, but to my own artwork, to my own perspective.

Lastly, she explained what it felt like to have her work shown in a public space along with her colleagues, and how the experience allowed her to see and accept herself as an artist within the art world:

This experience has allowed me to see myself as an artist in a venue that I really wouldn't have seen myself,…because it's white-male-dominated, and you're like, ‘Oh, gosh, I'm just not going to fit in here at all.’ So it's allowed me to see myself as an artist, which is strange to think about because I didn't see people like myself being artists growing up at all….
Morgan’s narrative beautifully illustrates how the elements of competence, purpose and belonging emerged from the act of doing research and how this resulted in a strong sense of artistic identity.

Patricia also described “doing from her perspective” in terms of her development as an artist and individual. Like the experience of other participants, UR provided a space in which Patricia could explore her artistic becoming:

at this point in time… it was knowing that this was the right move for me, knowing that this was the right path, knowing that research was the key to my self-awareness, my self-awakening, my acceptance of my own ability to express myself in the way that I do, and my-- I think the acceptance of my own artistic or creative process, rather than doing it by somebody else's needs.

Another aspect related to the theme of doing from my perspective was idea that art can involve and communicate more than self-expression. While there is no doubt that self-expression is a key component of artistic/creative production, participants indicated that UR challenged them to expand their conceptualization of art beyond the notion of self-expression. Through the UR process they learned how to explore and communicate self-generated problems and issues through their work. Over the course of the study, many participants came to realize that art could be conceived and applied in ways that transcend the traditional conceptualizations of self-expression. Rebecca described this circumstance in terms of fully embracing the researcher side of who she was:

…identifying yourself as a researcher, you… think about it more, and try to figure out why you’re doing it, or what you should be doing, what you should be looking for….and as I did with this research experience, realizing broader and broader thoughts, so it’s not just these narrow passageways of thinking…

Similarly, Deborah discussed self-expression in terms of being able to communicate her message in an articulate and transparent manner for both herself and her audience:
...as an artist...I know my style... and what I like to make but I would say that it
[UR] expresses more like a specific idea... I was able to know how to express myself better as to how to translate it to other people so they can understand it to create a meaning for myself that would make sense. So one day when they ask me what that painting is about I know that I thought about it and I'm like did this and that was the choice that I made because of this and get inspired by research...

In addition, Meagan noted that participating in UR helped her see possibilities and other ways to approach and apply her artistic endeavors. This was a prominent theme in much of her narrative:

I think it probably means more to me than it used to, or maybe it's just more broad than I used to think about being an artist. I guess when I first came to Southside art seemed like showing in galleries or possibly teaching, but I think now what it means to be an artist is a whole lot-- there are possibilities I had no idea about before that seem very possible to me now.

She further explained:

...doing research, trying to connect my art to other things in STEM, to kind of make it more about the world rather than just expressing myself. That is more interesting to me... I was just saying this today,... in class,... saying something about the world or trying to give back or explain-- using the research component to do something with art is a lot more interesting than just expressing yourself. So, being an artist doesn't really just mean using some sort of medium to express yourself, but it's kinda like describing the world around you or explaining something with-- in a different way.

She also wrote about this idea in her reflective essay:

It makes me really determined to just... go out in to the world and change minds by creating art research pieces. I never knew this was possible, and I think it's because of this attitude from art education to just focus on self-expression. While that's a part of making art, it is not the entire big picture.

Lastly, in her first journal entry in response to the question: “Making art makes me feel”, Victoria wrote about having the opportunity to do something outside of her comfort zone:
While I do not see the things I have created to be art pieces, I do try and push…out of my comfort zone….I feel that as an art historian staying within the confines of the library reading and researching does not allow for creative thinking. Making art allows you to engage with different parts of your brain helping your thought processes to work in a different way. This can help new ideas to arise that you would not have not been able to explore or develop without the outlet of creating something. This project will allow me to explore the idea of creating my own art piece that is reflective of my research, something I feel much more comfortable in.

She responded to this question in her final entry as follows:

Making art still makes me feel nervous and uncomfortable. I doubt myself and my abilities because it is something new and out of my comfort zone. Having to rely on yourself entirely is a very isolating but yet empowering feeling. Knowing that not only will your ideas, work, skill and talent will be on display creates feelings of anxiety. Knowing though that you have a support system of friends, family, mentors and peers does enable not only confidence, but motivation. You feel motivated to perform your best to evoke pride out of your support team. Now having created my final piece I do know that I am equipped with the abilities to be pushed beyond my limits and create something I am proud of.

As the above excerpts demonstrate, most participants described the ability to engage in individual research projects as a way to explore and share their own ideas as individuals and artists. This exploration involved evaluating (and exposing) their competence as artists, and a deep examination of their life purpose. Feeling a sense of belonging among colleagues in the program assisted them with seeing who they were as artists in relation to the larger environs of the institution and art world. While most participants felt less connected to their departments, the institution, and the larger art world at the beginning of the program, after the experience most reported a deeper connection. Through the experience, participants also contemplated how engaging in research for a sustained period resulted in more possibilities for their work, and their creative lives.
Research Question Two

...art is a unique, evolving dialectical relationship between internal and external aspects of the artist’s own subjectivity. (Hagman, 2010).

I think the way that it [creativity] interacts with people, and the way that it requests people to engage with it, is also where creativity has resided with me. So not only in the process, but I think in the way that it asks for people to really look within themselves. (Patricia)

...there’s no textbook to show you creativity. (Stuart)

The second research question considered how creativity influenced the formation of an individual’s artistic identity/identities. I identified three primary themes associated with this research question. I labeled the first theme “doing through my creativity”, which also involved “the process and mechanics of artistic creation”. Furthermore, doing was related to whether participants viewed creativity in terms of problem-solving or problem-finding (or a combination of both). The second primary theme was “what does creativity mean for emerging artists”, which revealed how participants understood the construct of creativity, and how they viewed their creativity within the larger “system” of the art world. The final theme that emerged from my analysis was “weaving an artistic identity/identities through creativity”. This theme illustrates how the process of creativity intersected with the process of identity formation within participant narratives. As with the themes related to question one, the data around creativity involved many layers and as the reader will observe, the themes were interconnected and relational.

Interview data and journal entries collected during the research program yielded data to demonstrate how participants viewed the influence of creativity in relation to their artistic becoming. At the beginning and end of the study, I asked participants to define and describe their creativity both in relation to their artistic endeavors, and the way that
they perceived creativity functioning in their lives. I also asked them describe their creative process. In the sections that follow I describe each of the primary themes related to this question.

“Doing” through MY Creativity: The Process and Mechanics of Artistic Creation

The first primary theme involved how participants described “doing” creativity. As I noted above, the process and mechanics of artistic creation were embedded into this theme. Analyzing the process and mechanics of creativity illuminated the ways in which individuals in my study conceptualized the notion of creativity and how they executed creativity through their art. In addition, “doing” was related to whether participants viewed creativity in terms of problem-solving or problem-finding (or a combination of both). To understand how participants conceptualized the creative process, I asked them to describe their “process of creation”. During the first interview, participants told me about the development of a school project. During the second interview, this question focused on the artistic research project, which participants had recently completed for the program.

In chapter two I enumerated the five “steps” typically involved in the creative process. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1996), the creative process begins with “curiosity about a problem or issue”. The next step involves a period of “incubation”, and this is followed by “insight”. Uncertainty or “self-doubt” characterizes the fourth step, and the process concludes with the “execution” of the final creative product. Although most of these steps were present in participant accounts of the creative process, as has been noted in the literature, the process is not linear, and participant narratives clearly illustrated this circumstance.
Participants arrived at the first step in the process, the idea, in different ways. Stuart described it as “an idea in my head”. Meagan stated that her process usually began with “deciding what to make”, and Deborah noted that the creative process typically commenced with a “general idea”. Christine described the beginning of the process as starting with “an idea or feeling”, while Ashley typically “fiddled” around with a few quick ideas. While most participants articulated a shared experience regarding how they typically arrived at the initial idea, the remainder of the process was unique to each individual. For some, the next phase involved a period of reflection, while others described getting the ideas down on paper. Several participants described conducting extensive “research” on a “general” idea to ensure they were not reproducing an idea that had already been explored. The majority of participants explained that once the periods of reflection, research, and contemplation were completed, their focus shifted to the execution of the final product. Nearly all participants noted that their creative processes had changed during the program. In the next section I describe how participants discussed these changes.

At the end of the study, several participants noted that their process had evolved to include more planning. They had also spent more time reflecting on the various pieces of the process and thinking through things deeply before the execution phase. For example, Rebecca indicated that she typically began projects with a plan but she was “questioning herself more” before creating the final piece. Consulting with others had also become a major part of the process. Deborah described the evolution of her process as more personal and involving more reflection and thought. She now better understood the connection between the analysis and “translation” of a work. Christine stated that her
process was entirely different from the way she worked before. Ashley typically worked intuitively but her process had become more deliberate. While creating her piece she stopped often to reflect about the direction of the project. At the beginning of the study Jeanene indicated that she did not necessarily have a process. However, at the conclusion of the program she stated that she had a definite process that involved lots of planning from the early stages to execution. Early in the study, Patricia had explained that she was not clear about what the process of creation was or how to access it. During the second interview she described how her process had changed. She had a deeper understanding of the creative process in regard to her work. She explained the process in terms of a system and strategy and one that allowed her to have more confidence in her work:

…process has become a major part of my work now… I think seeing…this journey to get there, has made my final pieces stronger…figuring out how I’m arriving at this point,… has been an overall evolving process for me… it has definitely helped me build confidence in the piece that I’m making knowing that there was a clear process,… a system,… a strategy…. everything was very purposeful and not… just because it looked right, or just because it was the easiest way to do it. But because it was the most meaningful way to get there. And I think that that’s really what has allowed my work to become more successful through creation.

As the quotes above illustrate, for most individuals in my study, the creative process became more complex during the UR experience. In addition, participants became more aware of their processes and this in turn allowed them to engage more deeply with their creative work. For most individuals in my study, the process of creation involved familiar steps that have been identified in the literature such as beginning with an idea and a period of incubation (or reflection). Another feature of the creative process is the mechanics of creativity, or the artist’s approach to creation. While some individuals described their creative process as involving problem-solving others noted that problem
finding was more relevant to their process. Still others noted an evolution from problem solving to problem finding. I address these elements in the next section.

The mechanics of creation are central to the creative process. I explored the mechanics or method of creation employed by participants to understand the creative process in relation to each individual’s artistic self. In chapter two I explicated the difference between problem solving and problem-finding. In contrast to problem solving, which involves working from a predetermined question to answer a known solution; problem finding requires the individual to identify both the problem and the solution related to a particular issue (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976). In the context of artistic production, the artist who follows a problem-finding approach does not rely on templates or formulas, but rather the project emerges from an internal decision making process, which results in highly creative and innovative work (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976). Most participants noted that engaging in research allowed them to explore their own voices and ideas. A curious finding that emerged from my analysis the mechanics of creativity was the connection between the process of creation and process of research, which several participants identified in their narratives.

Stuart, Meagan, Ashley and Rebecca explained their creative processes with reference to problem solving and/or problem-finding. In some cases, participants conflated these terms. For instance, several participants used the term problem-solving to describe problem finding. Although Stuart noted that creativity involved problem-solving, when he explained his creative process his description was closer to the characteristics associated with problem-finding:

There’s just no formula to it,…creativity is just making that light bulb in your head go off,…getting a good idea, and feeling good about it…you have to figure
out what you’re trying to say, why you’re trying to say it, and how you’re gonna say it…when you’re making art, a lot of the times you don’t know what you’re gonna get… that means you may not necessarily know what you’re looking for, but you’re looking…

He discussed doing research in similar terms. Research was about discovery and creating something completely new from an old technique:

…when you’re trying to do this research project,…you’re going to find something, and you may not necessarily know what you’re going to find, but you’re going to know how to record and make the decisions to get to where you’re trying to be. I mean, and that’s hard to say, because you may not necessarily know. Because with my project, I’m trying to do something that’s dealing with the modern age, and something that’s dealing with very old-school practices; you know, how can those be combined to make a new form, or a hybrid form…

Meagan likewise conflated these concepts when she discussed her process. In some instances, she used the term problem solving to explain her process but her description was more aligned with problem finding. Moreover, while she spoke about solving a problem, she had posed the problem to which she referred. This is illustrated in her discussion around creativity and the production of her research project “The creativity, I guess, was in explaining what I wanted to do and posing the right question to frame what I was doing…” And she described how she approached her creative process:

I think I do my best work when there’s a problem. It’s tough, but it’s fun to think around corners and to create what you’re trying to make with problems… it’s rewarding when it happens and it comes together. Even if it’s not the way you thought it was going to be. So that’s part of being creative. And for me, maybe that makes me the kind of artist I am, because it’s more enjoyable to solve a problem versus to just make something without problems,…Something easy.

Meagan also stated that she was more of a research-based artist because she liked the aspect of solving problems through her work. This is related to my previous discussion about her beliefs that art making can expand the parameters of self-expression:
So maybe that’s why I’m more of like a research-based artist. That’s what I want to be… Like you’re making something out of nothing. That’s really hard. Like, a problem to solve is, you know, more interesting to me, and I think that’s where I get creative. Like, ‘Okay. Here’s the problem. How do we solve it?’ And then my thoughts begin. So for me, maybe that’s how I can kind of activate that or reach that. It’s like maybe posing a problem or creating a goal.

Ashley described the evolution of her creative process as realizing that creativity was more about posing the right questions:

Creativity…I think…it's not necessarily coming up with the solution to a problem, but,… understanding and figuring out how to ask the right questions. Or maybe not even the right questions, but posing questions that open up bigger conversations… just being interested enough to continue asking questions, to try to investigate something further. Not necessarily coming to a resolution at the end of that investigation, but allowing your mind to, kind of, jump to places, to draw connections.

