

MOTHERS' EXPERIENCE IN PRISON:
FINDING MEANING THROUGH WEAVING AND WORDS

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ABSTRACT

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Women's imprisonment, and more specifically the situation of mothers, is a widely under represented research topic. The research presented through this report gives voice to nine mothers incarcerated in a Quebec provincial detention center in Canada. By adopting a subjective and feminist standpoint epistemology, using art-based and narrative strategies of inquiry and a thematic analysis, the researcher seeks to explore the meanings that these mothers make of their experience. The craft of weaving was suggested to these mothers as a primary mode of artistic expression and therapeutic medium in the context of an art therapy group. The process of *witness writing*, a method of looking at and entering into a relationship with one's artwork framed this artistic exploration. This creative writing method lead the mothers to produce texts which stand as rich analyses of their handcrafted work. These narratives stand alone in expressing how these mothers experienced weaving, and in parallel, their situation of imprisonment. The texts were then analysed by the researcher to extract the most relevant themes in concordance with the research interrogations: How does weaving as therapeutic medium and creative mode of expression inform the participating mothers about themselves and their imprisonment experience in the context of an art therapy group? The findings show that most themes stand at the intersection of the experience of weaving and that of imprisonment. As a primary focus, these mothers expressed the concerns they have and the emotions they feel about their children. *Creating beauty* is the overarching theme identified by the researcher and refers to these mothers' use of the process and product of weaving as a way to search for, bring about, and give life to the qualities that provide pleasure and delight to the mind and the senses in a context where they are deprived from sources of beauty, particularly their children.

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My mother,
for being who she is

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research report to the women, who embarked on this journey with me,
diving into their selves in embracing this project.
I hope my writing will do justice to their voices.

NOTICE

Opinions and conclusions presented in this research report do not necessarily constitute those of
the Public Security Ministry.

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Introduction

Women's imprisonment, and more specifically the situation of mothers in prison, is a widely ignored research topic. Moreover, among the few studies that have been published, those that actually give a voice to these women are scarce. I discovered this *état de fait* through my searches as I looked for articles and books to build my literature review. These reasons added to my already keen interest in the subject and motivated my will to accomplish the research project I am presenting through this report. Beyond this lack of knowledge, I was first interested in having a human encounter with these women. To get an idea of how they make sense of their experience, I wanted to find a creative way that would allow them to tell their stories. The few studies conducted in Quebec demonstrate that the field of research about women who are imprisoned under provincial jurisdiction needs to be developed (Blanchard, 2002; Giroux & Frigon, 2011). In art therapy, my domain of study, I encountered that the practice of fiber arts has not been widely explored in research or exploited in therapeutic practice. On a personal level, I cherish the practice of fiber arts. I am particularly drawn to the handcraft of weaving, the technique of interlacing threads and other materials to create fabric. The tactile and sensory aspects and the way of working with fibers in weaving symbolically connect me with my own substance. The sharing and continuing of a timeless craft, through transgenerational and intergenerational transmission, connect me with the threads of humanity. By joining these areas of interest and contributing to fill a gap in research, this report documents the experience of mothers in prison. By providing an account of their self-representations through creative and artistic means, it identifies some of their needs.

Literature Review

The areas reviewed from the literature have to do with the researched population, the type of setting in which the research project unfolded, and the selected creative expression and therapeutic medium that was suggested to research participants. This literature review is divided in three parts, each focussing on a main component of the research. The first part examines the existing literature on incarcerated mothers and their experience of imprisonment, the second part provides a review of available group and art therapy services in women's prison settings, the third part considers the use of fiber arts as therapeutic medium. In order to be as true as possible to the context of the research, I mainly focussed on and selected Canadian sources of reference when it was most relevant. In the search for the most up to date material, I selected a certain

quantity of references from American and international publications, as long as it seemed to be transferable material to the subject of the research.

Incarcerated Mothers and their Experience of Imprisonment

The majority of imprisoned women are mothers. American studies relate percentages that vary between 70% (McGee & Gilbert, 2010) and 80% (Kiser as cited in Berry & Eigenberg, 2003) of the female inmate population to be mothers. The figures are similar in Quebec. In 2002, mothers represented 70% of the incarcerated women population (Blanchard, 2002). Blanchard's study (2002) is the only extensive empirical study of mothers under judiciary authority and their children in Quebec. The 99 mothers who participated in this study had 203 children in total, having approximately an average of 2 children each. Children between the ages of 5 and 11 were the most important cohort, followed closely by children who had reached 18 years or older (Giroux & Frigon, 2011). Mothers in Blanchard's study (2002) "show many similarities (low income, low education level, drug addiction...) with the overall population of incarcerated women" (p. 92). Giroux and Frigon (2011) conducted the first study that describes the socio-judicial profile of women that comprise the correctional population under provincial jurisdiction in Quebec. They report that in 2007-2008, the average age of these women was 37 years old; that in 2004-2005, aboriginal women represented 30% of the women detained under provincial or territorial jurisdictions in Canada; and that incarcerated women are more susceptible than women in the general population of being single, having a low level of education, receiving social security, being poor, and for those who are mothers, being single mothers (Giroux & Frigon, 2011). According to data collected in studies by Boutet, Lafond and Guay, Cousineau, Brochu and Sun, and Frigon and Duhamel (as cited in Giroux & Frigon, 2011), one out of two women incarcerated in Quebec has been a victim of sexual abuse and seven out of ten have experienced conjugal violence. Studies by Robert, Frigon and Belzile, Frigon, and the Quebec Public Security Ministry (as cited in Giroux & Frigon, 2011) point that prior to incarceration, many women have chronic health and mental health problems that are often exacerbated by the stress of incarceration, including: sleeping and eating disorders, dental problems, sexually and blood transmitted infections, including HIV. These problems are often due to precarious living situations such as poverty, marginalisation, prostitution and drug abuse. Giroux and Frigon (2011) cite several studies (Dolan Mullen & al.; Henderson, Schaeffer & Brown; Kane & DiBartolo; Ortiz) that show that the most frequent mental health problems among women who are incarcerated are drug and alcohol dependence, borderline personality,

post-traumatic stress syndrome, as well as depression and anxiety. Robitaille, Guay and Savard's study (as cited in Giroux & Frigon, 2011) show that self-harm and suicidal behaviors are also present among women who are incarcerated, in proportions ranging from 34% to 50%.

Studies of criminalised women across different countries demonstrate more and more similarities about the problems they face despite heterogeneous profiles and situations (Rapport de l'équipe française sous la direction de Philippe Combessie as cited in Giroux & Frigon, 2011). "When a woman goes to prison, her relationship to her children is a central emotional focus" (Boudin, 2008, p. 104). This quote summarizes the core of mothers' experiences of imprisonment. Studies by Frigon and Duhamel, Borrill et al., and Frigon (as cited in Giroux & Frigon, 2011) show that incarceration can cause psychological distress due to the separation from children and the lack of contact with family members. Berry and Eigenberg's (2003) and Berry and Smith-Mahdi's (2006) studies look at mothers' identity in relation to their role as mothers and as inmates. A mother's incarceration produces injuries to her sense of identity as she is less able to perform her mothering role (Berry & Eigenberg, 2003), but still strongly identifies with traditional mothering (Berry & Smith-Mahdi, 2006). Celinska and Siegel's (2010) and Ferraro and Moe's (2003) studies shed light on the different ways women perceive themselves when faced with the hardly compatible double identity of mother and prisoner. Despite the differences in the mothers' life stories, Celinska and Siegel found that "the central theme that emerged in the interviews was motherhood" (2010, p. 454). According to both studies (Celinska & Siegel, 2010; Ferraro & Moe, 2003), although motherhood appears to be a source of confidence, to provide a sense of worth and a positive self-image for incarcerated mothers, it also sends them back the painful image of not being sufficiently adequate in their role and the feeling of being unable to do what is necessary as a mother. As much as children may be a source of worries and conflicts, they are often an important source of hope and purpose for mothers during their incarceration and for their social reinsertion. As Frigon, Strimelle and Renière (as cited in Giroux & Frigon, 2011) point at in their study, children are often the most important motivating factor for the steps that mothers take towards their personal growth and self-responsibility. On the other hand, prolonged or recurring incarceration has unavoidable repercussions and causes strain to the mother-child attachment relationship. Incarceration is not always the cause of rupture in the mother-child relationship. Other events prior to incarceration sometimes justify children being in substitute care. In Blanchard's study (2002), participating mothers identify different causes for their separation from their children: addiction problems, Youth Protection

intervention, recurring judicial problems, or other causes such as depression or children living abroad (Blanchard, 2002). Boudin's (1998) and Shamai and Kochal's (2008) studies delve further in the “meaning of the experience of motherhood for women prisoners” (Shamai & Kochal, 2008, p. 323). The main issues these studies reveal are that past traumatic experiences sustained by incarcerated mothers prevents them from acknowledging and noticing their children’s needs; and that incarcerated mothers experience feelings of shame and guilt over their criminal behavior and the consequences it has on their children. These studies stress the need that mothers in prison have to address the sense of loss occasioned by their separation from their children in order to develop a more positive attitude towards motherhood (Boudin, 1998; Shamai & Kochal, 2008). In sum, the literature shows that imprisonment of mothers is a complex issue, and points out the multiple challenges and consequences to the mother-child relationship. Quebec detention centers and some Canadian penitentiaries have put programs in place to address this issue, but initiatives supporting mothers in taking their parental responsibilities and sustaining their ties with their children remain limited (Giroux & Frigon, 2011). Since 1987 in Quebec, the CFAD program (Continuité Famille Auprès des Détenues) offers services to mothers and their children during and after incarceration. The Joliette penitentiary and the Okimaw Ohci pavilion for aboriginal women inmates let mothers live with their children in residential units for a period of time (Giroux & Frigon, 2011). For women in detention, being a mother brings particular meaning to their experience of imprisonment. Giroux and Frigon’s study (2011) emphasise the need to rethink the types of intervention in the service of women entrusted to correctional services, in paying particular attention to the singularity of their experience, in considering the structural context they have to submit to, in listening to what they have to say about their needs, and in trying to mitigate the negative effects detention can yield.

