

Research of Factors Affecting the Career Developments of Advanced Visual Arts Professionals

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Summary

People who show an interest in art often begin their art studies before considering career opportunities in the visual arts. They simply enjoy drawing and painting, and may successfully enroll in an art department. However, there is a common stereotype, in our culture, of art college major students having financial difficulties after graduating. In reality, there is a difference between someone being interested or majoring in visual arts and someone who likes to draw. Few studies have been conducted on how to explore personal traits and prepare for a life-long career, leaving some art major senior students confused about their future career direction and development, especially those who do not want to make a living as an artist.

The literature review contains three main theories of career development. The first approach emphasizes the understanding of personal traits, such as interest, aptitude, personality, value, attitude, and ability, in making useful career decisions. This theory shows that the better one's personal traits are suited to a chosen profession, the greater is the satisfaction with one's career development. Second, the developmental approach focuses on the changing roles between various developmental stages, and highlights the importance of life-long experiences. If a person achieves a certain realization of self via these roles, they may approach their occupational preferences and competences with greater self-esteem, in other words, achieve greater vocational maturity (Super, 1990). The third theoretical approach shows that learning experiences clearly influence behavior, including career decision-making. Therefore, Krumboltz (1994) tried to train people to deal with unpredictable social factors and turning chances circumstances into positive career opportunities.

Few studies have examined career development factors among the advanced visual art

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professionals. However, the main theories, outlined above, seem to describe phenomena about career development in these professions. Accordingly, this research applies the Holland theory of types to the visual art profession. The Holland hexagon model suggests that most people fit into one of six types (Holland, 1985). The application of this notion to the present study establishes the assumption that every type determines a specific visual art profession. The six types are: The realistic (R) type likes to use hand operated equipment, such as in the art restorer profession; the investigative (I) type likes to explore complex and theoretical questions such as those of art history or aesthetic; the artistic (A) type likes to create or express themselves in original ways, which suit the visual artist; the social (S) type likes to work with people, as in art education or art therapy; the enterprising (E) type likes to organize things and influence others, and are apt for art administration; and the conventional (C) type likes to work with data or numbers and is able to endure repetition, such as art research data collectors or art museum librarians.

In order to investigate the factors in the career development of advanced visual art professionals, this study applies a qualitative research approach and subjective analysis. Deliberate sampling was used to invite eight advanced visual art professionals of various types in Holland's hexagon model, including visual artists, visual art designers, art historians, art reviewers, art administrators, art educators, art restorers, and art therapists. The results are discussed below.

This research finds that family support, personal character, and occasional opportunities are the three main factors that influence the perception of personal traits, career decision-making, and career self-efficacy in the career development of advanced visual art professions.

According to the results, family support is one of the major influences. First, the aesthetic atmosphere of a family imperceptibly forms the fundamental sense of beauty. The artistic circumstances come from parents' interests, such as an interest in crafts or love for classical music. Some participants mentioned art knowledge transmitted from family members, such as that from a father who was a calligrapher, a photographer, or a Chinese painter. Second, financial and psychological support from parents and elder family members encouraged participants to continue enjoying art, particularly when some participants needed to learn techniques before the college entrance exam. The art interest, or relevant college art studies, of siblings also directly affected participants. Above all, they came from artistic environments and identified early with the artist's role.

Personal artistic gifts are inherent traits, while pictures can show drawing skills at a very young age. Some of the participants were asked to decorate the classroom or draw posters in elementary or high school. Some of them had been asked to participate in art competitions and won a prize.

It was not difficult for the research participants to realize their gifts upon encouragement for their early artistic achievement. Encouragement spurred the participants enthusiastic for learning. The more they recognized their artistic competence, the more they could persist in the face of great difficulties in their professional career development.

Occasional opportunities included benefactors at different educational levels. Teachers' teaching methods in different elementary school subjects cultivated participants' curiosity for diverse fields, which later enriched their art learning. Most participants were highly influenced by a high school art teacher. Usually, this mentor instantly discovered their gift and spared no effort to guide them to choose art as their college major. While in the college art department, teachers with special art professions provided information about advanced visual art professions; moreover, these professors became role models with whom participants could identify.

According to the results, from the theoretical perspective, it seems that no career theory can truly describe the career development of advanced visual art professionals. Moreover, all research participants have several talents and interests that enrich their professions and can perform art-related professional work beyond their student career. Cross-discipline research on career development theories and advanced visual art professional is needed to enhance understanding of these advanced visual art professionals. In addition, the drawing technique section of the college entrance exam is the main way to select talented persons for fine arts programs; however, most research participants did not spend a long time preparing for the drawing exam. The question is whether this means that they are sufficiently gifted to not need much practice, or whether they would work harder once they identified a field they like. This special situation should remind art educators and scholars to consider the importance of drawing technique and other learning. Additional curious questions arise, such as how the social economic status of the family influences the career development of art professionals, and the gender issue of financial concern when participants make decisions to enter art-related professions. Thoughts and research feedback are provided, and more related research is suggested for the future.