She further explained her thinking concerning the creative process and failure:

…the creativity aspect of being an artist is just being able to get ideas out there. Maybe I don’t continue making all of them if I’m starting a project, but it makes me more comfortable with the possibility of failure, that I’m…just trying things out. If it doesn’t work out then I can…take things different directions, trying out things, asking questions, or trying to find solutions that may lead to nowhere, and if they fail then that kind of spurs me to pick up and move to the next thing…

Ashley also noted similarities between the creative process and the research process:

I drew connections between my artistic process and the active research. Creativity is, I think, imbued in research just depending on, again, the kind of questions you ask, how you go about kind of investigating…I think I more saw at the beginning of the program the artwork and the research project as being kind of two different things, but I think, I don’t know, just the process allowed me to see the creation of the work as just the kind of manifestation of the research.

Finally, Rebecca described her creative process as involving primarily problem-solving:

…definitely problem solving and creativity go hand-in-hand, because it's like you may have an idea, but like your vision may not play out the way that you want it to. And when it does play out, like you have to figure out how to tweak it and get it back to how you were thinking it could be...
However, by the end of the study she was beginning to think about her creative process in terms of problem finding. She distinguished the two approaches:

...problem-solving infers that you have to have a problem...the creativity would come in to where that you find a problem that you don't know it already existed. I would say I currently do problem-solving, but I'm trying to do problem-finding.

Other participants described their creative processes in ways other than problem solving or problem-finding. For example, by the end of the program, Deborah explained that her process had more “layers”, whereas before she did not understand ”the connection in the middle”. Discipline had become a prominent feature in Christine’s creative process by the end of the program. She described how this feature blended with the explorative facet of her creative process “the creative process...requires discipline...I need... this framework that... gives me the freedom to explore but the discipline to set aside that time to do it...”.

When I asked Victoria to discuss her creative process in relation to the research-based art project she had recently completed, she explained that her approach and process was “different” from how she approached writing art history papers:

I know it was different. It had to have been different than how I create my papers, because it’s something completely different, so it had to be different. I just don’t know how it was different: what my thought process was. I guess... I mean, well, maybe it wasn’t different. Hold on. I don’t know. I’m working through this.

The more she pondered this question, however, she was attempting to articulate how the process of art making might be different from that of writing papers. In the end, she decided to answer the question by relating her creative process to her personal strengths:

Have you ever done StrengthsQuest? ...you take this 50-question assessment, and it gives you your top five strengths. And based on those five strengths, you know, you can learn to use them in professional, social, artistic... any type of environment. And so...my first one is restorative, which is, I look to the past to figure out how to problem-solve the future; and my second one is competitive.
So... I think, when I write my papers, not only do I want to write the best paper that I can write, but I need to write the best paper that everyone else can write. So I knew, going into this, that wasn’t going to happen...there’s no way that I can create something that’s better than somebody else, because everyone’s going to do something completely different. So I had to remove that mindset, in the sense of competing with others, but not remove it, in the sense of competing with myself, because I have a lot of pride in what I do, and I’m very hardworking, and I’m very dedicated in everything that I do. So I think I had to translate the thought process that I have when writing a paper, and do it into something visual.

As evidenced above, Victoria’s process involved a problem-solving dimension, and the ability to challenge herself and attempt a new way of thinking. Ultimately, she was conflicted about whether or not her processes were different:

So maybe my thought process didn’t change... but it had to [have], at the same time. You see? It’s very conflicting... I went in there, thinking, “This has to be the best thing that I ever can do...So I went in this mindset of, ‘I have to do this, I have to do that.’” But it had to have been different; I just don’t know how.

Examining the process and mechanics of creativity exploited the ways in which participants conceptualized the act of creation. My analysis revealed that most individuals more closely aligned with a problem-finding approach by the end of the UR experience, indicating that for most, the act of creation was strongly linked to internal decision making processes and more acceptance with finding problems rather than solving existing questions.

**What Does Creativity Mean for Emerging Artists?**

Most participants defined creativity with reference to terms such as “innovation”, “unique”, and “originality”. These ideas are consistent with the common myths around the persona of the artist, which I discussed earlier in this chapter. For example, Stuart defined creativity as the ability to “see the world differently”, and Rebecca noted that creativity involves the ability to be original. Deborah indicated that one must have creativity to be an artist, and Morgan stated that creativity is the ability to think outside
the box. Others had different thoughts regarding the personal value of creativity. For instance, Meagan noted that creativity helps her stay focused, and Jeanene defined creativity as how one expresses oneself without words. Christine defined creativity as the ability to be inquisitive, and Ashley noted that creativity helps her think. Finally, Patricia linked creativity to the notion of “good”, good art is creative. Over the course of my inquiry, participants wrote about (and discussed) how art making made them feel, and the ways in which they “express their creativity” through artistic endeavors and in their lives.

For the majority of participants, the notion of creativity was associated with being “good”, a concept related to the philosophy of aesthetics (Kant, 2009). When participants discussed creativity, some did so with reference to the idea of striving to be “good” in the eyes of the art world. Moreover, several pointed to “good” examples from the canon of art history, and the contemporary art world. Participant stories around creativity acknowledged that being creative involves a variety of factors including sociocultural “norms”. These ideas are consistent with Csikszentmihalyi’s (1996) systems approach to creativity, which I discussed in chapter two. As he noted, creativity is an emergent process, which involves a combination of the individual, domain, and the field working in tangent (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Acceptance from the domain and field is therefore critical to the manifestation of the creative self (selves). Furthermore, the systems model provides a mechanism for conceptualizing how the process of creativity like that of identity is constantly re-constructed and filtered through the combination of individual experiences in tangent with society and culture. Below, I outline how each participant described and engaged with creativity both in their artistic endeavors and in their lives.
The descriptions weave together how participants saw themselves (including successes and failures) within the larger sociocultural environs.

Individual perceptions around creativity emerged at various points during each interview. For instance, when I asked Rebecca “what it means to an artist”, she responded, “to create”. In addition, when she wrote about her artistic self in her journal she did so with reference to the term innovation, a term which she had also used elsewhere to describe creativity. In her entry she noted that a primary goal of art making was to achieve innovation in her work. Since her future career goal was to become a professor she surmised that she must first become a “successful” artist, and being a successful artist involved the ability to be innovative, and to make an impact (contribution to) within the larger environs of the art world. She referenced the 20th century French artist Marcel Duchamp as an exemplar (or good model) of innovation and creativity. Moreover, Rebecca explained how she strove for innovation through her creative process:

I do try to do things like a new process every time I make something, not that I'm like that's my goal, but when I'm done, I'm just like, ‘Oh, like, I learned a new skill from doing this, and now I know how to do this.’ So, especially where art is today, I feel like you have to be innovative, and that's like the only theme that there is within contemporary art, is like innovation in some way.

As I discussed in earlier sections, Christine’s artistic self was bound up with several factors including prevailing myths of the artist, not feeling that she “fit” within the art department, and not having confidence in her work. Thus, Christine was not only cognizant of the sociocultural elements related to artistic success, but her narrative also illustrates how she was processing these factors as she attempted to discover herself. As she indicated, being creative provided a way for her to “play” and “explore”. In addition,
she used her creativity as a mechanism to process life experiences, and to explore her thoughts and ideas. At the beginning of the study she described creativity as a way to be “flexible” in response to life challenges. She engaged her creativity to examine the person she was becoming, which involved being more open-minded:

I would say the biggest thing with my creativity in my life is being able to be flexible with solutions to problems with my family…being able to think of alternatives. And part of who I was and who I'm starting to break away from was a very narrow minded opinionated person but very narrow vision….there's a whole spectrum of color and I always felt black and white, now from just the possibility of difference.

By the end of the program her ideas about creativity had further evolved, and she described working through the creative process as a way to accept herself as an artist:

I think that's part of why being labeled an artist was so-- why it didn't sit well,… because I don't think I realized…how much went into it…I don't think I gave it the weight that it deserved, for myself primarily…I look at other people's work…I say they are artists, I say that they are creative,…But when I say it about myself, I internalize that as a negative thing…today, I don't see it in quite the same way.

Working through her individual creative process illuminated her artistic self, and led to further acceptance of who she was. As a result, she was beginning to see herself as more creative through this process.

Earlier I mentioned that by the conclusion of the study several participants believed they were merging into one person rather than seeing themselves as two separate people: the artist and the person. This element was likewise present in discussions about creativity, and was most illuminating in the narratives of Ashley, Patricia, Morgan, Jeanene, and Deborah.

Similar to Rebecca and Christine, Ashley related her artistic self to the art world. For instance, she wrote about her desire “to be recognized in the art world”.

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However, over the course of the study, her ideas about she related to her art had evolved. At the beginning of the study she described her art as an “appendage” of herself, but by the end of the inquiry she indicated that her art felt like an “an extension” of herself. She further expounded upon this thought by explaining that when she was not “creating” she felt “disconnected” from herself. The act of creation, then, moved from an external component of herself to an internal component, which was critical to feeling like/being an artist.

At the start of the program Patricia felt a “disconnect” with the creative process due to her lack of formal training prior to enrolling at Southside University. When she began her artistic career she was more concerned with the final product and explained, “It does tend to be the finished product…that I think has more impact than how I arrive there”. Like most other participants she also equated being creative with being “good”. The notion of good was associated with formal artistic training, and striving to achieve the standards of the art world:

I’ve never really saw myself as being creative. I feel like, when you think about creativity…I really associated it with being good at it; like, if you are good painter, then you are creative, or you are really good at drawing, you are creative.

She described the challenge of comparing her work to artistic standards and the tensions it created within her as an artist:

Sometimes seeing what the art world deemed as good and bad… it almost forces you to make artwork in the way you think galleries will want to display it… it takes away from that sort of individuality you have as an artist… when you are held to this sort of standard of what other artists have made and been successful at. And I think sometimes that clouds my judgment, I think sometimes I rely too heavily on what other people think as maybe a starting point for my own work.

By the conclusion of the program Patricia’s ideas regarding her creativity had changed significantly. She strongly believed that the experience abroad, living in what she
considered to be a highly creative environment, had nurtured her creativity. The experience encouraged her to engage with her creativity in new ways. She was exposed to a variety of art while abroad, which prompted her to rethink her understanding regarding the concept of “good art”. As she indicated, some of the art she saw in galleries and museums was not necessarily “perfect or polished”, and yet it was on public display. The art she discovered while abroad made a strong impression on Patricia, and she later used one of these examples as a point of departure for her final artistic research project.

She described how the experience gave her confidence to see her work as valuable:

…it exceeded all the rules of what good art is, to me. What is celebrated as good art, the polished marble, or the pristine relief. But to see this sort of haphazard sculpture, and it’s like here as this monumental piece, was really like, “Wow, you can totally do anything that you want and be successful.” And how you arrive at it is totally your own, …it’s your own way of working, and it’s totally fine. And I think that once I saw that there’s no set path and set rules to be a successful artist, really made me see that, ‘Hey, I can do things the way I want to do them. And I can say what I want to say, and still make a difference, and still be successful.’

She described how her ideas around creativity had evolved during the program and how she came to see herself as one cohesive, creative person:

I think in seeing how much my perspective, and my thoughts about being an artist have changed, once my environment became more creative, allowed me to think about how I want to take that sort of practice with me into my artistry. And help merge that as one part of me…instead of having to separate myself into these different people for different things, I can be an artist all the time…it’s really allowed me to be more creative…I think that really allowed me to think not only about process, but just about what it truly means to be an artist… I would say that there are no boundaries…the process of creation is really your own.

These excerpts show how the ability to embrace her creativity and creative process allowed Patricia to move closer to her artistic self, and to fully understand what being an artist “means”.

By the end of the program, Morgan’s ideas about creativity had also evolved to encompass a more complex and varied understanding of the ways in which this element functioned within her process and her life. When she was younger one of her favorite activities was making master copies of famous art works. Early in the program she had described this experience fondly noting how making copies allowed her to be creative while staying within boundaries. However, by the end of the program she began to question why she had been so interested in the act of “copying”. She also began to realize that it was much more interesting to create her own work based on her ideas and interests. After she returned from the study abroad trip she described her creativity as follows:

Now I have formulated a new understanding of my creativity, which is through a connection with nature and myself….It was only when I freed myself from the confines and imposed upon cultural boundaries and restrictions that I was able to truly discover what's important.

The excerpt below reveals how she was beginning to think about creativity in terms of possibilities, and breaking free from structure:

I think creativity is exploring all of those different possibilities instead of just basing whatever you're making or your life off of the standard… If you just reside within those boundaries and structure…then you're not being creative,…You just have to bring what you have to the table and not accept them as boundaries.

She also described placing herself in the “shoes” of the artist, which helped her see and accept her own history and creative abilities:

I think through putting myself in the artist's shoes,…I'm learning about the history of these people and how that has gone into creating their own works and I had to look at my own history and how that's gone into me being an art historian or an art researcher and an artist…understanding that it's not just a work that you're looking at. It's this process, … that really allowed me to see myself as an artist and see myself as someone who has done the same thing that artists in the past have done.
As I explained in a previous section, at the conclusion of the program, Morgan felt a deeper connection between herself, her personal history and the larger artistic milieu.

Like most other participants, Jeanene’s ideas about creativity evolved during the study. One of the most profound changes in her perceptions about creativity involved being exposed to a variety of art while abroad. This experience prompted her to have a more open mind about what can be considered art. She also thought more about her own creative possibilities, and she attempted to explore these possibilities in her research project. Jeanene had come to realize that the more time she spent thinking deeply about her art projects resulted in more creative works. On the relationship between being an artist and creativity she no longer saw these elements as separate. As her comments below illustrate being an artist had become more complex and central to her identity:

I learned that it’s not a separate thing. It’s not something you can put aside really, you know…being an artist is definitely something that is kind of like you’re an artist every day whether you make art or not while before I may be was like I’m artistic sometimes, you know, kind of a thing and I think now I really realize it. I think part of it too is if you’re artistic you’ll see art kind of in everything…

Deborah initially conceptualized creativity as spontaneous, and as a way to translate one’s ideas and experiences visually. She wrote about creativity as a vehicle for telling one’s story, and for reinventing ideas:

We reflect our creativity… in the way we present ourselves to the world, we decide how to tell our stories and how to describe ourselves to others. My creative self reflects on my personality, my history, my background, my origins…it reflects on fragments of my soul. Creativity to me is related to things that already exist,…connecting the dots. Being aware and informed of what exists out there and being able to integrate…those things…in a way that has never been done before, thus innovating… taking these ideas and making them better.