Group and Art Therapy Services in Women’s Prison Settings

Giroux and Frigon (2011) describe the different programs offered within and outside the two prisons for women in Quebec. Programs offered to respond to the mental health needs of the incarcerated women population are comprised of educational workshops on substance abuse problems, Cocaine Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings, substance abuse relapse prevention programs, a suicide prevention program, a specific psychosocial follow up for women who are diagnosed with sexually and blood transmitted infections, zoo therapy sessions, group and individual art therapy sessions, and specific and punctual initiatives addressing self-esteem and self-consciousness enhancement. Specifically for

mothers, parental competency education is offered and the CFAD program organises trailer visits and special events in the prison gymnasium where mothers and their children can be together. The Elizabeth Fry Society, a pan-Canadian organisation, has put a program in place allowing mothers to be in contact with their children by means of story reading. It is important to note that all these programs are not equally available in both Quebec detention centers. McGee and Gilbert's research findings (2010) provide a good introduction to qualify the state of services available in women's prison settings. "There is in fact a deficit in available treatment programs for women in prison and an even greater lack of programs designed with mothers in mind" (McGee & Gilbert, 2010, p. 343). Boudin's (1998) and Williams and Taylor's (2004) studies provide an account of two different types of group work that can take place in a women's prison setting. Williams and Taylor (2004) studied an 8-week pilot program involving creative arts and narrative interventions to gather data on the impact of such a group on incarcerated women who have been abused. In her study, Boudin (1998) presents and evaluates a peer support group model where participating women come together to concentrate on "their roles and identities as mothers" (p. 103). Both studies show the need for empowerment and the necessity to make sense of personal history and experience. For some, the group experience can be tantamount to a journey into "self-discovery and healing" (Williams & Taylor, 2004, p. 49). The group format provides women with each other's support, strength, and hope while navigating difficult emotions and painful stories (Boudin, 1998; Williams & Taylor, 2004).

In the area of art therapy more specifically, individual and group services are offered within prison settings. Descroissettes-Savoie's thesis (2010) presents a case study where the art therapy group is used as a narrative space for women to explore and express their experience of incarceration and reflect upon it. Ferszt, Hayes, DeFedele and Horn's pilot study (2004) addresses the use of individual art therapy sessions with incarcerated bereaved women. Deschamps's thesis (2001) explores group and individual art therapy as providing an access to what she defines as a 'sacred space' where the potential for living the experience of a symbolic rebirth and the resulting sense of empowerment is possible for incarcerated women. Merriam's compilation of case studies (1998) documents how the art therapy process helps incarcerated women with histories of severe trauma to express their feelings. These studies recount the particular advantages of using art materials and images as a mode of expression enabling the woman "to access and express her feelings through a medium other than verbal therapy" (Ferszt & al., 2004, p. 197). The process of creation in art therapy is quite unique in that it fosters the

“women’s self-esteem and sense of competence” (Ferszt & al., 2004, p. 198) allied with the therapeutic investment. Merriam (1998) comments on the safety provided by “the focus on the image” (p. 158) in art therapy. As much as self-created images can hold personal content, the art making process also creates a space in between the artist and what is expressed through the image (Merriam, 1998). In turn, the art therapy process has the potential to offer incarcerated women a “direct and rich encounter with their inner world and feelings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 169) in a non-threatening way. According to Descroiselles-Savoie (2010), the art therapy group in the context of incarceration opens the potentiality of a liberatory space where women can envision their future while navigating their past and present life within the restrictive, controlling and confining dimensions of the prison. Deschamps’s (2001) analysis of group sessions shows that participating women have lived a self-transformation and a feeling of empowerment through the process of accessing a sacred space, which they defined as a place where they were able to transcend the boundaries of their subjective experience to access a universal dimension of the human experience.

Fibre Art Making as Therapeutic Medium

The symbolic power and potentiality that fiber arts offer was partly inspired by my own artistic experience and research and partly by the discovery of contemporary artist Sheila Hicks’s work (Danto, Simon & Stritzler-Levine, 2006). As a multidisciplinary artist and designer, Sheila Hicks stands out as a telling example for situating weaving in a contemporary context. The artist’s large public architectural fibre arts pieces contrast with her more intimate miniature woven pieces. The technique she designed to create her miniature pieces enabled her to use filaments of all kinds and work with found materials to create what she conceives as a personal journal or a space for reflection, experimentation and creation (Simon, 2006). The wooden frame Hicks uses to weave her miniature pieces “serves as a window to her thoughts ... miniatures that she has also called ‘personal expressions’, ‘private investigations’” (Simon, 2006, p. 41). Hicks’ miniature woven pieces echo a world of lived experiences, condensed with meaning and form, and stand as her personal narrative.

Weaving is a thread that runs through my family on the distaff side. The women on my mother’s side have practiced this craft from generation to generation. As I was offered my mother’s cousin’s loom some years ago, I have started experimenting with the craft of weaving and continued exploring this medium throughout my studies. The multiple lenses that art therapy offers encouraged me to look at weaving from a metaphorical and symbolic perspective

in relation to various theories and concepts. This exploration revealed that “craft form of fiber arts has received a modest amount of attention in art therapy” (Moon, 2010, p. 22). Collier’s book *Using Textile Arts and Handcrafts in Therapy with Women* (2012) may be the only book that provides an introduction to textile art therapy. Kapitan argues that this lack of attention is probably attributed to the conception that this type of creative process is embedded in a traditional notion of making “art for life’s sake” (as cited in Moon, 2010, p. 22) rather than art for self expression purposes. I think this notion should be revisited, challenged and expanded. I believe that the innate potential of artistic expression provides a “natural healing process” (Schaverien, 1992, p. 224). Kapitan describes fiber arts as “an activity that calls forth peaceful attentiveness” (as cited in Moon, 2010, p. 22). My own experience with weaving taught me that this process has a meditative quality. It helps me enter into a focused state of mind, which has a calming and regenerative effect. This process provides a potential for transformation of one’s inner state. As Hinz puts it: “the media experience itself can induce serenity” (2009, p. 7). Among other materials, fibers used for weaving have tactile characteristics that can have a powerful effect in awakening sensorial memories (Hinz, 2009; Moon, 2010). Cognitive functions are called forth in weaving when one sets up the loom or executes a chosen pattern, these actions require planning and execution in an organized and sequential manner. A symbolic meaning may be found through weaving one’s own patterns, choosing threads to incorporate in one’s piece, or in the weaving process and product (Collier, 2012). Historically, weaving has been present in every culture and is associated with various myths, tales and stories where it often references concepts of destiny, unity and creation (Anquetil, 1977). Through the process of interlacing threads to construct fabric, weaving becomes a practice of witnessing one’s own creative process. The completed piece becomes itself a witness of this practice. The product then holds a narrative, a part of one’s metaphoric journey. Weaving is usually a slow, time consuming process, it can then be continued from one session to the next, and allows for the possibility of undoing what has been previously done.

I found similar accounts to my experience in the few published studies that explore the relationship between fiber arts and therapeutic potential. Blood’s doctoral dissertation (2007) examines how fiber art making may induce a state of flow, as defined by Csikszentmihalyi’s theoretical concept (as cited in Blood, 2007) where one becomes intensely concentrated on an activity which in turn produces a sense of enjoyment and happiness. This type of experience, which involves a “perceived loss or distortion of time, the slowing of the flow process, the

presence of extreme focus and creativity, the absence of disorder, worries, and frustrations, and the existence of clear and immediate feedback among others in regards to the activity” (Blood, 2007, p. 88) is reflected in the qualitative analysis of the participants’ comments about their involvement in fiber art making. Her results demonstrate a relationship between skill level and flow state experience. “It is evident that participants of non-industrial textile production activities do experience more occurrences of flow as they progress in skill” (Blood, 2007, p. 84). A strong association has been found between occurrences of flow and skill level.