Deborah’s ideas about creativity were largely influenced by the concept of *disegno*, an Italian term that dates to the Renaissance, which is the ability to combine high technical
skill with invention. Thus, being creative involved a combination of technical skill and invention. She further noted, “Creativity is what we do to show ourselves truly, like, in a tangible way”. By the end of the program, Deborah no longer considered creativity as a spontaneous element but rather a sustained endeavor, and a vehicle for intellectual experimentation and possibility:

before, to be creative, for me, was to just get inspired by something I would see, and act on it right away…Now it’s like I think about it, and if I just go with my impulses, I would never grow as an artist…. now I feel like my work is more important to me, because I do spend a lot more thinking, and a lot more planning, and a lot more of trying to make this narrative work. I feel like there are more layers, too.

Similar to other participants, Deborah felt more creative after the study abroad experience. Being exposed to a variety of art, and being immersed in a different culture for a sustained period inspired growth and confidence in her creative abilities:

when I came back, that was like the most giant leap of confidence that I've gotten, as a person who believes she's creative. But I've gained that confidence, because I was there on my own…And the people that I was with…we became really good friends… knowing that we could share our ideas and grow and get ideas from others…is just something really powerful. That kind of helped me believe, like the more art that you look at, the more you learn. The more you listen to other people and take critique and like wisely, that's the best way to kind of grow.

Stuart’s ideas regarding creativity were largely associated with coming to terms with his position as an artist within the larger environs of the art world. He also noted the elusive quality of creativity. When Stuart wrote about “what it means to be an artist” he listed five areas that encompassed his ideas around this issue. Among these were “creativity”, “art making”, and the “art world”. Under the header “creativity” he noted that being an artist meant, “exploiting creativity”. In this section he also wrote “Being an
artist is not a destination it is a process”. In regards to the art world he believed that to be a successful artist it was necessary to understand and work within the system:

...hierarchical system constructed by institutions such as art historians, art critics, museums, galleries...curators, universities...etc. One must respect the system and work the system if they so desire a place within the system, they must 'play the game’. Playing the game refers to networking, socializing, and conditioning oneself and one's work to become attractive to the...Art world. Some artists are lucky and their natural instinct is adequate enough to gain a spot in the art world.

Stuart was therefore well aware of the artistic environs in which he was operating, and he was learning how to successfully navigate this environment. He also wrote about feeling the sociocultural pressures of being an artist:

Making art makes me feel angst! It's how I channel it, I grow so furious with how humanity has evolved, what we depend on, what we hold valuable as a society. Our culture stigmas, prejudices, etc. I hate how our society has become a measure of standards for an individual, whether or not a person has a set of traits as material possessions.

Finally, Stuart linked creativity to the drive and essence of the artist, but also acknowledged its elusive nature:

I thought I had a grasp on creativity, but maybe that's why artists make stuff, maybe they're trying to...maybe I think, maybe that's why artists are driven to make things because they have that creativity, that you know, sensible awareness, and that drive to do it.

Meagan described the creative process as difficult. As she explained “sometimes the process is frustrating...searching for inspiration”. Similar to Stuart, she also described creativity as a drive:

It's more the drive, it's the energy behind doing it. It's not just an idea, because ideas come a million miles an hour. It's just like you grab onto one, and that's the creativity part. Like okay, this, and this is how I'm going to do it. Like an energy, I guess.
And she explained why she drew “little waves” around the word creativity on her relational map. Similar to Stuart, she believed that achieving artistic creativity was sometimes elusive:

It's harder to reach sometimes, especially when you want to. Like on my little map, I put little waves, because you have to like swim to it sometimes. It's hard to get to sometimes. Also like you second-guess your own creative ideas. You have that second-guessing, that filter. So there's always like an obstacle to get to the creative part where you're like, 'Okay, this is what I'm going to do, and now I'm going to do it.' So it's tough.

She further explained this point by describing what it is like to engage with a new material or medium, and she found that through this process she was often able to learn about herself and her capabilities:

you find out what you’re capable of. Because sometimes as an artist you start a project and you’re like, “I can’t do this”…And it’s a total failure. That’s definitely happened…you learn about your limitations through trying new things. And I guess your talents. Sculpting for me, it was like a last-minute thing. I’ve only been doing it for a year and I love it… So I learned…more about myself through that very quickly.

Finally, Victoria, the art historian and self-described non-artist, discussed her creativity, and specifically the process of making her final art project, in terms of the challenges she faced not coming from an artistic background:

…making something, presented a lot of challenges and difficulties for me. But then… when I was told… I can do what I know how to do, and what I have the capabilities of doing…I was able to think about, ‘Oh, well, I can create an experience.’ …being allowed to not do the norm-- which, in this case, was creating art, which is funny, because that’s usually never the norm-- but being able to do something that was against the norm, and something that I was not only comfortable doing, but I could do… gave me-- let down all these barriers; that I was able to, ‘Okay, so I’m able to think outside of the box. What can I do that isn’t creating art, in the conventional way that we think of creating art…you know, making a sculpture, taking photographs, painting, all of these different things?...how can I… do that?’…once I was allowed, and once I was told, like, ‘No, you don’t have to do it this way. Any way.’ Like I said, any way you can do it. …once I figured that out for myself,…I just-- I was in here every day, and I was like, “Okay, I got to do this, I got to do that.”
This excerpt reveals the complexity involved with Victoria’s meaning making around her creativity. In recounting the story of how she approached her final piece, she simultaneously denied and affirmed her creativity. On the one hand, she noted the difficulties with approaching the project. However, once we discussed her options for creating the piece, and indicated that she could approach her project in a way that was most comfortable for her (rather than prescribing a set approach or outlining specific criteria), she discovered what creativity meant from her own perspective. Although by the end of the program she remained conflicted about her creative abilities and seeing herself as an artist, in the end she discovered her competence and was empowered by her ability to conquer the challenge:

I know that I can do it…coming in here, I was like, ‘…I’m not going to be able to do this. This is going to be a disaster. It’s going to be a nightmare.’ So, knowing that I’m able to do it, then I feel more empowered that I can do something similar, or something a little bit different. I know that I can go into a situation where I feel so out of my element, and be able to come out on the other side with a final product that I’m proud of, and that… I say ‘This is mine,’ you know?

She went on to explain how she discovered that words cannot always express what one is feeling or thinking. Victoria thus acknowledged how creative expression allowed her to access what is sometimes “unsayable”:

Sometimes words can’t do it. Sometimes…when you’re trying to get across…when half your research question’s about a feeling,…words can’t do it, you know? So…we write these…long papers, and I’m like, ‘But this isn’t really saying what I want to say. This isn’t expressing what I want to express.’ But it has to do, because that’s what we have to do. So that’s just all we got. So with this, it allowed me to realize that it isn’t so cut-and-dry, and that sometimes words really can’t express. I can sit here and I can talk to you all day, but unless you’re going to feel it...
Thus, to some degree, the excerpts above illustrate how participants conceptualized the creative process as extending beyond the parameters of self-expression; rather, the process was described in relational terms: it embodied “the artists relation to his or her reality” (Hagman, 2010, p. 78).

“Weaving” an Artistic Identity/Identities through Creativity

*Identity is the ultimate act of creativity.* (Josselson, 1996)

*In forming a core of who we “are” identity weaves together all the aspects of ourselves and our various locations of ourselves with others and with the larger society.* (Josselson, 1996)

...*artistic creativity is not just something the artist does...it is a way of being in the world, and of experiencing their inner and outer life* (Hagman, 2010).

The final theme that emerged from my analysis demonstrated how the process of creativity intersected with the process of identity formation within and through participant narratives. This theme also illustrates how participants associated creativity with who they were and who they were becoming as individuals and artists. I previously discussed how participants conceptualized creativity through their process of creation. For most, this process involved problem solving or problem finding or some amalgam of the two. However, when participants discussed creativity in their artistic production, and in their lives, the processes they described curiously echoed the ways in which they described their identities. Although nearly all the narratives weaved together the process of creativity with that of identity, this circumstance was most coherently articulated within Christine, Patricia, Morgan’s narratives.

Christine recalled feeling creative most of her life yet she had only begun to “embrace” her artistic self recently: “…it's an identity thing... all my life, I was…
creative and… wanting to do creative things… the fact that… I'm only now getting to a point where I can embrace that is sad in some way”. To explain how she was beginning to embrace herself as an artist through the creative process she recounted creating her final UR project. She describes the many layers and mutable nature of the sculpture in similar ways that she had discussed becoming an artist:

The process that is different, definitely has to do with the body sculpture, because that piece has so many layers on it. Each time I worked on it, it was something new. Something new was happening to it. This idea of covering up,… I spent six hours doing this one version of it, and then I cover that up. Then I add something different, and maybe some parts came through. I never did anything like that before…So that process of creating. And… I did several self portraits like that, where the bottom layer of the self portrait is you as a person, and two of them is like words I felt about myself and …afterwards, I painted over that. So this idea of processing our feelings,…with the sculpture,…with the portraits, processing the feelings and the emotions behind that, the drive from our experiences. That is something I definitely will take into the future, because I think it will just keep adding to my…[artistic] agenda…

Christine’s description of “painting over” while engaged in the creative process recalls her process and experience of becoming an artist. As I described in earlier sections, discovering her artistic self involved rejecting family expectations. It also involved coming to terms with the myths of the artist, and the social expectations of being a woman. Thus, for Christine, the process of creation was a way to paint over the self that had been inscribed upon her, and she employed the creative process to discover her self. She further explicated this circumstance with reference to one of the self-portraits (see Figure 8) in her journal:

The profile one… that says "I feel."…it doesn't look like me, but that one in particular is the one that has the words underneath. So creating that was…That image represents, I feel, this transition between accepting the things I cannot change, and embracing the things that I can, which is myself…
She further articulated her “feelings” and approach to her work at the end of the program and how this process involved inscribing herself into the process:

…exploring those feelings about my work has been a real transition from just blindly doing it to really incorporating my belief system, my belief structure and what I know and have experienced into something that is-- into an artwork and so this process of… reflecting through it, I’m thinking about what I’m doing as it’s coming out and allowing it to happen. And after I’ve done the work and I sit back I think about what that process was like for me and what came out of it, why did this come out of me, and part of that I think has been just one of the many steps towards-- in this journey of really understanding myself as an artist.

Figure 5. Christine’s Self-Portrait (reprinted with permission).

Christine’s explication of her process of creation in relation to understanding her artistic self recalls Hagman’s (2010) discussion related to the creative process and the artistic self:
During the heat of the creative process the artist’s self can be viewed not as fixed and preformed but emergent and transitional, crystallizing in the potential space which defines the shared psychological reality of the artist, medium, and artwork. Internal potential and external emergent aspects of self-experience interact, co-create, and define each other (p. 27,28). But for the artist, the art object is experienced as part of the self; both of the artist and the world, it exists in a transitional psychological realm within which subjectivity and objectivity are dynamically related and a new reality is co-created- the artwork is a subjective object (p. 27, 28).

Patricia described a similar process of creation. Through the explication of her research project she described the creative process as evolving. Curiously her narrative alternates between the creative process and the process of identity formation:

It was a really emotional…and the self-reflection that came from creating these pieces… [shows how] My frame of thinking has changed about what creativity is,… for me was an evolving process,…my ideas changed so much.. it was definitely beneficial for me to look inward….this process…was so fluid and abstract,… And I thought about how this experience really helped mesh all of these people within myself,… I shredded all of these papers, and I added water and let them soak for a few days… it…reminded me of how I felt once I came back … And I was trying to like, soak myself back into this American culture that I’ve kind of like… grown to dislike,… I feel like I’m becoming less displaced over there, and I feel more displaced here [in] America, like I just don’t belong here… thinking about how I felt in the situation, and how the paper was reacting to the water, was very symbolic to me…It’s like the breaking down of these ideas that I had before, and sort of a creation of something new through this process. And …seeing how I dealt with these multiple layers. So there’s like so many layers to this. And each of these layers really helped me think differently about this experience. It really helped me hone in differently to how I wanted to… what exactly I wanted to say…in terms of my own creation and my own process, it really came into play once I started physically creating these pieces….And I think that really allowed me to think not only about process, but just about what it truly means to be an artist. And what it truly means to sort of project your point of view, or your perspective, onto someone else through this piece of art that will be viewed thousands of times over.

The soaking metaphor was echoed in her discussion of a self-portrait (see Figure 9) she created in her journal shortly after returning from the study abroad trip and how the trip impacted her:
… I saw a photograph when I came back…and it was of a guy,…submerged in water with only his mouth coming out, and it was just so powerful…I wanted to embody that feeling of being submerged and just barely holding your head above water, and so I created this sort of self-portrait of myself being submerged in this water…I wanted to sort of put this …thought of, like, holding my head above water, and that’s why …like, my mouth and my nose are out of the water, because I really wanted to speak to this thought about being so overwhelmed and…like, this feeling, or this desire to be somewhere else, and just be so overwhelmed…So I think…this is a definite self-portrait of how I feel about this situation, but I think this is probably my strongest representation of how it’s affected me.

Figure 6. Patricia’s Self Portrait (reprinted with permission).
Earlier I explained how Morgan used her creativity as a vehicle to express her own voice and ideas. She described the connection between her creativity and her artistic self. In her narrative, identity and creativity weaved together and intersected at various moments:

...now I see that because of who I am that I'm an artist because I've chosen to demonstrate my creativity and what I think and how I want to communicate my ideas through art...I'm an artist and researcher,...but it's amazing that I choose to demonstrate who I am through creativity which makes me an artist, and that's one facet of who someone is but I would say that's the main facet that travels through you whether you're writing about art, whether you're curating art. You're choosing to use art as a vehicle of your own creativity.

She also noted the connection between “doing” through creativity and being an artist.

Morgan clarified the distinction between having an idea and the ability to execute through creativity:

I think what it means to be an artist is to have these ideas, to have opinions, to have perspectives, and be able to create something in the physical world that communicates that, and that is difficult to do. A lot of people have ideas, but they don't create something that can demonstrate their ideas, or they don't communicate it effectively,...that's what an artist does....to be able to communicate those ideas, the conditions of society, the conditions of yourself, your own expression, into something. So that's what you kind of realize, is I'm an artist in life, and I think if you take life from that creative perspective then you're going to be nothing but...innovative... so...your perspective in art has a place in the world somewhere, even if you don't see it reflected back to you in 18th century portraiture. It's still there.

Morgan positioned herself in the world through her creative “perspective”, which I interpret as an embodiment of her identity. This is most evident in her remark regarding 18th century portraiture. Although by the end of the program she still did not see herself reflected in 18th century portraiture, this was no longer a barrier to her becoming but rather this imagery served as a way to see beyond the narrow structures of western power structures to the possibilities of her artist identity/identities.
Other participants described the connection between creativity and identity in alternative ways. For example, Stuart discussed his creative process by weaving in how he uses “conscious thinking” to understand himself and his artistic endeavors:

Just think about it, and you’re going to reach some level of understanding or revelation or insight that you didn’t know, previously…when you grow your perception of the world, you not only become more sensible to it, but you become more knowledgeable of it, because when you’re opening all these doors of perception to the world, you may not have realized some things if those doors were closed… if you don’t have any answers, you’re forced to think about it, and to reason, and try and understand the world around you without all these answers. And I think when you do that, you become more connected with the world around you, and… your human experience becomes more genuine to who you are…

He further related his process to the philosophical notion of *qualia*, the experience of one’s inner self:

…qualia is what it’s like to be something. So, you know, *your* qualia is what it’s like to be inside your body, with your mind, and you react to certain things, due to your history and millions of other things. And that’s all going to be different across the board. But something that makes us all connected …we’re all... we are all given the same opportunity to discover what the world is…

Rebecca indicated that the creative process involved finding one’s “mode”. Her mode involved the ability to be flexible and grow through experimentation:

I remember in your first interview, it was like a lot of questions about process and things that I hadn’t really thought about, and once I started thinking about those things, like I noticed that I do things this way, and she does things this way, like how I was talking about one of my other peers doing her processes in one way, me doing it another way. Like, I didn’t really recognize the modes of people, so trying to recognize my mode, and trying to be able to switch modes, I feel like that will help me a lot to address things that I had never addressed before,… like reflecting on things.

She further discussed her mode in relation to creativity, and how she observed that others explored their “selves” through the process of creation. I interpret Rebecca’s analysis of her friend’s creative process as her realization that the act of creation is closely linked to
the exploration of one’s self. The excerpt below illustrates the “weaving” I have discussed in this section:

I don’t feel that everyone knows why, like how they’re creative, or why they’re creative, and this idea of this person thinking that this is what they’re doing, and why they’re doing it, … one of my artist friends,…everything that she makes I don’t even want to tell her, because she doesn’t realize, but it’s all her, and she’s like, ‘Oh, this character I made up.’ And I was like, so it’s not you? She’s like, ‘No, no.’ And I’m like, okay. And her next project is like, ‘Oh, this is [__],’ like she gives it a name, and it’s like this whole thing. And I’m like this is you, but you don’t know that. And so it’s like we do things, and we don’t always know why we’re doing them, but that doesn’t make it bad or unsuccessful. But identifying yourself as a researcher, you kind of try to think about it more, and try to figure out why you’re doing it, or what you should be doing, what you should be looking for.

A large part of Rebecca’s exploration of self involved the creative connection she shared with her father. When she was a teenager she discovered that her father was an artist. She described seeing one of his doodles and noticing that they had similar artistic styles. This familial connection to art had a profound impact on how Rebecca saw herself as an artist. Her description of a self-portrait (see Figure 10) in her journal illustrates this circumstance. For Rebecca her emerging artistic identity was closely linked to creativity.

one of the pictures is like a finger coming in through the side, and there’s like a seed, and it’s pushing the seed into the dirt, and the seed is labeled “Art,” and it’s like this hand is supposed to be my dad’s hand, like planting an art plant….So it was like a hand pushing from the side of the page inward, and pushing this seed into the dirt,… the dirt was crowding up around it, so it was more like of an action of like planting the seed, because … the excerpt was about my dad inspiring me and motivating me to do art, but also kind of having this underlying thing of planting the seed,… my dad planted the seed. He had me, and it’s like I am his seed, and I can’t get away from that.
In my previous discussion regarding the theme of what creativity means to emerging artists I articulated how Meagan, Jeanene, Ashley, and Deborah weaved together creativity and their identities as artists. Below, I provide additional details that illustrate this notion of weaving. Similar to Christine, Meagan’s discussions around the creative process echoed how she described the process of becoming an artist. She explained the creative process through the metaphor of swimming. She believed that
creativity was sometimes hard to reach but she often discovered herself through creating sculpture. By the end of the program, Jeanene embraced the title of “artist”, and she discovered a tangible link between being an artist and creativity that had been elusive. Moreover, Ashley’s relationship with her art changed because her creative process now involved “showing” herself more through her art. Finally, Deborah described how “creativity is what we do to show our true selves.” She articulated this process in the excerpt below. The “process” that she describes brings together many of the factors I have discussed in previous sections that influence artistic identity/identities. Her remarks also provide further evidence for how she was embracing new information to form who she was becoming:

…you have to go through so much, and keep trying new processes, and learning about yourself, is the best way how art would translate the best version of yourself, because you keep learning more and doing more, and in the process, you grow as an artist. And with everything you make, you’re showing that you’re gaining a new skill, or you learn a new process, or you broke out of your comfort zone, which also gives you value, as an artist.

**Participant Relational Maps**

In chapter three I described the relational map activity and its purpose in my inquiry. To review, I began the first interviews with the relational map activity (Josselson, 2013). I asked participants to locate themselves on a map in relation to words/ideas/roles such as “artist”, “creativity”, “student”, “mentor”, “mentee”, and “researcher”. The relational map activity allowed participants to reflect on the major themes of the interview, and to communicate their ideas around “self” visually. Before beginning the second interview I asked each participant to review the maps they had created during the first interview, and to note any changes to the map in red ink. The
table below represents changes to the maps. The most significant change was related to
the term “researcher”, which most participants moved very close to the center of the
circle, or inside the circle on the second map (by the end of the program) In addition, for
most participants who self-identified as artists at the beginning of the study, the words
artist and creativity remained consistent. At the end of the study, Morgan, one of the art
historians, artist and creativity moved to the center of the circle. For Victoria, by the end
of the study, artist and creativity remained the farthest from the center. At the end of the
program, Christine, Rebecca, and Stuart indicated no changes to their original maps. On
the first map, Patricia drew creativity, researcher and artist closest to the center of the
circle. By the end of the program she indicated that the first map “made more sense” by
the end of the program.
Table 2 Relational Maps- Participant Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Map One Word Order</th>
<th>Map Two: Changes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>creativity, researcher, student, artist, mentee, mentor</td>
<td>Creativity* and artist* moved inside circle. Researcher moved very close to circle. Other words remained the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>student, artist, creativity, mentor, mentee, researcher</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah</td>
<td>artist*, creativity*, student, mentee, mentor, researcher</td>
<td>Researcher*, mentee*, student* moved inside circle. Artist, creativity, mentor remained the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanene</td>
<td>Artist*, creativity, student, mentor, mentee, researcher</td>
<td>Researcher moved very close to center. All other words remained the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meagan</td>
<td>Artist*, student, mentor, mentee, researcher, creativity</td>
<td>Researcher* moved inside circle. All other words remained the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>student, mentee, mentor, researcher, creativity, artist</td>
<td>Student, artist, creativity, researcher moved very close to center. Mentor, mentee remained the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>creativity, researcher, artist, student, mentee, mentor</td>
<td>“Map One makes more sense to me now”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Artist*, creativity, researcher, mentee, student, mentor</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuart</td>
<td>Creativity, artist, student, researcher, mentee, mentor</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>student*, mentee*, researcher, mentor, creativity, artist</td>
<td>Researcher* moved into circle with student and mentee*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Words in column two are listed from closest to farthest from the center circle (You Are Here). Words with an asterisk denote that a word appeared inside the circle. Column two includes changes made to the maps. Participant comments have been included for clarification regarding changes.
Chapter Summary

The purpose of this multiple text narrative inquiry was to examine how undergraduate art majors construct and navigate their artistic identities, particularly while engaged in an undergraduate research experience. As part of this process the influence of creativity was also considered. In this chapter, I presented the major findings of my inquiry. I identified and analyzed themes that corresponded to each question in order to illuminate the factors involved in the formation of artistic identity/identities. In the next chapter I discuss the major findings around the research questions along with the implications of the research, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this multiple text narrative inquiry was to examine how undergraduate art majors construct and navigate their artistic identity/identities, particularly while engaged in an undergraduate research experience. I also considered how creativity influenced this process. Two questions guided my study: 1) How do undergraduate students majoring in the arts negotiate/construct their identities as artists?; a) How does participation in an undergraduate research experience in the arts influence the construction of identity as artist?; 2) What role can creativity play in the formation of an individual’s artistic identity/identities? In this chapter I discuss the major findings of my research. I address the findings that align with existing literature, and also those that fill gaps in the literature. The chapter concludes with a discussion around the implications of the research, and recommendations for future research.

Artistic Identity/Identities

A major finding of this research is the process by which participants began to understand themselves as artists in relationship to others, and also within the larger social milieu of the art world. For the majority of participants the construction of artistic identity/identities involved a profound evolution in their meaning making structures. As I explained in the previous chapter, for the individuals in my study artistic identity/identities emerged from a variety of factors including significant life experiences, exploration of the artistic self, the impact of participating in UR, and the influence of
creativity. By the end of the program, most participants were increasingly relying on internal meaning making structures in the process of becoming artists. As evidenced in my analysis of the data, this process occurred along a continuum, and did not represent a linear progression. Participants entered college at different levels of development. For example, Jeanene’s decision about attending college, and the fact that she made this decision with limited influence from family or other external authorities, is consistent with what is known about “at risk” students, or those with lower levels of privilege (Pizzolato, 2003), and the ways in which high-risk students conceptualize decisions around college. Although most participants vacillated between accepting external formulas and formulating their own beliefs and values early in their developmental journeys, by the end of my study most had moved much closer to making meaning from internally generated formulas (Baxter Magolda, 1999, 2001). This was evident in Meagan’s negative experience with a for-profit art school after graduating from high school, which initially caused her to doubt her identity as an artist. It was likewise apparent in Morgan’s decision to follow her family’s wishes and select a “practical major” when she first entered college. While participants were engaged in an UR experience, which provided an opportunity to challenge their current ways of knowing and develop their own ideas, and which encouraged them to use their creativity to explore themselves as artists within the larger sociocultural milieu, participants moved closer to “trusting” their internal voices. At the conclusion of the study, a few, Morgan, Christine, and Patricia in particular, had begun to construct a philosophy of life based on their personal beliefs and values (Baxter Magolda, & King, 2012).
Although extant studies indicate most college students continue to rely on external formulas during their college careers (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Baxter Magolda, & King, 2012; Hodge, Baxter Magolda, & Haynes, 2009), this finding could indicate that the act of making meaning in regards to being in an unconventional career could assist students in finding an internal voice. Participant narratives illustrate the ways in which these individuals came to reject external ways of knowing in favor of “creating” and increasingly relying upon internal formulas. For example, Morgan came to reject the “frameworks” that had guided her life up to that point, and she began to think deeply about how these frameworks had “structured” who she was. Christine, who had initially rejected the label of artist due to the negative (external) connotations associated with the artistic persona, became more accepting of the label by the end of the study and had found a way to conceptualize and accept who she was as an artist on her own terms. Like Morgan’s experience, this was a departure from external family structures that had guided most of her life.

While my findings are consistent with previous (scant) literature, which determined that art majors tend to rely less on external influences (such as family) as compared to other students (Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010), the results of my study point to additional cohorts of students who might move closer to “authoring one’s life” during the college years, and the factors that influence this process (Abes & Jones, 2004; Pizzolato, 2003; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). For instance, Deborah’s narrative reveals how she was forcefully rejecting sociocultural norms about ethnicity and gender, and what she perceived as the limitations of her culture to construct and embrace her own beliefs and values around being an artist (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez,
By the end of the study, she had rejected the negative connotations regarding women with whom she had grown up; rather, she began to see herself as a strong female leader, an image that stood in sharp contrast to the externally defined persona of the artist.

For the individuals in my study, becoming an artist involved a significant life moment that shaped their future trajectories as creatives. It also involved recognizing and embracing their artistic selves. For most, the experience of these transitional moments resulted in the decision to pursue an unconventional academic path, which further involved following one’s own voice. Participant narratives demonstrate how these individuals moved towards developing internal meaning making structures rather than continuing to follow external formulas. Who they were becoming as artists and the paths they wanted to follow in the future became more apparent (and multidimensional) as they developed more complex ways of knowing. The narratives are consistent with individuals in the crossroads phase of development (Baxter Magolda, 1999, Baxter Magolda, & King, 2012). Over the course of my inquiry, participants were either firmly within or moving out of this phase. This circumstance is evident in the way participants were evolving in regards to the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal dimensions of development (Baxter Magolda, 1999), discussed in the previous chapter.