“Characteristics associated with the flow state seem to be generally absent for unskilled or low skilled individuals [whereas] individuals experiencing frequent occurrences of the characteristics associated with the flow state” (Blood, 2007, p. 86) report high skill levels. Collier’s survey research study (2011) examines the impact of textile creation on well-being for women who define themselves as textile handcrafters. “This study suggests that textile media may be therapeutically beneficial for women who already have fiber art skills” (Collier, 2001, p. 111). Her study shows consistent results with Blood’s study (2007). The percentage of participating women who use textile handcraft to cope with difficult moods (47.1%) “were also significantly more skilled and engaged in their handcraft making” (Collier, 2001, p. 111). From their study on motivational factors for contemporary women textile handcrafters to pursue the work of their ancestors, Johnson and Wilson (2005) extract three main themes:

First, participation in various textile handcraft activities provided the women an opportunity to identify their place in the world. Secondly, the production of the items—the act of doing—brought meaning to the women. Finally, tangible and intangible benefits were gained from the end products of their labor. (p. 118)

For these women, the practice of textile handcraft enhances their quality of life in a significant manner. It connects them to family, friends, and community, brings them recognition, and allows them to express their identity. This practice helps them cope with difficult life situations and daily stress by offering a sense of control, continuity and rhythm. As much as the women agree on the value of their practice for keeping tradition alive, they voice practicing their craft because they enjoy it rather than because they feel obligated. The commitment, planning and stages required for the production of textile handcrafts foster a sense of ownership of the creative process and “strong feelings of attachment” (Johnson & Wilson, 2005, p. 122) to their creation. Using McCracken’s viewpoint on locations of meanings, Johnson and Wilson (2005) show that in that process, the women imbue their handcrafted objects with symbolic qualities akin to

“possession rituals, in which the individual takes an object and makes it his or her own” (p. 122). The quality, the useful aspect and the uniqueness of their productions were also important factors in the meaning that women in Johnson and Wilson’s study (2005) established for making textile handcrafts. “These objects are valued by their creators as symbols of self, who feel textile handcrafts are special because they are made with love and are connected to personal histories” (Johnson & Wilson, 2005, p. 115). Riley (2008) found similar results in her study, showing that creative textile making enhances personal and collective sense of self for individuals who are members of a guild of weavers, spinners and dyers. As Collier (2012) exposes, women associate therapeutic effects to this kind of activity that can be aligned with Hinz’s (2009) framework of the *Expressive Therapies Continuum*. The sensory and kinesthetic qualities of this type of creative activity play an important role in the therapeutic process, as it has a grounding effect and induces a sense of flow. The cognitive and symbolic components are also important to underline in textile art making as it promotes a vehicle to help women create meaning out of their experiences. Through textile art making, women depict their conception of the world and express their emotions, which allows them to look at their problems and concerns more clearly. Reynolds (2002, 2004) has conducted several studies on the therapeutic value of textile arts for women suffering from chronic illness. Her results show that textile arts provides an “identity-enhancing function” (Reynolds, 2002, pp. 99-100) for that population by “preserving or regaining a satisfactory sense of self” (Reynolds, 2002, p. 99), as well as a sense of power, knowledge and skill. These studies show that the practice of textile arts helps these women cope with long-term illnesses and improve their quality of life, namely “through leading to social contacts … based on mutual interests” (Reynolds, 2002, p. 100). Moreover, these participants consider their creative occupation as an “escape, distraction or relaxation” (Reynolds, 2002, p. 100). Interestingly, the author states that “the findings demonstrated that individuals could reflect in detail upon the meanings of creative activities and could offer from a personal perspective, a careful analysis of their therapeutic elements” (Reynolds, 2002, p. 100). Textile art making inspired symbolic meaning for half of the participating women in Reynolds’s study (2002). Using a grounded theory approach, the central themes that emerged from these women’s accounts are that textile art making is used as a way to symbolize, transform and transcend one’s experience, in this case the experience of illness. In a subsequent study, Reynolds (2004) examines what themes inspire women textile artists living with long-term

health issues and what part does their illness play in terms of inspiration. Her results show that the participating artists find inspiration from a variety of sources:

The sensual qualities of color and texture, themes from nature, precious memories, personal and professional interests, and spiritual beliefs all found expression in the women's designs and styles. Having sufficient technique and an environment conducive to creativity were valued as enabling control over the creative process and achievement of a meaningful personal style. Most of the women enjoyed the spontaneity, immersion, and adventure inherent in their artistic work, and their descriptions approximated flow states. (p. 89)

Issues and feelings related to chronic illness were expressed through textile making by some women as way to accept and learn to live with their health problems. "Illness did not only inspire artwork through distress and loss, but through sharpening perceptions, heightening emotional sensitivity, and confronting the person with the deeper issues of life" (Reynolds, 2004, p. 89).

Having reviewed the main components of the research in respect to population, context, and therapeutic medium, it is clear that the situation and experience of mothers in prison is a topic which needs attention and that imprisoned mothers are an underserviced population. The therapeutic potential of fiber art making has not been explored for this population. It seems that it could offer interesting benefits for these women.

Methodology

The three dimensions examined in the Literature Review are the main components that informed this research's questions. These questions address my interest in what weaving as a therapeutic tool and expressive medium in group art therapy can reveal about the experience of incarcerated mothers: How does weaving as therapeutic medium and creative mode of expression inform the participating mothers about themselves and their imprisonment experience in the context of an art therapy group? What experiences do the participating mothers portray through their weaving? Does their weaving refer to their sense of identity as mothers? If so, how?

Having these questions in mind, I first expose in this section my philosophical position in regards to this research endeavor. Then, I explain the research methods of data collection and analysis chosen to conduct the project. For each method, I briefly address issues related to ethics. The next part of the section addresses aspects of research trustworthiness: validity, reliability, and reflexivity in the context of qualitative research, as well as ethical considerations

that pertain to the context and the population of the research and to my position in regards to this context and to this population. The last part of this section presents the project design and it's framework.

The wide umbrella under which this research project should be located is the interpretivist paradigm in that it “is interested primarily in the qualitative interpretation and understanding of human experience” (Kapitan, 2010, p. 44) and it is exploratory. My “assumptions about the nature of existence” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 38) and my “viewpoint on the nature of knowledge-building” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 38) form the philosophical basis in which this research project is grounded. I believe that each person experiences the world in a unique way and that each person’s identity is defined through the uniqueness of their experience. I also believe that people who live similar experiences define themselves according to common and shared concepts. It is my viewpoint that each person is the expert of one’s own experience, even though we are mostly able to grasp only partially at the complexity of experience that shapes us. Here, the notion of identity is bound to that of experience as exposed by Scott (1992) where:

It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced. (pp. 25-26)

Based on my personal beliefs outlined above, I tend to align myself with a subjective epistemology which “assumes that there are multiple truths regarding the social world and that knowledge gathering is always partial” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 282). A subjective epistemology encourages “the researcher … to be on the same plane as the researched in an effort to promote a co-construction of meaning” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 282). This epistemological standpoint also assumes that knowledge gathering is contextual (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), hence circumstances and environment are tied to meaning making. These ontological and epistemological standpoints draw me to adopt a feminist perspective as a frame of reference in conceiving of this research project. Feminist perspectives, as defined by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011, p. 27) “developed as a way to address the concerns and life experiences of women and girls, who, because of widespread androcentric (sexist) bias, had long been excluded from knowledge construction, both as researchers and as research subjects.” The feminist standpoint epistemology, pioneered by Smith (1974) and Hartsock (1983), is an

“approach … based on the assumption that in a hierarchically structured social world, different standpoints are necessarily produced” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 27). When one considers the women’s prison context, and the place incarcerated women who are mothers occupy in this context and in the wider social world, I think that adopting a feminist standpoint epistemology is unavoidable and essential to the understanding of these women’s experiences. As it is outlined above, some of the founding principles that motivated my will to conduct this project are aligned with the critical paradigm. My research questions stemmed from previous experiences with this population and from my desire to inquire about their “distinctive perspectives” (Kapitan, 2010, p. 45). It was although impossible to actualise a project that would correspond to the critical paradigm because of the constraints imposed by the university program within which it has been realised, such as the timeframe allotted to complete the project, the restricted size of the project and limited length of the research report. Nonetheless, if this research project could be a way to allow these women’s voices to be heard in academia and in the wider social world, my hope is that making their realities known might stimulate change on how they view themselves and how they are socially perceived.

The symbolic dimensions of weaving as concept and practice also underlined my methodological reflection. Weaving and its concept has inconspicuous ramifications in the English language: the Latin verb *texere*, which means to weave, was used “in the sense of ‘composing a written work’” (Scheid & Svenbro, 1996, p. 106), joining by their roots the concepts of writing text and of weaving fabric (Scheid & Svenbro, 1996). The interrelation between these two words links weaving with the idea of the narrative. Going further in considering the context of this research in relation to critical politics, Danto’s text *Weaving as Metaphor and Model for Political Thought* (2006) exposes Plato’s vision of the state as one where justice is the primordial principle and is the process of bridging social virtues into concordance to form a unified whole. This is done both in statesmanship and weaving by exercising “a certain kind of creative judgement—the ability to make decisions in the absence of rules and laws” (Danto, 2006, p. 34). The aim of this practice being the achievement of a just, equal and lasting society which includes all of its individual members into a sustainable woven fabric (Danto, 2006). From this perspective, art therapy in prison can participate in doing just that by providing a space to practice, through art making, making use of this sort of critical opinion and power in giving something existence.

Research Methods

Conceiving of art therapy as an integrative field and coming from a social sciences and arts background, I chose to combine different methods of inquiry. As a researcher in the field of art therapy, I understand part of my role was to be providing research participants access to tools and techniques that they could use to help them make sense of their unique and shared experiences. I also feel that my voice was important and could contribute to knowledge-building for my future field of practice and about the population that took part in this research project. The work of Sheila Hicks (Stritzler-Levine, 2006), contemporary fiber artist, and of Pat Allen (1995, 2005, 2012), art-therapist, guided my inspiration in designing this project.

Art-based and narrative strategies of inquiry. Johnson and Wilson's study (2005) about motivational factors of contemporary textile handcrafters underlines the feminist perspective that the practice of textile handcraft allows women to forge an understanding of their lives and place in the world through what Smith calls "experiential knowing" (as cited in Johnson & Wilson, 2005, p. 116). As Ice, Lippard, Nelson, and Labat and Williams have pointed, this is a feminist perspective where the artists' "perceptions of their own work ... reflects their lived experiences" (as cited in Johnson & Wilson, 2005, p. 116). Art-based strategies of inquiry function on the same basis of understanding and appraising the self and the world through the process and product of art making (Leavy, 2009; Jones, 2012). Aoki explains that art-based methods can be conceived as creating spaces of "generative possibilities" (as cited in Wilson, 2004, p. 47) for meaning-making by offering an opportunity to dwell within and between uncertainties, ambiguities, complexities, and paradoxes inherent to the art making experience (Wilson, 2004). These notions are tied to Polanyi's (1998) thinking about tacit knowledge as stemming from exercising one's power as creator and his "belief that creative acts of discovery are charged with strong personal feelings and commitments" (Prior, 2013, p. ix). Art making is then a primary way to tap into tacit knowledge which is not usually readily available through cognitive thinking but reveals itself through the process of reflection about the creative act. In that sense, art making can serve "as a vehicle of research" (McNiff, 2013, p. xiii) conveying "unique ways of examining and communicating experience" (McNiff, 2013, p. xiv). As a researcher in the field of art therapy, I share the viewpoint of creative arts therapies professionals that "art is way of knowing, problem solving, healing and transformation" (McNiff, 2013, p. xiii) that can substantially contribute to knowledge-building.

Important ethical issues are linked to art-based methods of data collection and analysis. Buckingham (2009) exposes important ethical dilemma about the use of ‘creative’ visual methods:

Data from ‘creative’ research cannot be taken at face value: these data need to be analysed, and we need to develop methods that can deal specifically with the visual dimensions of such material there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach. Analysis needs to address the ‘affordances’ of different modes of representation ... but it should also address the social meanings that attach to these modes, and the social expectations that surround them. (p. 648)

The discovery of Hicks’ miniature hand woven pieces influenced my thoughts about how to incorporate weaving as a creative and expressive medium into the inquiry process. As for Allen (1995, 2005, 2012), her way of framing the art making through first setting an intention, with *witness writing* following art making, provided a most useful tool to create narratives (see Appendices A and B). By combining these two techniques, I invited the research participants to follow a method similar to the one Wilson (2004) exposes in *Fragments*, where she investigates her own experience of mothering, loss, and hope through quilt making and narrative writing. She states “both the process of research and the ‘story fabric’ evolved as both written and visual, an interplay of image and text” (p. 42). This formed a process where image and text complemented and enhanced one another, “each resonating with the other” (Wilson, 2004, p. 50) to create “something different yet similar” (Irwin, 2004, p. 31). This brings the process of inquiry to a deeper level, with layers of richness and complexity of meaning. In a similar fashion, the combination of art-based and narrative strategies of inquiry aimed at allowing for this kind of richness and complexity to emerge as the participating mothers explored their lived experience in the art therapy research group setting.

Thematic analysis. Coming back to Scott (1992), who explores relationships between experience, language, and knowledge production, helped me figure ways to look at and analyse the research participants’ texts. If “experience is collective as well as individual” (Scott, 1992, p. 34), language is something that we share, but Scott (1992) “would not assume a direct correspondence between words and things, nor confine itself to single meanings, nor aim for the resolution of contradiction” (p. 34). Scott’s understanding “would not render process as linear ... Rather it would ... open new possibilities” (1992, p. 34). Sharing and communication of experience through language therefore rarely translates the fullness of experience. Using a

thematic analysis (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Bold, 2012; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012; Joffe, 2012; Paillé & Mucchielli, 2012; Riessman, 2008), my aim was to position myself as witness of the participating mothers' process of appraising their reality through their weaving work. The initial plan was for the analysis to be conducted on an ongoing basis, with the aim to enable me to reflect on what was emerging from the data back to the research participants, possibly creating a dialogue about it. In consultation with my academic supervisor, this method was discarded to limit 'contamination' of research participants with my interpretation of their art works or of their words. It was decided to first let the material emerge from the participants, trying to interfere as little as possible in that process, and to conduct the analysis of the written material in a subsequent phase of the research. The approach I chose was one that focuses on meaning in context, with an interpretive perspective, to try to get at the fundamental aspects of the mothers' experiences. The thematic analysis method I used consisted in systematically locating themes, verifying their recurrence, noticing how they overlapped or were joined together, and how they complemented and contradicted each other when grouped in relation to excerpts of the participants' texts. The aim of this method was to locate all the pertinent themes according to the research objectives in order to build a representative portrait of the mothers' experiences through predominant features. The procedure I used to attribute the themes to excerpts of the participants' texts was a continuous and progressive one, simultaneously going from theme attribution to portrait construction through an ongoing process of theme identification, grouping and merging, to create a hierarchy of central themes under which associated, divergent, and complementary themes were grouped. This way of working can become an intensive process and I had to come back several times to the basic questions of the research in order not get caught up into the elements that were less significant in terms of my research objectives. It is through this process that I chose and defined the themes that appeared to be most significant. When using this method, the findings are usually presented in the form of a diagram. Instead, I chose to present them within the text of the report because I wanted to address some nuances and implications of the findings, resulting from my subjective interpretation of the context (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012; Paillé & Mucchielli, 2012).

These methods of data gathering and analysing also bring the researcher to face ethical concerns at every step of the research process. In the context of this research, the risk for the narrator feeling "vulnerable or exposed by narrative work" (Chase, 2011, p. 424), stressed the importance of carefully planning and of disclosing how the results of the study will be presented,

and involved research participants in this decision making process. In this regard, the participating mothers showed appreciation that I cared about protecting the confidentiality of their personal information and were enthusiastic about the idea of their work being shared and displayed to testify of their experience.

In terms of the collected data, neither video nor audio recording were used in this research project. There was an intention on my part to keep the focus on the mother's experiences as they saw it through their own woven creations and as they translated it in writing. Recording would have increased the amount data gathered, making this first research project bigger than I could handle. The data collected was to be restricted to photographs of the woven pieces and transcriptions of the witness writings. This was put into question when two participants moved away from the weaving to use other art making media. In pulling out the consent form and in consultation with my ethics board advisor and my research supervisors, it was concluded that any artistic production created in the context of the research should be included as valid data as long as the participants agreed so. In reflecting upon this issue, I actually realized it is interesting data to consider as it represents 'disconfirming' cases, in the sense that they diverge from the general pattern of data (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). It is important to include such data as it may add to the value of the study by providing a guaranty of a more precise and poised account of findings and interpretations (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). Of those two participants, one decided to remove all written data. A third participant asked that the spontaneous art pieces she produced in the check ins, which were all writings, be included as research data.

There are many concerns about re-transcribing the participants' writings, as with transcription of recorded interviews. The original writings are artworks in themselves. Participants used writing creatively, using color and different mediums for their witness writing. In the re-transcription, I tried to stay as close to the writing expression as possible and keep the text flow when there seemed to be a specific formatting with paragraphs, line breaks and capitalised characters (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). I also chose not to make any spelling corrections to the texts, leaving them as unaltered as possible.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

What has been exposed above about art-based and narrative strategies of inquiry and thematic analysis make validity and reliability important aspects to consider for this qualitative approach to data collection and analysis (Silverman, 2006; Spencer & Ritchie, 2012). This

research being interpretive in nature, I wondered if it should be evaluated according to the emerging criteria exposed by Lincoln (2002). Although I believe that my approach to this project aimed at meeting some of these emerging criteria, such as positionality, attention to voice, reflexivity, reciprocity and sacredness, my lack of experience as a researcher and the exploratory nature of this project prevented me from attaining such high quality standards. I decided to stick with the classical terms of validity and reliability, interpreting them generally in the context of qualitative research. Having research quality and credibility in mind, I designed a research project that incorporated a systematic structure in the group where the mothers could write about their art making experience and their art production, and I scheduled a debriefing meeting at the end of the group project. These were ways to ensure a degree of credibility about the meaning of their artworks, and consequently of their experience. I considered their voice, their narrative, as interpretive findings regarding the artistic process and product of research and, simultaneously, as data to be further analysed according to a thematic analysis method. The application of the same structure for each group meeting allowed for stability and consistency across and throughout the project in an unstable context, lessening the impact of the women's absences on their participation. The application of systematic proceedings in the thematic analysis of the participating mothers' texts was used to try to extract the most relevant themes according to my experience as witness in this research process. Also, the continuous and progressive text analysis method chosen and the care put into staying as close as possible to the text in the theme inference process contributed to increasing the validity of the analysis. Furthermore, I submitted my analysis process and interpretations for review to my clinical research supervisor, who has been working with this population for many years, to verify if my findings make sense according to her professional judgement and knowledge (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). As part of the Findings and Interpretations section of this report, I provide a description of the group sessions with notes as to how I experienced this work with the participating mothers and with my interpretations of the group's dynamics. This information about the context of the research hopefully allows to situate my perspective in the practice, acknowledging the impact or influence of my presence on the data generated from the participants and letting my biases be seen (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012; Riessman, 2008).