The ways in which participant meaning making structures evolved and shifted during the study is illustrated in how they began to consider multiple perspectives in their decision-making processes rather than acquiesce to conventional prescriptions. These findings provide further areas of alignment with the Self-Authorship literature (Baxter Magolda, 1999; 2001; Baxter Magolda, & King, 2012; Baxter Magolda, Abes, Torres,
2009). For instance, Christine and Deborah’s experiences reveal how they balanced external pressures with their own desires to pursue art. They each worked to mediate external influences (viewpoints) while learning to cultivate their internal voices (Baxter Magolda, & King, 2012). Deborah finished a business degree to appease her family, however, she ultimately decided to pursue an art degree despite the negative connotations associated with the artist label in her native country. Attending art school outside her country provided an opportunity to develop alternative perspectives, and embrace other ways of knowing. Growth regarding the interpersonal dimension of self-authorship is most clearly articulated in Meagan’s story. Her negative life experience in art school demonstrates how she viewed herself in relation to others. Comparing herself to others in the program resulted in internal doubts about being an artist, and more importantly her identity as an artist. However, rather than serve as a barrier, the experience provided a way to conceptualize her life path. It also reinforced her belief that she was an artist. By making the decision to pursue studio art she rejected those external influences that did not support her beliefs and values, and she began to attend to her inner voice (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

Finally, the narratives of Morgan, Christine, and Patricia demonstrate growth within the intrapersonal dimension. For all three women, their “sense of self”, in this case their artistic selves, moved farther from external definitions of the artist and moved progressively towards internally defined beliefs. By the conclusion of the program, Christine came to reject the negative social connotations of the artist; rather, she described having more confidence to embrace the positive aspects of her artistic self, and by extension the “artist” label. Although Christine was well aware of the social myths of
the artist for example, she was beginning to separate herself from them (Boes, Baxter Magolda, & Buckley, 2010) in order to become an artist. Christine’s narrative recalls Kegan’s theory of self-evolution, specifically the phenomena of the subject-object relationship (Keagan, 1982). At the beginning of the study, the negative social connotations of the artist were embedded in Christine’s meaning making. However, at the conclusion of the program, these beliefs became object, something that she could “relate to, reflect upon, operate upon” (p. 32). As Christine developed her own values and beliefs she was able to see and act upon this element, which she had previously accepted without question. The ways in which Christine was making meaning from these external influences had evolved significantly by the end of the program. As a result, her narrative around who she was as an artist reflected more complex ways of knowing.

Another prominent example of this evolution in thinking is illustrated in Morgan’s story. By the end of the study, Morgan had rejected the predominant narratives about race. She had discovered her own definition of self (Baxter Magolda, 1999; 2001), which was based on internal structures. This is apparent in how she described setting aside the long-held belief that being black was a “curse”. In addition, Patricia developed a strong sense of self by rejecting her previously held beliefs as regards to what an artist “is” and considering further possibilities for artistic production. She formed her own beliefs and values in part by engaging with new information gained through experiencing other cultures and incorporating these experiences into her belief system.

The results of my inquiry align with Josselson’s (1996) work related to women’s identity formation. Josselson’s (1996) research identified four “gateways” including Guardians (foreclosure), Pathmakers (Identity Achievements), Searchers (Moratorium)
and Drifters (Identity Diffusion). While several women in my study described beginning their early adulthood (and college careers) searching for their identities and their place in the world, by the end of the program, most women were more closely aligned with the Pathmaker category (1996). During the program most women had explored the multiple facets of their identities, and all had committed to being/becoming artists. By the conclusion of the study, none of the women described having “second thoughts” about being/becoming artists, and none had decided not to pursue creative lives. Most also described coming to these decisions based on personal values and beliefs. Christine and Morgan’s narratives show how they set aside external authority and family history to become artistic individuals. Another similarity with Josselson’s (1993) findings is related to the idea that for women, identity formation tends to be linked to social factors and relationships (Josselson, 1993). Christine, Ashley, and Deborah’s artistic becoming was strongly linked to positive feedback they received in art classes. These experiences can be understood in the context of Josselson’s (1996) notion of a “sense of mastery”, which ultimately engendered confidence to pursue artistic passions. For several women in my study, their identities were intimately connected to relationships with others (Josselson, 1996). For Christine, these relationships were painful and challenging yet influential in shaping who she was and who she was becoming. Patricia’s identity was strongly linked to deep relationships with her children and her desire to set positive examples for them as a woman of color and a creative individual. Rebecca’s status as artist was linked to the realization that her father had also pursued art. Lastly, in contrast to some of the participants in Josselson’s (1993) study, for individuals in my inquiry, vocation plans emerged as highly significant to their artistic identities.
As I indicated in previous sections, my analysis of the data revealed how participants explored possibilities regarding their artistic identity/identities. Results did not point to a single artistic identity common to all, but a multiplicity of artistic identities (Josselson, 1996; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Mishler, 1999) contingent upon time and place. Moreover, the process of becoming an artist, as I envisaged it in this inquiry, involved contemplating identity in terms of past, present, and future perspectives.

Analyzing participant narratives through the lens of possible selves revealed how individuals were conceptualizing the process of artistic identity, and how they imagined themselves as artists over time. Possible selves emerged through participant discussions regarding future careers, and also in the process of seeing their futures as artists. Jeanene’s narrative provides a distinct example of how she “saw” her future self as a college student while in high school, and as an artist mother once she completed her bachelor’s degree. Meagan’s story is another example of how she imagined her possible selves throughout her life, and how her conceptualizations of becoming an artist provided motivation and inspiration to persist despite major obstacles. The ability to conceptualize these “cognitive structures” (Markus & Nurius, 1986) provided motivation to pursue goals and aspirations. This is consistent with the primary features of the possible selves concept. (Markus & Nurius, 1986). My findings add to what is known about how possible selves function and evolve from the perspective of creative individuals.

In chapter two I discussed the sparse literature related to the construct of artistic identity. While my findings share some similarities with those of Bain (2004, 2005), my research fills the gap in the literature around artists in the making (i.e. undergraduate art majors), and adds to what is known about the artistic identity/identities of emerging
female artists in particular. In a study that involved ten professional female artists, Bain (2004) investigated the role of the artist’s studio in the formation of an artistic identity. Bain argued that the space of the studio represented status and belonging, and helped the women develop their identities as artists. Moreover, the space of the studio signaled a safe, familiar environment. Several women in the study described the space of the studio as feeling like “home”.

Although the space of the studio was important to women in my study, their artistic identity/identities were not necessarily forged through a particular, private space, but in how they defined themselves by cultivating relationships (rather than comparing themselves to) with other female artists in the research program through a sense of belonging. Another distinction from Bain’s (2005) research was participants’ ideas around work. As Bain (2005) noted, for visual artists in particular, the relationship between the self and the notion of work is often ambiguous and tenuous because unlike other professions where academic credentials assist an individual with establishing a personal and professional identity, artistic work does not hold a similar association. In other words, the profession of art is not viewed as “real” work (Bain, 2005, p. 25) thus individuals must fashion and maintain an artistic identity in order to communicate who and what they are, and to gain legitimacy in society (Bain, 2005).

The individuals in my study held slightly different ideas about the relationship between becoming an artist and working as a professional artist. The link between these two poles was less tenuous than the experience of Bain’s participants. For example, Patricia discussed finding her potential as an artist, and she clearly envisioned herself accomplishing the goals of a professional artist such as pursuing residency opportunities.
Furthermore, while Bain (2005) argued that pursuing an art degree was one way to establish legitimacy as a professional artist, individuals in my study described how obtaining additional credentials such as a graduate degree might help them pursue their passions as creative individuals, which was not confined to the notion of simply becoming a successful artists. For instance, Christine indicated that she wanted to use her education and artistic talents in the service of social justice. Meagan sought to pursue graduate school so that she could become a “different” type of artist who applied her craft to real-world issues rather than simply focusing on gallery shows and selling work. Morgan described pursuing graduate school as a way to develop and apply her unique skills in order to build her own career crafted from her personal passions rather than fitting into a prescribed career path. Individuals in my study seemed to conceptualize more possibilities for their artistic/creative métiers. Moreover, they understood the notion of “artist” in more expansive terms than the more traditional conceptions.

Another departure from Bain’s (2005) work includes the role of sociocultural myths in regard to artistic identity formation. Bain (2005) argued that the misunderstandings and disconnect around the sociocultural views of the artist encourages creative individuals to construct an artistic identity that is Simultaneously reliant on and separate from prevailing myths and stereotypes about artists. She further argued that in the contemporary environment, many artists construct an artistic identity by embracing the historical myths of the artist such as alienation and marginalization, and some artists use these myths to capitalize on their identities as artists (Bain, 2005). In the previous chapter I explained how participants navigated and ultimately rejected a good number of these myths through the process of identity formation. Individuals in my study did not
seem to be interested in building a “mystique” around who they were as creative individuals, or being alienated from society; rather, they sought to use their position as artists in order to make a difference in society and to make lasting contributions.

Finally, although the disconnect between the act of art making and the traditional notion of work problematized artistic identity and sense of self for most women in Bain’s (2005) study, most participants in my study held a different view. For example, Christine had faced challenges balancing her family’s feelings about her decision to be an artist, and her responsibilities as wife and artist (making art). However, rather than problematize Christine’s identity these challenges helped her forge a stronger artistic identity/identities based on internal values and beliefs regarding who she was becoming as a creative individual, and what she wanted to accomplish as a professional artist. Participants seemed to embrace more internally generated notions of what an artist is and does rather than mold themselves to fit external myths and stereotypes of the artist (Bain, 2005). The distinctions between my findings and Bain’s (2004, 2005) discoveries provide insight regarding contrasts between the experiences and conceptualizations of established artists in comparison to “budding” artists. My findings also reveal notable comparisons with Freeman’s (1993) research on artistic identity and development. Freeman’s (1993) work centered on the salience of the prevailing negative myths of the artist in regards to the formation of artistic identity, and the degree to which the negative myths influenced individuals’ career trajectories, creativity, and sense of self. Like Freeman’s (1993) participants, the individual’s in my study described themselves as artists with reference to terms such as originality and uniqueness. However, my findings indicate that while participants were cognizant of the myths, the myths did not (at this point in their creative
trajectories) stymie them as “budding” artists. For instance, a participant in Freeman’s (1993) study described a difficult experience in art school because she received many “mixed messages” from instructors regarding her artistic production and could not seem to please them. In contrast, Christine learned to balance feedback from her professors with her own artistic tastes and approaches rather than acquiesce to their opinions. Moreover, Deborah explained how unflattering comments about her art made by one of her professors, which she had interpreted as sexist, inspired her to become increasingly dedicated to her own ideas about how she wanted to fashion herself as a female artist. Although Deborah valued her professors’ feedback and opinions, she did not describe setting aside her own values to satisfy them. Another factor that had hindered several individuals in Freeman’s (1993) study was a fixation with getting into galleries. Meagan’s thoughts around the type of artist she aspired to become provides an alternative to the traditional professional pursuits of the artist. She had expanded her notion of the artist beyond the typical “gallery artist” type and in the process developed an alternative way to “be” an artist.

Regarding the salience of the myths and creativity, Freeman (1993) noted that creativity was more “attainable” when artists were able to separate the act of creation from the myths (p.84). Stuart’s rationalization of the starving artist shows how he was able to separate himself from the notion of financial failure and focus on making art. As he indicated, an artist can always find a way to survive but should never abandon his métier. My findings provide a glimpse into how a small group of budding artists were thinking about who they were at the early stages of their careers, and how they were rationalizing their decisions to pursue art. Results of my study also diverged from those
of Freeman (1993) regarding the persona of the artist and artistic development. Several individuals in Freemans’s (1993) study were more committed to the “idea” of being an artist rather than the reality of making art. For some, this resulted in lack of confidence, creative stagnation, and failure to “become” an artist. Those that embraced challenges despite not being fully developed as artists had some success. My findings demonstrate how the act of doing brought participants closer to being artists. They were aware of the celebrity artist stereotype but none mentioned extrinsic motivations such as fame or fortune as reasons for pursuing art.

Results of my study share some commonalities with Mishler’s (1999) work with craft artists. Mishler (1999) argued that there is no single artistic identity; rather, artistic identities emerge from various components of oneself. My findings confirm Mishler’s (1999) notion of artistic identities, and illuminate the variability regarding the persona of the artist. For instance, Patricia’s artistic identity/identities is similar to two women in his study who discussed the difficulties with balancing life statuses such as motherhood with being an artist. Mishler (1999) defined this circumstance as “conjunct identity”. Like the women in Mishler’s (1999) study, Patricia persisted as an artist despite these challenges. Similar to Mishler’s (1999) participants, several individuals in my study spoke of art making as “something they had to do” (p. 161). It was part of who they were, and they were attempting to find ways to achieve balance in their lives rather than give up creative pursuits to face other life demands. The identity stories of participants in my study demonstrate the various ways in which the artist emerges from a combination of internal and external elements and is influenced by the sociocultural contexts of place and time.
Finally, the formation of an artistic identity/identities from the perspective of female undergraduate art majors has not been explored in the literature. Moreover, there is almost no research that documents the experiences of diverse artists of color. My findings revealed critical new insights regarding the artistic identity formation process of female art majors from diverse backgrounds. Results also underscore the persistent inequities in higher education especially within the context of specific populations of art majors including women, students of color, and first generation college students (Lindemann, Rush, & Tepper, 2016; SNAAP, 2013). Moreover, the issues and concerns raised by African American women in my study were consistent with the work of scholars who have examined artists of color in regards to persistent inequities within the art world and art education (Charland, 2010; Von Blum, 2013).

The Impact of Undergraduate Research and Artistic Identity/Identities

Although the construct of artistic identity/identities has been explored within the context of professional artists, the formation of an artistic identity/identities from the perspective of undergraduate art majors engaged in UR has not been extensively researched. Results of my study fill this gap in the literature. By using the practice of UR as the context, I hoped to discover how “doing” research influenced the formation of artistic identity. I have noted how over the course of the program participants became increasingly comfortable with relying on internally generated ways of knowing regarding their artistic endeavors and who they were becoming as artists. Most indicated that engaging in UR provided an opportunity to make individual and personal decisions about their artistic and intellectual work. They also described how the experience provided a space for their artistic voices to be heard. A major finding that emerged from the data
around the context of UR was the notion of doing for oneself through research, which resulted in a stronger sense of artistic identity. Below, I explain how my findings align with the literature, and I also identify new findings that emerged from my inquiry.