Ethical concerns in this research project have been closely considered. The hierarchical structure and authoritative culture of the prison context may jeopardize the researcher's credibility if the researcher is not perceived by research participants to be independent from the

prison structure. On the other hand, the multiple marginalization factors exposed in the Literature Review which characterises the researched population makes potential research participants vulnerable subjects. Moreover, incarcerated mothers are stripped of their power to exercise their basic social roles such as being the caregiver for their children and assuming the responsibilities that come along with being a mother. In this context, the power imbalance between myself as researcher, therapist, and ‘free person’ and the incarcerated mothers as research participants in an art therapy group is significant. Conditions were put in place and imbedded in the research protocol to ensure that the women have the ability and the possibility to consent freely and in an informed manner to their participation in the research project. These conditions involved providing as complete and as transparent as possible information about the research project, its aims, underpinnings and foreseen outcomes. It also involved screening out women for whom the risk of potential harms would be too high, for example women who are waiting for trial for a crime committed against their children. The screening procedure excluded women who were under protection and maximum security regimes. Women under these regimes are not allowed to mix with the general prison population for their own protection and others’ safety. This screening procedure limited participation in the research project to the women in the general prison population. Under these conditions, this research project has been assessed by the Concordia University research ethics board as falling in the threshold of minimal risk, since “the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research is no greater than those encountered by participants in those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research” (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2010, p. 23). In other words, participation in this research project did not put participating women at further risk of potential harms or bring added detrimental consequences than what they are exposed to on a day to day basis in the prison environment. On the contrary, my assumption was that participants should gain benefits from their participation in this project. As is stated in the American Art Therapy Association *Ethical Principles for Art Therapists* mission statement: “the creative process involved in the making of art is healing and life-enhancing” (2009, p. 1). This being said, participating mothers were encouraged to monitor their ability and willingness to participate throughout the research project, knowing that they have the agency to make choices in regards to their participation at all times during the course of the project and that they can withdraw themselves at any time without consequences. Since women from aboriginal

communities represent a disproportionately high number of the prison population, the researcher was expecting an incidental participation of women who identify in some way as Aboriginal. Even though the proposed project is not intended to study specific characteristics of Aboriginal people or communities, the researcher remained sensitive to the expression of cultural identity and needs. This statement actually applies for all socially oppressed minorities.

Project Design and Framework

The project took place in 2015, in a Quebec provincial detention centre. The art therapy room of the prison is situated on the ground floor. It is an oblong space, sort of like a large corridor. On the width, the door and a large window separate the inside of the room from the control station of the prison guards and an inmate living sector on the other side. On the length, the thick exterior wall is pierced with four windows with a view on the delivery dock and garbage area. Working tables are set along this wall. The two other walls separate the room from another sector of the prison: The short wall is where the sink and some storage cupboard are installed. The long wall is used to hang up participants images in sessions. The project was designed with Buckingham's (2009) considerations in mind, outlined in the Research Methods section above. This was implemented by creating a custom structure with methods that allowed for data gathering and analysis to be adapted to the creative and visual dimensions of the data, as well as to the context of the research setting.

In order to recruit research participants, I created simple posters which briefly described the research project, criteria, and how to contact me (see Appendices C and D). I announced the project to the women in the general prison population by visiting each wing, briefly presenting and explaining the project and to putting up the posters. Eligibility criteria were: to be a mother and to have basic writing skills, no fiber handcraft skills were required. Mothers interested in participating were invited to contact me through the internal mail system. I then met with each potential participant individually to explain the project in further details and hand them written information about the project (see Appendices E and F). If they decided on participating, I obtained their informed consent (see consent forms in Appendices G and H), asked them to fill out a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix I), and to answer the first survey question from Collier's (2012) textile survey regarding their experience with textile arts (see Appendix J). A bilingual art therapy group was formed, welcoming a maximum of eight women at a time, which identified themselves as mothers. The group met twice a week for three hours, over six sessions, in a period of three weeks. A debriefing meeting was scheduled when the group ended. This

schedule was chosen in collaboration with the prison administrative staff with consideration for the availability of the art therapy room, the daily prison routine and various programs to allow for maximum participation. Each group session was planned to follow the same structure, comprised of three phases. In the first phase, the participating mothers were invited to make a quick expressive image to share the state in which they are entering the art therapy space. This first art making activity is modeled over the structure of the regular art therapy services provided in the detention center. It serves as a form of visual check in, and allows the women to discuss pressing concerns or their general mood. Visual material produced in this phase was not to be considered as research data. It was incorporated to allow for a ‘free space’ within the research group for the participating women to express themselves. In the second phase, the women were invited to move into individual weaving projects, exploring fiber art materials that could be incorporated into a small handcrafted piece (approximate dimensions: 6 in. by 6 in. [15 cm per 15 cm]). They were first guided into building a frame out of small precut tree branches and setting up the wrap yarn on this frame. The woven piece was then constituted by the interlacing of other yarn or different elements through the warp yarn. The weaving process was presented as the primary means of artistic self-expression and therapeutic medium in the context of the research. This second art making phase, framed by Allen’s witness writing process, fostered a personal reflection around the art making. It was used to provide the research participants with a framework to process their creative experience and to produce a written narrative. In the third and last phase, the women were invited to choose a part from their writing to share with the group. This last step served as the group closure. After each group session, I transcribed the writings and photographed the woven pieces, whether in progress or finished. This group structure and data collection method was designed in light of the context, where there is a high likelihood of absences and dropouts in the group due to various conflicts of schedule and the possibility that women may be liberated at any point during the course of the project.

Findings and Interpretations

In this section, I first present a description of group participants and group process. This is followed by the results of the research and the analysis. The artistic and narrative results are presented through a selection of the completed or in progress participants’ weavings accompanied with extracts from their witness writings. The results from my thematic analysis of the participants’ texts are presented as a parallel voice. Pseudonyms are used in the presentation of results to ease reading and comprehension. The section ends with some of the project’s limitations.

The Group

A total of ten women volunteered their participation, signed the consent form and filled out the two questionnaires. Before the group sessions started, one participant decided to withdraw her participation. There was a conflict in her schedule where she had to choose between participating in this project and continuing individual therapy sessions she was already receiving. The total sample size for the project was then of nine participants.

The group was comprised of French and English speaking participants. From the demographic questionnaires, I gathered that the age range of group participants varied between 20 and 65 years old. The average age in the group was 37 years old, the median age was 33 years old. All participants identified themselves as “female”, “women”, “féminin” or “femme” in relation to their gender. In terms of cultural appurtenance, two participants did not provide any answer, from these two, one identified as a member of an aboriginal community later in the group; two participants provided one cultural identity: “Jamaican”, and “Québécoise”. The five other participants identified with at least two cultural markers: “Christian faith” and “Canadian”, “in between Inuit and white”, “Canadian” and “American”, “Québécoise” and “française”, and “canadienne française”. In terms of their civil status, five participants answered to be “single” or “célibataire”, two participants answered “common law” or “conjointe”, one participant answered to be “widow”, and another one to be “divorcée”. Regarding their level of education, four participants declared having various levels of secondary education, four other participants declared having college or equivalent education levels, and one having an undergraduate university education level. Two participants did not provide any answer regarding their source of income, two other participants answered having no source of income, three participants answered having income from work, student loans or pension, two participants answered receiving social assistance. As for the scale of their income, three participants did not provide any answer, five participants declared earning less than \$ 20 000 per year, one participant declared earning between \$ 20 000 and \$ 30 000 per year. The number of children per participant ranged from 1 to 6, with an average of 2.6 and a median of 2 children per participant. Considered as a group, the participating women’s children age ranged from 3 months to 41 years old.

In comparing the demographic information about this group of mothers to data reported in the literature about imprisoned women population, most characteristics gathered about this group seem to align themselves closely to what is reported in the literature except for the level of education which seems to be higher in this research group. It is difficult to affirm this sample to

be representative since the size of the group is small, some information is missing and other characteristics have not been collected such as health conditions and history of abuse.

From the results of Collier's (2012) textile experience survey (see table of results in Appendix K), as a group, the participants had tried fifteen of the eighteen techniques listed. The range of techniques tried by each participant varied from two to nine, with an average of five and a median of four techniques tried per participant. Most participants rated their skills as moderate or good for most techniques they had tried. Most participants reported typically spending one to two hours for most techniques they use.

The group sessions started as soon as eight participants agreed to take part in the research project. A ninth participant was integrated into the research project after the second group session had taken place. Since she volunteered her participation after the group had started, it was understood that she would be invited to participate when there was a space to welcome her in the group since a maximum of eight people could attend at a time. Participation was unsteady for various reasons. Some participants, specifically in the beginning of the project, could not attend sessions because they were on a work schedule and had not yet been released of their task by the prison administration. Not attending work meant they would lose their job. Some participants did not attend sessions or left early because they had other therapeutic activities scheduled at the same time as the research group. Some participants' health condition and medical follow up or periods of confinement had an impact on their attendance, and some participants sometimes chose to leave the group early to benefit from their scheduled outdoor time. Early in the group process, participants stated the need for a break at mid-session, which was readily implemented. The group framework was for the most part respected; it had to be adapted to the fluidity of participants' attendance, sometimes becoming an individual process within the group structure, but always finding ways to bring it back into the group flow. The following description of the sessions is based on my observations and my experience of the group process; it is therefore a subjective account.

Six participants attended the first group session, one of them for half of the session. This first session was charged with strong emotions, creating a climate of uncertainty in the group. Participants appeared to be in reaction to the unknown nature of the techniques and medium presented, which was manifested through various emotional states ranging from excitement and curiosity, to nervousness and frustration. Some demonstrated their enthusiasm towards acquiring new knowledge, while others reacted with frustration before a process still unknown to them. I

was for the most part nervous of starting my first research project with a group of participants, having a feeling of not knowing what I was doing and trying to think of everything I should be doing. Recognizing this feeling in myself and in the group, sharing about these emotions became the focus of the discussion and these feelings started to make sense in the presenting context. In this first session, I completely forgot to instruct the participants to state an intention before having them start to build their weaving frame.

Five participants attended the second group session, one of them for the first half of the session, another coming in half an hour after the beginning and leaving half an hour before the end. I prepared myself more rigorously for this second session, with a structured plan and examples and advice on weaving techniques. I started with congratulating the group participants for their persistence with the process despite challenging beginnings, reiterating the importance of showing oneself some indulgence in circumstances where we are faced with uncertainty. This second session had an overall less constrained feel than the first one. Participants seemed more at ease and composed. They peacefully worked at finding their own rhythm, patiently becoming familiar with the weaving process. They were starting to realize and to accept that making mistakes is an inherent component of this process and that it is a way of learning. At this point, they started envisioning what their piece could become, and through this mechanism, seemed to project themselves into future self-representations. They voiced their gratitude for having access to this space, which they definitely consider as a different space within the prison.

Seven participants attended the third group session, one of them for the first hour of the session. The general energy level seemed low among participants on this third session. They were in good spirits but looked tired and seemed to have trouble concentrating. They were easily distracted by the internal prison activity we could see through the art therapy room window. Nonetheless, some participants seemed to find a way, through the weaving, to turn their attention inward and to become tuned to themselves. The weaving process seemed to expand into some sort of reflective space, allowing some participants to think out loud about their experience. This seemed to help them gain some perspective about their situation. In this third group session, two participants moved away from the weaving to use collage and drawing as their means of creative expression. One of them felt she was finished with her piece. She did not want to continue with it or start another one. The other participant had a negative reaction to her production. She did not want to see it anymore and later asked that it be removed from the research data. The session

ended on a positive note. Participants left the group with a sense of accomplishment in beginning to see the results of their work and with pride in regards to their perseverance with the process.

Eight participants attended the fourth group session, three of them for the first half of the session, and three others leaving about an hour before the end. This fourth group session began in a heightened energy. I made a point of reminding the participants about the importance of mutual respect and to pay attention to each other. It seems that they progressively invested this energy into the weaving process, working on their piece with intention as if they were letting themselves become absorbed in the process. In the last hour of the session, the two participants that stayed until the end had heavy testimonies to share. They seemed to leave with some relief and expressed their gratitude to each other for having felt listened to and accepted.

Seven participants attended the fifth group session, one of them for the first hour of the session, three others leaving an hour before the end. Participants arrived to this fifth session with a mix of feelings and emotions mostly linked to the prospect of their approaching liberation, or to their condition of imprisonment and its more or less lengthy perspective. Most participants felt anxious. For some, it translated into excitement and joy, while for others, feelings of sadness, sorrow and grief were predominant. Some participants had trouble identifying and describing their inner state. The group became rather quiet, filling the room simultaneously with feelings of calm and absence. The participants seemed to use the weaving process as a way to connect with and follow their inner rhythm.

Eight participants attended the sixth group session, one of them for the first hour, four others for the first half of the session, and another one joining the group at mid-session. The atmosphere of this last session felt tinged with respect, mutual attention and support. Participants showed themselves available to welcome emotions shared in the group and demonstrated compassion towards one another. They shared and showed their pride in regards to the accomplishment of their weaving projects, recognizing and explicitly transposing the challenges they faced in carrying out this project to those they were experiencing in their lives at the time. It seems that the weaving experience helped them conceive that they have the capacities to face difficulties that present themselves to them and maintain self assurance in their ability to sustain and overcome them, creating a sense of hope that they can survive this imprisonment experience and move forward in their life. Part of this session was dedicated to a group debriefing process, since many were not sure they could attend the planned debriefing session in the following week. The participants confirmed which data could be used in the

research report and expressed the main theme, or the thread, they followed through their weaving along these research group sessions.

Three participants attended the debriefing session, which lasted an hour and took place a week after the group sessions ended. This debriefing session was an opportunity for the attending participants to share their comments about the group experience and to revisit specific moments in the process that were important to them. The art therapeutic space seems to have been beneficial. They voiced having found a place where they felt included and listened to with respect, and where they found a moment of peace through the art making. They shared that participating to this project brought them to face the insecurity they feel towards their own capacities to succeed at something and that they come out of this experience with a feeling of accomplishment and pride. They expressed the importance of having access to resources that provide help and support throughout their incarceration.

Artworks and Witness Writings

The selection of images and texts excerpts presented below are the results of the art based and narrative strategies of inquiry suggested to participant to express themselves creatively about the nature of their experience.



Figure 1. Nadja, session 4.

I leave soon I will make it!

Pink feathers, blue rose. Pink string, sparkles

My piece is a symbol of love and beautiful intention, I will fly, I will be Free

I will take back My Life, and rise again (Nadja, sessions 4 and 5)



Figure 2. Nadja, session 5.

Go with the flow

I picked up some new sticks and my intention was to make a dream catcher. But this way
my inventive way of figuring

I see Beauty, I see strength, it turned out Beautiful

I feel calm, another thing that's beautiful during my day

ANYthing CAN BE BEAUTIFUL (Nadja, session 5)



Figure 3. Rachel, session 6.

I will communicate with my “art” piece and find inner peace within myself
Today I’m feeling a bit anxious, well basically; I’m feeling a lot of mixed emotions. My daughter is finally coming to visit me after 5 months of not seeing her, and I’m excited!!
I honestly don’t know what to feel but right now I’m happy....

When I first look at it “my piece” I’m amazed at the way it turned out. Besides amazement, I see my culture. Something that finally represents me in all aspects. It’s simply beautiful and the gold glitter just adds glamour and fun to it. My piece in a way really describes my character. Also, it has my favorite color in it, which is yellow
I didn’t think it would have come out well, but I am proud of not only the art piece but also with myself by not giving up, and by continuing to push myself into completing something.

As mentioned above, my piece is me, its telling me to always have patience, to not give up not only on my art work but also on myself because you never know on the wonderful things and feelings it may bring. (Rachel, sessions 4 and 6)



Figure 4. Léa, session 4.

Mon “objet” me fait penser à mes enfants parce que je sais qu’à la fin de mon “art”, ça sera un cadre avec un cœur tisser avec de la laine. Les couleurs aux coins de mon “objet” sont bleu et rose, donc, c’est pour ça que ça me fait penser à mes enfants. Le fond noir va faire ressortir le cœur rose que je ferai plus tard. Je vais écrire “Je t’aime” aussi en haut du cœur. Ça va faire beau et je vais le mettre dans la chambre de mes enfants. J’aime faire cette activité parce que j’ai hâte de faire un autre “objet” comme ça avec mes filles. Elles vont aimer ça. Et j’aime le sentiment de retourner en enfance que cette activité me procure. Ça me rend joyeuse. C’est objet me demande: «qu’est-ce que je vais devenir?» Et moi je lui réponds qu’il va devenir un cadre sur le mur de deux fillettes. Et ce cadre donnera de la joie et de l’amour aux petites filles qui le regarderont.
(Léa, session 1)



Figure 5. Simone, session 3.

I am overcoming my anger

I like what I've done to my weaving, but I see I made a mistake so I will correct it. I feel good about knowing how to make something pretty

I like how I've done the wraps also the colors. The wefts look good, it is interesting to see how it's turning out, colors are cool too.

"Can you try to make me feel even, because at first I started understanding where I was going and then! What the _____ happened? Are you trying to drive me nuts?"

(Simone, session 3)

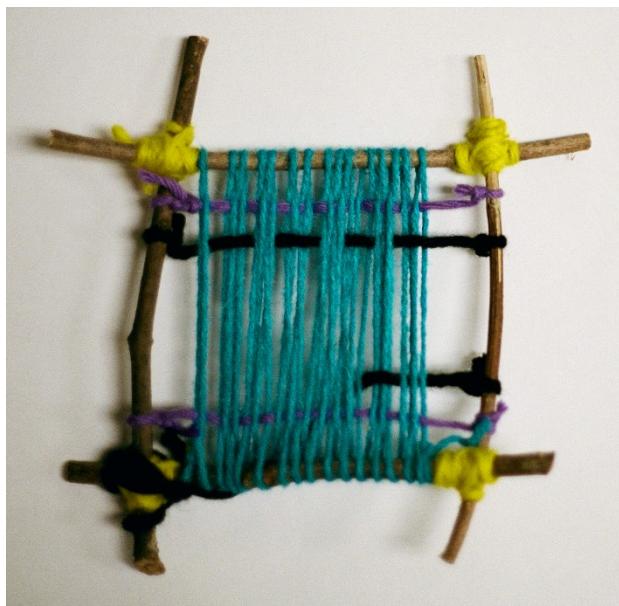


Figure 6. Simone, session 5.