In chapter two I discussed the seven vectors of identity development as put forth by Chickering and Reisser (1993). While Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) model contains limitations with regard to gender, race and ethnicity, the vectors were nonetheless useful for organizing and conceptualizing the process of identity formation. Three vectors, a sense of competence, establishing identity, and a sense of purpose, were specifically relevant to my findings. In chapter five I explicated the ways in which participants described their artistic competence. At the beginning of the UR experience most described moderate levels of competence; however, by the end of the study the majority indicated developing a higher level of competence through doing research. Furthermore, most linked their competence with motivation and confidence, and the ability to achieve success in the future. Competence was also linked to the goal of successfully completing the UR project. Through their heightened artistic and creative competence, participants gained an “awareness” that they could accomplish a specific goal (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted that the development of technical mastery could engender development in other areas such as intellectual competence, and the establishment of identity (p. 70). The results of my study illustrate how undergraduate art majors engaged in research moved within and through the process of development. For example, Deborah explained that working hard at her craft led to an increased level of “trust” in herself and her skills. The ability to trust oneself and to “see” one’s accomplishments results in a greater ability to “take risks” and “persist” at difficult tasks.
because there is a sense that success can be achieved (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

During the study Deborah came to see and embrace her artistic accomplishments more than she had in the past. She was thinking about herself as an artist and her work in more complex terms. This resulted in the desire to persist in the arts despite the many obstacles she would most likely encounter in the future. Ashley described herself as “developing”. She realized that she was not yet “perfect” at her craft but viewed herself as an artist (and her skills) as a work “in progress” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 82).

Stuart observed that the improvement in his technical skills solidified his identity as an artist as he was able to visualize his future success. Patricia remarked that engaging in UR allowed her to “see” her potential and what she could accomplish as an artist in the future. Participants also described how the UR experience provided an environment in which to develop “interpersonal” competence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Ashley noted that working closely with her colleagues in the program altered her ideas about giving and receiving feedback. At the end of the program she indicated that she was more open to engaging with and listening to others than she had been prior to the UR experience. Moreover, Chickering and Reisser (1993) made an important point about an individual’s sense of competence that is particularly significant to my findings. They noted that “disadvantaged students” or “those who have been discriminated against” (p. 78) might have high levels of competence but “too little support and acknowledgment” (p. 78). Patricia and Morgan’s positive experiences in the program show how a supportive environment coupled with receiving encouragement to pursue their own opinions, values and beliefs influenced how they came to “see” themselves and their potential as individuals and artists.
Chickering and Reisser (1993) identified seven key questions related to establishing identity. Individuals in my study were working through a good number of these while engaged in UR. They were likewise moving through the process of establishing their artistic identities. I previously discussed how engaging in UR prompted participants to deeply explore various “parts” of their artistic selves. For instance, Patricia and Morgan contemplated their “culture”. They also explored who they were in relation to the larger sociocultural sphere of the art world through the development of their UR projects. In addition, Deborah’s UR project focused on exploring issues of femininity. By the end of the program most were more comfortable with their “roles” as artists, and these roles “fit” with their selves. I previously explained how several individuals described becoming one with their artistic selves and how most were better able to define themselves (and their life styles) as artists by the end of the program. In addition, most became more accepting of themselves as artists, and they learned to value who they were as creative individuals. Lastly, participants articulated strategies for “staying on course” to “weather the storms of life” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 182), and to persist as artists. For some, like Deborah and Stuart, this meant rejecting family wishes concerning careers to realize their own passions and desires. For others such as Morgan, Patricia, and Christine, staying on course involved taking a stand and having the confidence to communicate their own ideas and beliefs.

Developing a sense of purpose involves an increased “ability to be intentional, to assess interests and options, to clarify goals, to make plans, and to persist despite obstacles” (Chickering and Reisser, 1993, p. 209). Chickering and Reisser (1993) have also argued, “When colleges provide flexibility and encouragement for students to pursue
their own interests, imagination and intentionality can provide tremendous motivation” (pp. 211-212). My findings demonstrate how engaging in a supportive UR experience created an environment in which participants could carefully consider life passions, and develop strategies to persist as artists. By the end of the study, most noted that the UR experience had helped them to clarify future goals and aspirations. While the majority had not previously considered pursuing graduate school, by the end of the program most were committed to this goal, and could see themselves as graduate students.

In a discussion around the process of finding one’s sense of purpose, Chickering and Reisser (1993) recounted the experiences of the artist and therapist Sue Bender who discovered her sense of purpose by living among the Amish for a short period. Bender indicated that the experience prompted her to reflect on knowing “who she was” and “what mattered in life” (p. 234). She also began to resist the temptation to change herself in order to meet societal demands, and she learned to embrace the notion of “trusting” herself (p. 234). She became more comfortable with rejecting society’s “labels”, and she learned to value “process and product”, and focus. Ultimately, Sue’s time with the Amish provided the necessary environment in which to cultivate strong commitments to personal values and beliefs, and to find her sense of purpose.

For the individuals in my study, the UR experience/environment facilitated similar transformative experiences. For Morgan, making art was transformational and transformative. She described participating in the undergraduate research experience as follows:

…if I look at myself without this experience, if I look at myself in January or February of this year-- totally different person, in all aspects. I was confused about what to do. I was just going through the motions. I was just hum-drumming it along, hoping an opportunity would hit me in the face, and it's like,
"No." You have to go out and find these things because they're waiting for you. But now you look at it and you're like, "Wow, I have changed. My career path has changed. My direction in life has changed," and from there, everything else flows. So once you have a clear direction in your life, which is what this project affords, then your whole life changes. Things I thought were important back then are no longer important, and now I'm like— in every aspect of my life I'm like, "Well, how am I promoting these ideas that are my identity, at the core of me, in everything that I do?"

Moreover, for Morgan, through the act of creation she felt in control of her life and her future. She realized that others may not like her or her artistic production, but she accepted this reality and persisted despite these challenges. The personal values Morgan cultivated during the program provided an important (and new) “frame of reference”, which allowed her to develop strategies to achieve future aspirations.

Like Sue Bender, the artist to whom Chickering and Reissser (1993) refer in their discussion of finding purpose, Christine came to set aside the artist label. She embraced who and what she was on her own terms despite what her family or others thought about her choice to be an artist. Several others described trusting themselves more after the research experience. Along the way each had developed strategies for embracing failures along with success in order to grow. They were learning to find value in both experiences.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) utilized the metaphor of the house to explicate how individuals move along the vectors of development towards identity. They noted, “Forming an identity involves reexamining belief systems about a larger reality, about our place in the universe, the meaning of life and death, and our purpose for being here. It involves making our own journey upstairs” (p. 207). The results of my inquiry reflect this assertion. My findings illustrate how participation in educational programs that challenge
what and how students “know” bring them closer to establishing identity and a sense of purpose in life.

In chapter five I discussed how a sense of belonging emerged from participant narratives around identity. Hurtado and others (2007) argued that a student’s sense of integration, a factor inherent to developing a sense of belonging, is influenced by a variety of external and internal factors such as the “characteristics” students bring to college, participation in formal institutional structures, the racial dynamics of a particular college, the influence of family and financial concerns, and the students’ assessment of competence (p. 848). The results of my study regarding this construct are instructive for considering the significance of belonging in regards to students in non-STEM fields, and students of color. Moreover, my findings are particularly pertinent when considered in light of the most recent Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP) data regarding art students’ sense of belonging, which I detailed in chapter two. SNAAP findings indicated that White alumni art majors felt a stronger sense of belonging as students than students of color. White students also felt more freedom and encouragement to take risks than students of color (SNAAP, 2013). My findings point to experiences such as UR as potential mechanisms for fostering a greater sense of belonging and sense of purpose, specifically in the context of female students of color.

Participants in my study made connections between the UR experience and an increased sense of belonging within their department, and the larger institutional environment. More importantly, feeling a stronger sense of belonging contributed to stronger sense of artistic identity/identities. This finding is particularly relevant considering extant research on belonging, which demonstrates how students from
different backgrounds experience this phenomenon in different ways and to varying degrees (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2012; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). In the previous chapter I discussed how the UR experience built a strong sense of community among the students in the program. Several participants indicated that the deep relationships they cultivated within the program extended to how they felt about themselves as artists within their departments and the larger institution. Results of my study further illuminate the relationship between a sense of belonging and the importance of developing professional networks. Individuals in my study noted that the most valuable activities in the program involved opportunities to network with creative professionals and colleagues in the program. Most described the interactions with creative professionals as providing affirmation for their passions to pursue artist lives. Moreover, hearing about the failures and successes of other artists from other creatives reinforced their identities as artist.

By the conclusion of the study, several participants had developed deep friendships with peers in the program, and they frequently sought feedback from each other regarding artistic endeavors. The supportive community of scholars that developed between participants during the study led to a stronger sense of confidence in regards to being an artist. This circumstance was particularly significant for students of color. For instance, Patricia had begun to develop an idea for a publication intended to build community with professional female artists of color. After graduation, Deborah had plans to create cultural programs in her country that would bring together professional artists and school children. This finding is consistent with recent SNAAP data (2013) that
underscored the importance arts alumni placed on developing professional networks as students and success after graduation.

My findings regarding the notion of belonging also align with Roland (2002) who noted that factors such as strong support from family and peers positively impacted the development of the artist self. Participants in Roland’s (2002) study shared how difficult family dynamics, and strained relationships with mentors created conflict within themselves as creative individuals. He noted the pitfalls of this circumstance:

To evolve an artistic career in today’s American society usually requires a degree of initiative, entrepreneurship, networking, and social skills that is as, or more demanding than any other career. An inability to network…to find others who are supportive and knowledgeable, to have those who are in tune with one’s work where there is often little if any supportive institutional structure, can be the death knell of the career of any creative artist…. (p. 14).

Roland’s findings are particularly relevant considering my previous discussion regarding the impact of support from art teachers, how participants navigated the environs of the art world, the positive support some received from family members to pursue art, and how this amalgam of factors contributed to the formation of artistic identity/identities for individuals in my study.

Lastly, results of my study provide further evidence to support existing research regarding how high-impact practices (HIPs): assist students in developing more complex ways of making meaning from their experiences (Baxter Magolda, 2007; Torres, 2011), and how the practice provides support for developing more confidence in one’s skills and abilities (Kilgo, Ezell Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015). Additionally, my findings also align with what is known about the benefits of UR in relation to preparation for future success in graduate school and careers (Gilmore, Vieyra, Timmerman, Feldon, & Maher, 2015). However, study results provide a unique perspective regarding how the formation
of an artistic identity/identities develops within the context of an UR experience in the arts, which also includes creativity and the creative process. Through a detailed analysis of participant narratives I demonstrated the impact of the UR experience in relation to how participants constructed their identities by developing a sense of competence, finding purpose, and cultivating a deep sense of belonging with their colleagues and the wider institution.

A major finding that emerged from the data around the context of UR was the notion of doing for oneself through research, which resulted in a stronger sense of artistic identity. The UR experience provided an alternative to traditional learning environments, which challenged participants to think beyond usual approaches to academic work. Most participants indicated that this new way of learning and working resulted in increased confidence in their ideas and work, and the ability to question authority figures in order to defend their own views about their work and how they positioned themselves as artists. These findings are consistent with the student success literature, which promotes UR as a promising educational strategy for increasing retention, engagement, and deep learning (Kuh, 2008; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, Hayek, 2006; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005; McCormick, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2013; NSSE, 2012; NSSE 2007).

However, my study proposes new understanding around what is known about the perceived benefits and outcomes of UR from the perspective of art majors, and the UR experiences (and perceptions) of art majors of color, a topic for which little is currently known. My findings related to these points are significant for two reasons: first, scholars have noted lower numbers of UR engagement as regards to women and students of color, specifically in STEM disciplines (Jones et al., 2010; O'Donnell et al., 2015; Webber et
al., 2013). Second, the need for institutions to develop additional programming to support the success of underrepresented students. (Herman & Hilton, 2017; Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup, & Kuh, 2008; Kuh, 2008).

At the end of the research experience the women in my study, particularly the women of color, reported higher levels of confidence regarding “being” female artists. They also reported gaining substantial professional development skills that they felt would allow them to succeed in future creative careers. These findings provide a level of affirmation in light of recent research around perceptions of arts alumni on the topic of research skills. For instance, in a recent study of arts alumni, Miller and colleagues (2016) noted that while arts majors reported high levels of confidence regarding creative thinking and problem solving skills, this group was least likely to report “very much” confidence in research skills 37.2% compared to the entire group 44.2% (p. 12).