I want to find out about how to think that it is okay to make mistakes and not get angry for being wrong. Just do my best to learn from them. Do not be so hard on myself. It is nice and strong. The colors are not bad, but it seems to be loose. All in all, it is going to the right road that it should be going to.

I feel as if I'm in a quicksand (my problems) and I'm sinking fast. I can hardly breathe!
Help! I don't know what to do.

Just be patient because you are not wrong (Simone, session 5)



Figure 7. Sharlene, session 4.

I pursue happiness & peace

I see a beautiful object with orange and purple feathers, wood and purple ribbon and orange and green yarn.

I feel I lost my childhood because I was abused, my art is a way to get in touch with my inner child, I'm not perfect and I am perfect in a Divine way, my wing is broken but still beautiful and special.

Being in touch with my inner child is a way to be happy and creating art is a way to achieve peace (Sharlene, session 4)



Figure 8. Sharlene, session 6.

I am creating something beautiful

Sparkle, really nice art with feathers, wood, wool & ribbon. I have time & space to regroup & heal, I like what I have created, it's pretty & relaxing to gaze upon, proud of my piece, surprised by its beauty. "Keep it simple, let love flow, I will help you, stay in the day & be strong in faith, think of the future when I'll see my son, let go & let God carry my burden, my inner self is emerging." (Sharlene, session 6)



Figure 9. Cynthia, session 1.

A diamond / square object with different colors wrapped around pieces of sticks...

Feelings of confusion; frustration; anger towards this piece it was my first time...

(Cynthia, session 1)

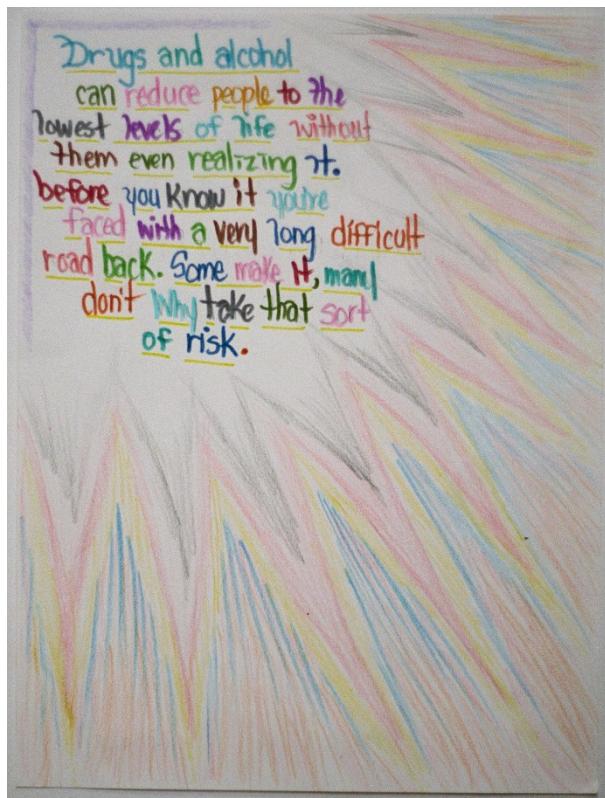


Figure 10. Nyna, session 3.



Figure 11. Véronica, session 6.

Je vois une cocotte de pin, de l'écorce, un brin de nature....

Je vois du rouge, du noir et du jaune et aussi des attaches de métal pour liqueur.

Je me sens fière!! Je suis heureuse de ce que j'ai accompli malgré les doutes que je me porte durant le temps que je le fais. J'aimerais que mon fils soit avec moi car il aime faire du bricolage avec moi. Il me manque...

Elle me dit, «tu es le fils jaune...» «le métal sont les menottes que tu te met toi-même aux pieds et aux mains» l'écorce est ce que tu aimerais atteindre. Vivre libre...

(Véronica, session 6)

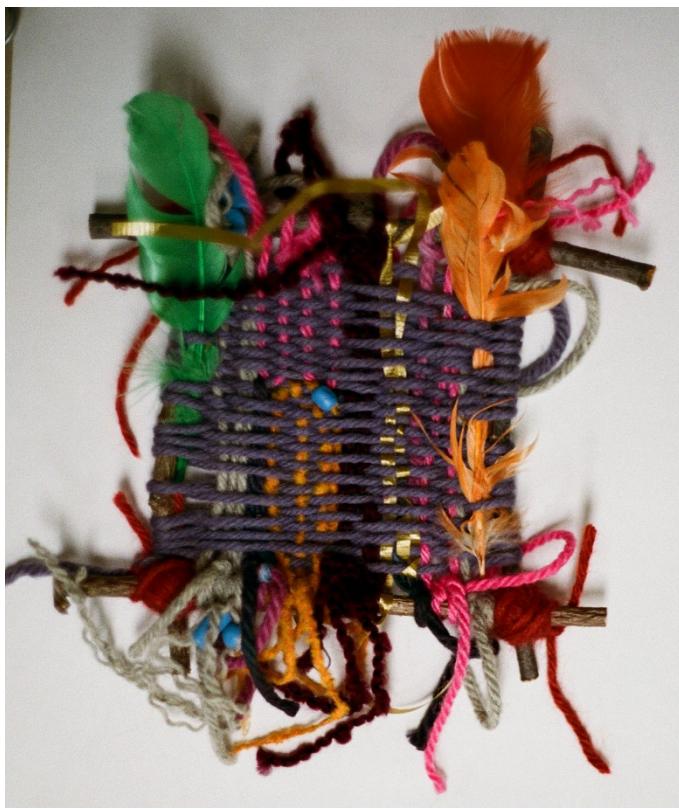


Figure 12. Séverine, session 5.

J'ai l'intention d'exprimer une œuvre en sachant que vivant et beau
La joie de vivre, le soleil, la beauté, des couleurs vives la vie heureuse. L'amour une
émotion de pensé à ma fille et mon petit fils qui s'en viens bientôt je vais être bientôt
grand-maman pour la troisième fois et je suis heureuse.
Elle me dirait qu'elle se sent bien et belle en l'ayant fabriqué de mes mains
Elle se sent bien et heureuse et belle (Séverine, session 5)

Thematic Analysis

The results from my thematic analysis of the participants' texts are presented here as a parallel voice. I organized the themes according to the research project objectives, extracting what was fundamental about the participants' experience. Using the same structure as for the literature review, the thematic analysis regroups themes that pertain to the participating mothers' experience of imprisonment, their experience of the art therapy group, and their experience of weaving. It is important to keep in mind that the presentation of the themes found throughout the

witness writings is presented in a static and synthetic organisation. In the reality of the participating mothers' experience, these themes intersect and overlap in a somewhat more complex and fluid way. The fundamental aspect of the mothers' experience as it comes out of this thematic analysis -the theme which transcends and crosses over all other themes- is the theme of *creating beauty*. This theme speaks of the importance for these women to search for, to bring about and to give life to the qualities that provide pleasure and delight to the mind and the senses. In a context where beauty is a rarity, it seems an act of salvation and restoration.

The imprisonment experience. Themes united under the participants' experience of imprisonment are associated with the four major themes presented below: *staying alive, keeping ties with children, searching for inner peace, and looking forward*.

Staying alive is a theme which encompasses the themes of *being a survivor, being unique, and finding protection*. The theme of staying alive is connected with the notion of vitality, its fullness, its force, strength and vigour. It stands in opposition to and as a resistance against the binding power of imprisonment, a state which can symbolically be associated to death. This theme relates to the necessity to stay connected with what sustains and produces life, and to the capacities and the strategies used to endure the imprisonment experience. By writing "I leave soon I will make it!" Nadja (session 4) expresses her capacity to uphold the state of imprisonment by identifying as a survivor. The words of Cynthia express how she plans to bear the remainder of her time in prison:

My intention is to keep on looking forward, being me, not let people get to me, do my time next thing I'll be out, I don't have much time left. So I'm going to keep on doing what I need to do till then. (session 4)

Simone expresses the theme of being a survivor by associating survival to strength through the voice of her weaving: "my structures are nice and strong sturdy. So I'll be able to survive" (session 4). In relation to having been abused as a child, Sharlene expresses being a survivor by writing "I'm not perfect and I am perfect in a Divine way, my wing is broken but still beautiful and special" (session 4). Defining oneself as separate and not the same as others is a way to salvage one's identity and individuality. Being unique is a theme that references the perceptions of participants as being unlike others. For Simone, it is expressed through the voice of her weaving. "I am nice and colorful and have different shapes... I am ME (UNIQUE)" (session 4). For Nadja, it shows through how she sees her weaving as "different" (session 1), and how she does things "this way my inventive way of figuring" (session 5). This theme also appears in the

work of Rachel, who sees her creation as representing personal aspects of herself. “My piece in a way really describes my character. Also, it has my favorite color in it, which is yellow” (session 6). Feeling protected is a basic human need that seems to be under threat in the prison context. Finding protection appears as a theme through the association several participants make between their weaving and the dream catcher. As Sharlene writes, the weaving as dream catcher seems to hold the magic powers of the talisman, hence becoming a symbol of protection:

My dream catcher is soft purple wool with purple ribbons & a wooden frame. It's pretty. I feel scared like I will crack from missing my son, I'm proud of my work, I'm proud of my son, I hope he is really o.k. I protected him, my dream catcher will protect both of us.