**Identity and Creativity**

Limited existing research has considered the construct of creativity and identity development, specifically with regard to undergraduates (Aaron, 2010; Welkener & Baxter Magolda, 2014; Welkener, 2013). Through this research, I sought to fill this gap in the literature. Specifically I aimed to understand the role of creativity in the formation of artistic identity/identities. Observing students engaged in UR provided an opportunity to consider how participants conceptualized creativity, and their processes around “doing” creativity and how this doing was linked to identity. I aimed to understand what creativity meant for the individuals in my study, and how it functioned within their lives beyond the context of making art. A major finding that emerged from this research question was how participants weaved their artistic identity/identities through creativity.
In the previous chapter I discussed how participants described “doing” creativity. The process of creation described by most participants aligned with the “steps” documented in the literature, (which I discussed in chapter two) such as beginning with an idea, and a period of incubation (or reflection) (Amabile, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Guilford, 1950; Wallas, 1926). My results revealed that most participants conceptualized creativity from a problem-finding orientation versus a problem solving one. In other words, a majority described processes that involved identifying the problem and solution, an approach known as the “discovered problem”, rather than working from a predetermined question to answer a known solution (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976). The discovered problem approach involves the individual identifying the problem and coming up with the solution. There is no template or guide to achieve the final outcome. This is consistent with previous research that explored problem finding and the artistic process (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi & Getzels, 1988; Kay, 1994; Runco, 1994; Sternberg, 1999; Taylor & Getzels, 1975). However, my findings offer a new perspective around this phenomenon because my study involved creativity within the context of UR. This context provided another layer of understanding regarding the processes of creativity and problem finding. I have previously discussed how participants articulated the connection between the process of creativity and the research process. Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels (1988) have noted:

Beyond intelligence and beyond technical skill, to see things in a new way, to discover, to envisage, to go into deeper questions, which is the foundation for creative work, an additional meta-cognitive ingredient is needed- what we have called the discovered problem-finding attitude (p. 104).
When Stuart described his creative process he did so with reference to a problem-finding orientation:

There’s just no formula to it,…creativity is just making that light bulb in your head go off,…getting a good idea, and feeling good about it…you have to figure out what you’re trying to say, why you’re trying to say it, and how you’re gonna say it…when you’re making art, a lot of the times you don’t know what you’re gonna get… that means you may not necessarily know what you’re looking for, but you’re looking…

Curiously, he described the research process in similar terms:

when you’re trying to do this research project,…you’re going to find something, and you may not necessarily know what you’re going to find, but you’re going to know how to record and make the decisions to get to where you’re trying to be. I mean, and that’s hard to say, because you may not necessarily know. Because with my project, I’m trying to do something that’s dealing with the modern age, and something that’s dealing with very old-school practices; you know, how can those be combined to make a new form, or a hybrid form…

Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels (1988) noted that what distinguishes individuals who approach the creative process through a discovered -problem approach is not necessarily intellectual capacity or manual skill but rather a staunch commitment to their own personal creative vision. I previously discussed this link with reference to how participants described a sense of purpose. Moreover, Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) have argued that artistic creativity involves an approach based on “a very strong value system”(p. 77). Understanding participants’ process and approach to creativity aided me in understanding the identity formation process. For most, the creative process echoed the identity formation process. The majority of participants described their creative process and their artistic identities in similar terms: fluid, emergent, and evolving.
Individuals in my study explained what creativity meant to them with reference to the sociocultural environs in which they were making art and “being” artists. Participants discussed being “good” artists, and how they saw themselves within the larger art environs. Several also described becoming one person through their creativity, and realizing the possibilities for creativity within their artistic processes. The ways in which participants conceptualized creativity in reference to their artistic identity/identities illuminates the \textit{process and elements} inherent within the systems theory of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). For example, Rebecca was well aware that being successful as an artist meant having a keen ability to be recognized as highly “innovative”. Ashley indicated that she sought acceptance from the art world but she realized that receiving recognition was a difficult process. Patricia had spent much of her early training as an artist attempting to conform to conventional artistic standards. By the end of the program she came to believe that the notion of “good” was flexible and fluid within the art world once she experienced what she described as a more creative and cultural environment. Similarly, being entrenched in the cultural environs of the study abroad trip encouraged Jeanne to see possibilities for herself as an artist and her artistic production. Finally, Stuart described the necessity to effectively navigate the art world to find/make a success. Participant sentiments regarding being artists and making work point to how these individuals defined themselves as artists in relation to the larger sociocultural environment. Participants were well aware that being successful as an artist involved the ability to effectively navigate the system. This finding demonstrates how these individuals perceived the importance of navigating their artistic selves within the larger environment. They clearly understood that to be acknowledged as artists required
recognition from society and culture (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). As they constructed their artist identities they did so with these understandings in mind. This finding also aligns with (although in different ways) psychoanalytic approaches to artists and artistic production. Hagman’s (2010) work on the mind of the artist illuminates many of the connections I have made regarding identity and creativity:

Each artist brings to his work intrapsychic (individual), intersubjective (relational) and metasubjective (cultural) dimensions of his or her own subjective life. …the artist is…embedded and inseparable from the social milieu within which he works, hence the importance of including in our model the role of the artist’s relationships (past and present) and the cultural surround within which he developed as a person and artist, and in which he is creating his art (p. 25).

At the end of the program participants in my study were more encouraged than ever to pursue art as a life path. Moreover, while they noted that they were still not completely satisfied with their level of creativity, they were nonetheless committed to their craft. In contrast to some of the participants in Freeman’s (1993) study, the individuals in my study had perhaps developed a certain level of what Freeman (1993) has described as “developmental realism”, or the ability to balance their level of competence with the ability to achieve success as artists and creative individuals. Participants in my study did not have grandiose ideas about becoming famous artists; rather, they discussed their future artistic selves in terms of the contributions they could make to society through their artistic endeavors. Another dimension to developmental realism is an artist’s ability to understand that one’s success is not simply contingent on innate skills and abilities but also on sociocultural circumstances (Freeman, 1993), and the ability to recognize that becoming an artist and creating art becomes more “normalized”…when it becomes part of life rather than something outside it (p. 259).
Participant comments regarding becoming one person through creativity speaks to this circumstance.

Several participants noted the impact of living abroad (as part of the UR experience), and being exposed to vibrant cultural scenes. For most this had a positive impact on their creativity, and further illustrates how the creative process involves a combination of individual, social, historical, and cultural factors (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Examining participant stories from the perspective of the systems approach yielded fascinating insights into connections between creativity and the creative process in the formation of artistic identity/identities. Furthermore, results underscore that a consideration of the sociocultural environs in which the individual operates is critical for understanding artistic creativity (Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2004). Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi (2004) noted,” One does not become an artist simply by making art. To earn a living and develop a self-concept as a bona fide artist…one must be legitimated by the appropriate art institutions” (p. 37). The “artist” emerges when the field recognizes the “creative work”. Creative endeavors are therefore intimately linked to one’s identity. To be recognized as creative is to be recognized as an artist (Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2004). Individuals in my study recognized this circumstance, and their narratives revealed how they were working through these elements to become artists. They acknowledged that the path was rough however most were committed to persisting in art despite the obstacles in order to obtain success.

I have described how the process of creativity intersected with the process of identity formation within and through participant narratives. The theme of “weaving” revealed how creativity influenced artistic identity/identities. The elements that
contributed to artistic identity formation including a sense of competence and purpose, and the ability to make meaning based on internal versus external formulas, are illustrated through the weaving metaphor. As I indicated, for Christine, the act of creation was a way to “paint over” the self that had been inscribed upon her. Through the act of creation she discovered her artistic self for “herself”. Patricia described the creative process as evolving. Moreover, her narrative alternates between a description of the creative process and working through her identity. Finally, Rebecca’s emerging artistic identity was closely linked to experimentation with her creativity. The ways in which participants described the connection between their creativity and identities aligns with existing literature in these areas. For example, Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) stated that emerging artists relate to the world and discover who they are through the act of creation. They noted “What artists discover through painting is most often some facet of self. (p. 20). They also argued that the process of self-discovery is bound up with conflict and tension, which involves a sociogenic (p. 243) component, or the notion that the conflicts and tensions with which an artist wrestles are strongly influenced by one’s environment:

On the one hand, the source of creative exploration is a conflict that needs resolution...On the other hand, it is not a return to a former condition which governs the creative person’s action, but the search for a new condition that is yet to be discovered – a search that involves finding and formulating problems (p. 243).

For individuals in my study, the process of finding one’s self as an artist shared commonalities with how they worked through the creative process. As participants resolved issues of creativity in their lives and artistic production they were simultaneously in the process of finding themselves as emerging artists and creative individuals. Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) indicated, “The aim of the creative
activity is not to restore a previous equilibrium, but to achieve an emergent one (p. 243). This sentiment suggests how the processes of creativity and that of identity formation share intriguing commonalities. Creativity like identity formation is emergent, relational and mutable. As I have discussed in previous chapters, as participants’ meaning making structures became more complex, as they set aside previously held beliefs and considered other perspectives, they began to resolve internal conflicts and thus moved closer to becoming artists.

The notion of weaving also aligns with Josselson’s (1996) conceptualization of identity formation particularly with regards to women. Participant narratives demonstrate the complexity and multifaceted nature of a woman’s identity. Josselson (1996) explicated this circumstance as follows:

Identity in women cannot be simply named, for it resides in the pattern that emerges as a woman stitches together an array of aspects of herself and her investments in others. A woman is, then, not a “this” or a “that” (mother, lawyer, wife, secretary, etc.), for these can only be pieces of herself. A woman is how she weaves it all together into a whole, articulating herself in the world with others and simultaneously making private sense of it (p. 9).

In my analysis of participant narratives I described how women in my study weaved their artistic identity/identities from the various “parts” of who they were. This process likewise involved the creative “parts” of their identity. As Josselson (1996) indicated “identity is the ultimate act of creativity- it is what we make of ourselves” (p. 27). She further explained: “What we connect ourselves to feels part of ourselves (p. 28). By the end of the study, individuals in my study noted that they had become strongly connected to their statuses as artist, and the creative part of their identities. In addition, most described their artistic selves as an “embodied” element rather than as an extension of the
self. This “making of self” and the factors that influence it is what I have attempted to understand through my inquiry of artistic identity.

The notion of weaving is likewise aligned with the work of Baxter Magolda (2001). Baxter Magolda (2001) indicted that once an individual arrives at the fourth order of consciousness as described by Kegan’s theory of self evolution, “The ability to relate to one’s own intrapersonal states, rather than being made up by them, makes it possible to see oneself as the maker (rather than the experiencer) of one’s internal life” (p. 23). Through the act of creation participants in my study were in the process of “making themselves”. They were engaged in exploring who they were as artists from their own perspectives rather than relying on external models, or what they had been told about what an artists is or does. Deborah stated, “Creativity is what we do to show our true selves.” As she noted, the act of creation enabled her to “keep trying new processes, and learning about yourself”. Through the act of “doing” Deborah had conceptualized a new way of being an artist. She aspired to be a leader within the art world, and she realized that this idea ran counter to the traditional image of the artist: White and male.

For Morgan, “making herself” involved setting aside the “frameworks” that had guided her life. By the end of the study she had separated herself from these frameworks and began to reflect on them. For example, she thought about why she had been so interested in making master copies earlier in her life and she realized it was because she was being ruled by external “cultural” confines and boundaries. She came to realize that it was much more interesting to create her own work based on her ideas and interests than to follow what had already (traditionally) been done. She also rejected the notion that being black was a curse. Rather, she came to value her status as an African American
female artist. As evidenced in Morgan’s narrative “making herself” as an artist involved a variety of factors, which intersected at various points during her experience in the program.

While my findings align with previous scholarship in regards to weaving and identity, my study provides a new perspective regarding this relationship by linking this phenomenon to the creative process. Hagman (2010) noted, “The artist working within, taking from, and acting against the culture and relationships within which she lives creates something new” (p. 26). In the case of several participants in my study including Deborah, Morgan, and Christine, the “something new” that these individuals were in the process of creating was twofold. First, it involved their artistic productions (self-portraits or portraits of important women in their lives). Second, these women described new self-discoveries around their artistic identities through their creative production. Morgan described rejecting cultural norms about the “curse” of being black. The artifact of her self-exploration was a newly acquired confidence to produce and exhibit a series of self-portraits for her final project. I highlighted this circumstance in my previous discussion regarding how she felt about having her work on public display. Through her experimentation with producing portraits of female figures in her life Deborah came to see herself as a leader and a creative professional. She also came to reject the traditional notions of the artist as White and male and she embraced and observed possibilities for herself as a contemporary female artist. In the last chapter I noted that Christine’s creative process allowed her to explore an emergent and transitional artistic self (Hagman, 2010, p.27). Through the process of creation she became more aware of who she was as an artist and her artistic journey. Christine’s process illustrates how the art
object is experienced as part of the self; the artwork is thus a subjective object (Hagman, 2010, p.28). My research offers new insights regarding these phenomena from the unique perspective of female emerging artists, and female artists of color.

**Implications for Practice and Research**

My findings illuminated how participants constructed their artistic identity/identities from the various parts of their selves, and through the process of creation. My inquiry offers new insights regarding the experiences of undergraduate art majors, a group that has not been previously been studied extensively in this context. In this section I discuss several implications for practice related to my findings. Among these are the need for more robust institutional supports and resources to assist emerging artists with developing career skills, creating accommodating environments for diverse art majors to ensure that they succeed and thrive in college, designing and implementing novel educational practices in the arts that promote self-authorship, and the expansion of UR activities within the arts.

Recent research around the educational experiences of art majors underscores the need to introduce novel college learning experiences that incorporate preparation for the world of work (Center for Cultural Innovation, 2016; Markusen, Gilmore, Johnson, Levi, & Martinez, 2006; Miller & Dumford, 2016; Skaggs, Frenette, Gaskill, & Miller, 2017). Participants in my study particularly valued the professional development and career skill elements of the program. For instance, nearly all participants indicated that the career day panel session, which featured a discussion with variety of professionals from the creative sector, provided a valuable opportunity to learn about career choices in the arts directly from individuals actively navigating the creative sector. This experience also encouraged
students to expand their understanding of creative careers, and to consider multiple career possibilities for the future. Participants also valued the group discussions on the topic of grant writing, and help with developing a curriculum vitae. The majority also indicated that the professional development components of the program aided them with preparation for graduate school. In light of the constantly evolving environs of the global world of work, career skills and professional development training should be a primary focus of arts curricula. In addition, colleges should increase advising and career counseling for art majors. The creative sector is a burgeoning area of employment. As art majors prepare to enter the world of work they should be well versed in the environs and economy of the creative sector so that they can make informed career choices.

At present, the college student population in the United States is the most diverse in the nation’s history (Renn & Reason, 2012). However, inequities in higher education persist, especially within the context of specific populations of art majors including women, students of color, and first generation college students (Lindemann, Rush, & Tepper, 2016; SNAAP, 2013; Von Blum, 2013). My findings illuminate the experiences of undergraduate art majors from diverse backgrounds, voices previously unrepresented in the literature. Results of my study are informative for developing additional institutional mechanisms to support underrepresented students in the arts. As I indicated in the previous chapter, women of color in my study developed a strong sense of belonging as artists, which aided them in becoming more comfortable with being artists within the university environs. Art educators and the larger institutional environment must provide a more welcoming and supportive environment for diverse art majors to thrive in college and beyond. This is critical considering recent data that underscores
persistence wage inequities in regards to artists (Lindemann, Rush, & Tepper, 2016), and the fact that “women (and minorities) who attend art school are less likely than White men to persist as artists in the workforce” (SNAAP, 2013, p. 8).

Higher education must do more to combat the lack of diversity that persists within university art departments. Despite recent gains, the lack of diversity and persistent racism within the art world (Charland, 2010; Von Blum, 2013) continues to create barriers to success. Diverse participants in my study noted the lack of role models (and diverse students) within the art department and the larger art environs. This circumstance resulted in participants feeling like they did not belong when they first entered the university environment. Participants of color indicated that the supportive environment created by the UR program changed both their perspective about being artists and pursuing creative careers. Therefore, colleges and universities must develop programming and other opportunities to highlight the achievements of artists of color. They must also strive to expand the curriculum to include more diverse artistic voices, and emphasize the value and contributions of artists of color.

Although a critical outcome for engagement in post-secondary education is skill acquisition and preparation for the world of work, college experiences should likewise foster learning opportunities that assist students with developing more complex ways of making meaning from their college experiences (Arum, Roksa, & Cook, 2016; Baxter Magolda, 2007; Baxter Magolda, Abes, & Torres, 2009; Goodman, Baxter Magolda, Seifert, & King, 2011; Hodge, Baxter Magolda, & Haynes, 2009; Kaplan & Flum, 2012; King & Baxter Magolda, 2004). Furthermore, as increased retention and persistence are the penultimate aims of higher education, college experiences that engage and inspire
students are critical to these aims. My findings demonstrate that educational practices such as the Leaning Partnerships Model, which encourage students to “construct knowledge”, learn from their own experiences, and understand that learning is a “mutually constructed” phenomenon (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004) are powerful tools that engender student growth in multiple dimensions. Colleges and universities must develop and expand educational experiences that promote self-authorship.

My findings revealed that the intellectual challenges of the program, which reflect the basic features of the LPM approach mentioned above, stimulated cognitive growth, prompted a deep exploration of identity, and promoted mature relationships among participants. For instance, Morgan made all these connections through her experience in the program:

It taught me how to promote my ideas…It taught me how to relate to colleagues, to relate to people who are in the art world…It taught me how to make an account of my research methods, how to then communicate those methods effectively, how to build my own structure, how to verbally communicate effectively in the professional world, how to think creativity and be given something as a blank slate. …how to think from my perspective-- just so much that you learn, and key career skills.

Results from my inquiry also provide useful data for considering how college experiences that promote student growth in all three dimensions of the self-authorship model might be developed and promoted, specifically within the arts. This model, which blends appropriate levels of challenge and support, shows promise for achieving positive student outcomes. It is essential that higher education administrators in the arts embrace programs such as the LPM model to help students understand the connections between their learning and future goals and aspirations.
An aim of my inquiry was to understand how participation in undergraduate research in the arts might influence a student’s artistic identity formation, and the perceived benefits gained from student engagement in this activity. Results of my study demonstrate that college and universities must do more to promote the value and benefits of UR in the arts. Participants in my study noted that the UR experience encouraged them to consider prospects such as applying for grants, residencies, and graduate school. For some, such goals were not entertained prior to the UR experience. My findings indicate that the perceived benefits underscore the necessity to expand UR opportunities to a larger segment of the student population. In addition, similar to diverse students in STEM majors, individuals in my inquiry perceived valuable benefits from engagement in the UR experience. My findings are specifically instructive in light of the limited extant research around perceived learning gains and benefits of UR in regards to diverse students (Finley & McNair, 2013). It is therefore essential that colleges and universities design and promote UR programs that are both appealing and inclusive to a diversity of art majors. This is critical in light of recent research that suggests arts alumni reported less confidence with research skills (Miller & Dumford, 2016). Finally, since there currently exists limited examples of UR in the arts, my inquiry represents a model for expanding the traditional definition, practice, and approach to UR.

**Future Research**

The purpose of this multiple text narrative inquiry was to examine how undergraduate art majors construct and navigate their artistic identity/identities, particularly while engaged in an undergraduate research experience. As part of this process the influence of creativity was also considered. My inquiry yielded critical
information regarding undergraduate art majors engaged in UR. Next I discuss several implications for future research. First, my inquiry of artistic identity/identities centered on a limited number of undergraduate students at a single research university. A larger project that involved multiple sites and institutions and a more diverse sample could yield critical nuances related to artistic identity formation and the perceived gains and benefits of research in the arts. Second, although intersectionality was not the focus of this study, my findings illustrate that artistic identity formation was intersectional in nature and involves multiple social identities. Therefore, a future study that investigated artistic identity formation from an intersectional framework could generate vital information regarding the artistic identity formation process, particularly regarding additional social identities such as sexual orientation. Third, while my findings yielded critical insights regarding the relationships between the processes of identity formation and creativity, more research is needed to determine the full scope of this phenomenon. Currently, there exists scant research in this area (Dollinger et al, 2005; Giaveanu & Tanggaard, 2014; Steffens, Gocłowska, Cruwys, & Galinsky, 2016). Fourth, my findings revealed critical information in regards to links between the development of artistic identity and future career goals. Additional research in this area is needed to assist colleges and students in the arts with career planning and preparation.

**Conclusion**

My inquiry explored how undergraduate art majors constructed an artistic identity and the factors that influenced this process. My findings illuminated the ways in which the context of the study, participating in a UR experience, and creativity influenced this process. Findings also underscore the plurality and mutable nature of identity. While
conducting this research I discovered that what it means to “be” an artist is bound up with a multiplicity of intersecting factors including one’s life experiences, social identities such as gender, ethnicity and/or race, and one’s inner drive or passion to persist despite obstacles. Implications of my research underscore the need for additional institutional support to assist emerging artists with the acquisition of career skills. Colleges and universities must also cultivate accommodating environments for art majors from a variety of backgrounds, and provide ample support to help them succeed and thrive in college. My findings also underscore the positive outcomes associated with educational practices in the arts that promote self-authorship, and the need for expanding UR activities within the arts.
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APPENDIX A: Interview One Protocol

1) Please tell me what it means to be an artist?
Possible Probes:
At what point in your life did you become interested in (or start making) art?
Please tell me how you came to major in art?
Please describe what an artist does?
Please describe the role of art (or art making) in your life?

2) When you think about yourself as an artist could you please tell me what role creativity plays in being an artist?
Possible Probes:
What role does creativity play in your life?
What role does creativity play in your artist body of work?
What role does creativity play in your artistic process- that is- the way you approach making a work of art?

3) Please describe your artistic process?
Possible Probes:
Please describe a time when you were working on a new art project.
How did you decide what you would create?
What guides your artistic decisions?
How do you plan to incorporate research into your artistic process?

4) How has being selected to participate in this research scholarship influenced your views about who you are as an artist and your art practice so far?
Possible Probes:
What do you think you will learn about being an artist and your artistic practice by participating in undergraduate research?
Please describe how you think the opportunity to study abroad will influence who you are as an artist and your art practice?
How do you plan to incorporate your study abroad experience into your artistic practice?
How do you plan to incorporate your study abroad experience into your research practice?

5) Anything you want to add or questions for me?
APPENDIX B: Relational Map Protocol

Instructions:

1) Please review the words below. Determine the relationship between yourself and each word. The closer you plot each word to the “You Are Here” circle the greater the importance of the word.

2) Plot each word in the diagram above (draw a circle and print the word inside).

*Artist*

*Creativity*

*Student*

*Mentor* (yourself as mentor to others)

*Mentee* (yourself in relation to a faculty mentor)

*Researcher*
APPENDIX C: Interview Two Protocol

1) In our last meeting, you described what it means to be an artist. Could you please tell me if your ideas and beliefs have changed since our last meeting? If so, how?
   Possible Probes:
   How has participating in this research scholarship influenced your views about who you are as an artist?
   Please describe if and how your views have changed about what an artist does.
   Please describe the role of art (or art making) in your life?
   Please describe how creativity has played a role in views about who you are as an artist?

2) Since our last meeting, please describe if/ how your views have changed about what it means to be creative?
   Possible Probes:
   In what ways did creativity play a role in the development of your research project?
   What do you think you learned about the role of creativity in being an artist?
   What do you think you learned about the role of creativity in the process of art making?

3) Please describe if/ how your artistic process has changed or evolved while working on this research project?
   Possible Probes:
   How did you decide what you would create for this project?
   What guided your artistic decisions?
   How did you incorporate research into your artistic process?

4) How has being selected to participate in this research scholarship influenced your views about who you are as an artist and your art practice?
   Possible Probes:
   What do you think you learned about being an artist by participating in undergraduate research?
   What do you think you learned about your artistic practice by participating in undergraduate research?
   Please describe if or how the opportunity to study abroad has influenced who you are as an artist and your art practice?
   Please tell me how your study abroad experience may influence your artistic practice?
   Please tell me how your study abroad experience may influence your research practice?
APPENDIX C: Interview Two Protocol (Continued)

5) Thinking back on the scholarship experience as a whole, what do you think you learned by participating in this experience?
Possible Probes:
How do you think you can apply what you have learned in this experience to other areas of your life?
What were the best parts of this experience?
Which activities/assignments were the most and least helpful during the project?
If you were asked to describe the Research in Arts Scholarship what would you say?

6) Thinking about the future, what do you see yourself doing in five years?
Possible Probes:
How do you plan to use your art degree?
Please describe if/ how you think this experience will impact your future career.

5) Anything you want to add or questions for me?
APPENDIX D: Artistic Journal Protocol

Keeping an Artist’s Journal throughout the experience will help you conceptualize your project, reflect on who you are as an artist and your artistic practice, and work through various issues or discoveries related to your research. Keeping a journal throughout the experience will help you think through your ideas early on and as you progress through the research process. Recording your ideas in visual and written form in your journal will also make the process of composing web text and poster content later in the fall semester much easier.

The majority of your journal entries will NOT be submitted. However, you will submit responses to three entries during the summer and fall semesters. Responses will be recorded in your journal, and you will submit the journal entries on the due dates listed in the guide. Finally, in your responses, you will use a combination of visual forms (drawings, illustrations, collage) and written text to answer each question. The journal questions are listed below.

Journal Entry One - (Reflection prior to study abroad experience)

Instructions: Please respond to the questions listed below in your journal. Use a combination of visual forms (drawings, illustrations, collage) and written text to answer each question. The minimum total page requirement for this entry (written and visual text) is two pages for each question. The maximum page requirement for each question is four. Your written response to each question should be at least 500 words in length (This is approximately one journal page).

Questions:
1) Being an artist means….
2) Making art makes me feel...
3) At this point in my life, I would describe/represent my artist self as….
4) I would describe/represent my competence as an artist as….

Journal Entry One Due Date: May 20, 2016 (bring to meeting #2)
APPENDIX D: Artistic Journal Protocol (Continued)

Journal Entry Two - (Reflection during and after study abroad experience)

Instructions: Please respond to the questions listed below in your journal. Use a combination of visual forms (drawings, illustrations, collage) and written text to answer each question. The minimum total page requirement for this entry (written and visual text) is two pages for each question. The maximum page requirement for each question is four. Your written response to each question should be at least 500 words in length (This is approximately one journal page).

Part I: Reflect on and respond to these questions while you are abroad (This activity is for your own exploration. You will not submit these responses)

Part II: When you return from Europe, reflect on and respond to these questions again and compare how your answers have changed over the summer and into the fall as you begin to work on the various parts of your research project. (The minimum total page requirement for this entry (written and visual text) is two pages for each question. The maximum page requirement for each question is four. Your written response to each question should be at least 500 words in length (This is approximately one journal page).

Questions:
1) At this point in my life, I would describe/represent my artist self as….
2) I express my creativity through....
3) Making art helps me…
4) Who I am is based on….

Journal Entry Two Due Date: Aug. 26, 2016 (bring to meeting #3)
Journal Entry Three

Instructions: Please respond to the questions listed below in your journal. Use a combination of visual forms (drawings, illustrations, collage) and written text to answer each question. The minimum total page requirement for this entry (written and visual text) is two pages for each question. The maximum page requirement for each question is four. Your written response to each question should be at least 500 words in length (This is approximately one journal page).

Part I: Reflect on and respond to these questions throughout the fall semester as you move through the various research project activities. (This activity is for your own exploration. You will not submit these responses)

Part II: After the opening reception, reflect on and respond to these questions again and compare how your answers have changed as you near the end of the research experience.
The minimum total page requirement for this entry (written and visual text) is two pages for each question. The maximum page requirement for each question is four. Your written response to each question should be at least 500 words in length (This is approximately one journal page).

Questions:
1) Being an artist means….
2) Making art makes me feel...
3) At this point in my life, I would describe/ represent my artist self as….
4) I would describe/ represent my competence as an artist as….

Journal Entry Three Due Date: Fri. Nov. 18, 2016 (bring to final group meeting)
APPENDIX E: Final Self-Reflection Essay Protocol

Instructions:
Writing this essay will give you the opportunity to reflect on the entire research experience, and what you have learned about yourself as an artist, student and researcher.

Points to consider in your paper:
- Describe any changes you may have experienced as an artist and as an individual during this experience.
- Describe your reaction to the process of creating a research-based art project. What was the most difficult part of the process? For example, developing the research question, organizing the data, creating the final art piece?
- Did you learn new skills or competencies during the course of this experience?
- How will you use what you learned during this experience in the future (career or work setting)?

Formatting Instructions:
- Compose your Self-Reflection in Microsoft Word (Minimum 500 words)
- Self-Reflection should be double-spaced using 12 point Times New Roman font
- You may include images and video links in your Self-Reflection.
- You must properly cite your sources; i.e. words, ideas that are not your own.
APPENDIX F: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

3/16/2016

Lisa Piazza, M.A.
Undergraduate Studies
4202 E. Fowler Ave., LIB 122
Tampa, FL  33620

RE: Expedited Approval of Amendment
IRB#: Ame3_Pro00016563
Title: Fostering Undergraduate Research in Arts Projects that Develop Research Skills and Promote Innovative Programming in Artistic Research

Dear Ms. Piazza:

On 3/12/2016, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED your Amendment. The submitted request and all documents contained within have been approved, including those outlined below.

Revised Protocol, dated 02/2016
Revised Consent, version 4, dated 03/11/2016
Revised Email, dated 03/2016
Added Interview One Protocol
Added Interview Two Protocol
Added Artistic Journal Assignment
Added Essay Protocol

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
   RIAS Protocol 2_2016_FINAL_VERSION(CLEAN).docx

Consent Document(s)*:
   RIAS Consent FINAL_CLEAN 3_11_2016.pdf

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab on the main study's workspace. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s) and replace previously approved versions.