(session 5)

This need for protection extends to the mother’s children. Being rendered unable to exercise this function because of the separation due to imprisonment, their weaving becomes a symbolic way to restore a mother’s protective function for her children. The need to find protection for themselves and for their children is linked to the identity as survivor. Along the lines of what the literature exposes (Celinska & Siegel, 2010; Ferraro & Moe, 2003), these themes seem to point at the sense of disempowerment these mothers can feel. Connecting with the identity of survivor seems to reference associations with past trauma and with the need to call for personal strengths and resources in order to face the danger and resist the threats and injuries to the sense of identity that represents the imprisonment experience (Berry & Eigenberg, 2003; Berry & Smith-Mahdi, 2006). on the other hand, the weaving becomes a symbolic act of subversion and an object through which they regain a sense of power.

Keeping ties with children encompasses the themes of *worrying about children, missing children, making something for children* and *seeing children*. These themes convey the feelings imprisoned mothers experience in relation to being separated from their children and the importance to continue to hold their caring role while in prison. They preserve the bonds that connect them to their children through various means. The theme of worrying about children appears in the writing of Sharlene and is linked to the theme of finding protection, she writes “I’m proud of my son, I hope he is really o.k. I protected him, my dream catcher will protect both of us” (session 5). Sharlene expresses being afraid of not being able to sustain the pain associated with the loss she feels from the absence of her child. “I feel scared like I will crack from missing my son” (session 5). The theme of missing children is also expressed in relation to time by Cynthia, after she created a drawing with her sons’ names. “I miss them so much it’s been months since

I've seen them" (session 3); and in relation to the art therapy space by Véronica: "Quand je suis ici je pense beaucoup à mon petit garçon. Anthony tu es dans mes pensées et dans mon cœur" (session 2). The theme of missing children is also associated with doing something that mothers usually do with their child. "J'aimerais que mon fils soit avec moi car il aime faire du bricolage avec moi. Il me manque..." (Véronica, session 6), or something that children would like to do:

Mon "objet" me fait penser à mes enfants parce que je sais qu'à la fin de mon "art", ça sera un cadre avec un cœur tisser avec de la laine. Les couleurs aux coins de mon "objet" sont bleu et rose, donc, c'est pour ça que ça me fait penser à mes enfants. Le fond noir va faire ressortir le cœur rose que je ferai plus tard. Je vais écrire "Je t'aime" aussi en haut du cœur. Ça va faire beau et je vais le mettre dans la chambre de mes enfants. J'aime faire cette activité parce que j'ai hâte de faire un autre "objet" comme ça avec mes filles. Elles vont aimer ça. (Léa, session 1)

The previous citation also exemplifies the theme of making something for children. Here, making something for children seems to point at the weaving as an object that contains and can transmit the mother's love for her children. Léa also expresses this idea through a dialogue with her weaving. She writes:

C'est objet me demande: "qu'est-ce que je vais devenir? Et moi je lui réponds qu'il va devenir un cadre sur le mur de deux fillettes. Et ce cadre donnera de la joie et de l'amour aux petites filles qui le regarderont. (session 1)

Having to make a decision about seeing children by having them visit them at the prison is part of some mothers' experience of imprisonment. Rachel shared her feelings about this process as she was making up her mind. In the first session she attends, she writes "the only question that's on my mind for the past 2 weeks is whether or not I would want my daughter to come visit me here... I do & then I don't...." and in a later session:

Today I'm feeling a bit anxious, well basically; I'm feeling a lot of mixed emotions. My daughter is finally coming to visit me after 5 months of not seeing her, and I'm excited!! I honestly don't know what to feel but right now I'm happy.... (session 6)

These themes speak to the participants' experience of imprisonment in showing the "central emotional focus" (Boudin, 2008, p. 104) the relationship to children occupies for these mothers. As several studies have already pointed (Frigon & Duhamel; Borrill & al.; Frigon as cited in Giroux & Frigon, 2011), these themes confirm the psychological distress mothers experience from being separated from their children. As Boudin's (1998) and Shamai and Kochal's (2008)

studies reveal, the meaning of mothers' experience in prison encompasses the need to address loss associated to separation from children. The themes related to keeping ties with children show how the weaving can help to address the sense of loss experienced by mothers.

Searching for inner peace encompasses the themes of *offering oneself kindness and forgiveness, building self-confidence and esteem and going with the flow*. These themes are associated with and refer to a quiet and calm state of being which these participants seem to look for and try to achieve. This search for peacefulness seems to be a way to alleviate the stress caused by imprisonment, and the anxiety aroused by the prison environment, with its constant noise and disturbances. Offering oneself kindness and forgiveness appears as a process towards self-acceptance for Sharlene. In dialogues with her weaving, she receives these words: "This piece is saying 'hold me gently'" (session 1) and "be gentle with me & allow me to be beautiful" (session 3). For Simone this theme also appears through the voice of her weaving, where forgiveness seems a process requiring tolerance and time. "Just be patient because you are not wrong" (session 5). The initial uncertainty and lack of confidence participants expressed in the beginning of the project and the feelings of pride they showed as they saw achievement in their artwork calls attention to the importance of building self-confidence and esteem for these women. The words of Rachel are a good example of this theme. "I didn't think it would have come out well, but I am proud of not only the art piece but also with myself by not giving up, and by continuing to push myself into completing something" (session 6). Simone seems to express the same ideas in different terms:

Because I know what I'll have to do next, I'm not as frustrated as I was before so I'm more confident. I'm proud of my work. I will not judge myself even when I make a mistake, try to learn from it instead. (session 2)

Véronica writes: "Je me sens fière!! Je suis heureuse de ce que j'ai accompli malgré les doutes que je me porte durant le temps que je le fais" (session 6). Through Léa's words, this theme appears as a goal she wishes to attain. "Je veux finir mon projet pour être fière de moi" (session 4). Going with the flow is a theme that refers to the experience of flow as it is explained in the Literature Review section of this report. Through her weaving, Nadja expresses her way at going with the flow, which seems to induce a quiet and peaceful feeling:

I picked up some new sticks and my intention was to make a dream catcher. But this way my inventive way of figuring. I see Beauty, I see strength, it turned out Beautiful. I feel

calm, another thing that's beautiful during my day. ANYthing CAN BE BEAUTIFUL.
(session 5)

Cynthia seems to refer to this state of flow after she created a collage representing her feelings and her interests. She writes: "my thoughts I have none they are out there floating around in the air!" (session 3). Séverine describes her experience in these words:

Je me sens bien en enlevant mon stress. Je suis heureuse et fière en ce moment. Je te pose une question est ce que tu es content que je travaille sur toi en te décorant avec de la laine? Moi je suis contente. (session 3)

Sharlene expresses how she reaches this state. "Being in touch with my inner child is a way to be happy and creating art is a way to achieve piece" (session 4), and she offers a description of her experience:

I like what I have created, it's pretty & relaxing to gaze upon, proud of my piece, surprised by its beauty. "Keep it simple, let love flow, I will help you, stay in the day & be strong in faith, think of the future when I'll see my son, let go & let God carry my burden, my inner self is emerging. (session 6)

Lastly, Rachel links these three themes together by writing "my piece is me, its telling me to always have patience, to not give up not only on my art work but also on myself because you never know on the wonderful things and feelings it may bring" (session 6). Through the weaving, the mothers seem to fulfill their needs to connect with a sense of worth, a positive self-image, and a source of hope. These elements have been found by Celinska and Siegel (2010) and Ferraro and Moe (2003) to be positively associated with motherhood when women are faced with having to maintain their identity as mothers while being imprisoned. On the other hand, these themes could hide feelings of shame and guilt that incarcerated mothers experience, as studies by Boudin's (1998) and Shamai and Kochal's (2008) expose.

Looking forward is a theme which encompasses the themes of *being free*, *letting go* and *being reunited with children*. The theme of looking forward addresses the ways in which participants cast their thoughts into the future and direct their mind towards what may take place until they get out and once they are liberated. For some, enabling this process involves releasing their hold of certain dimensions of their past and present experience to allow for the possibility of a brighter future. The theme of being free appears in a few participants' writings. Liberty is symbolised by the idea of flying as Nadja writes "I will fly, I will be free" (session 5). It is associated with standing upright, becoming visible, living again or having a new life. It also

seems to be connected to the notion of taking back power, as when she writes “I will take back My Life, and rise again” (session 5). This statement seems to reference becoming free again both as a return to life and as regaining power over her life. Simone expresses the theme of letting go in working at her weaving as a way of overcoming her anger. She draws this conclusion from witnessing her weaving: “If I could let go of my anger in life, I think I’d have easier times and not be so negative” (session 4). Before starting with her weaving in the next session, she states her intention as: “I want to find out about how to think that it is okay to make mistakes and not get angry for being wrong. Just do my best to learn from them. Do not be so hard on myself” (session 5). For two other participants, mourning is the process through which they untie themselves from their past and allow themselves to look forward. Séverine states her intention as follows: “Je fais le deuil d’une relation qui m’a déçu et je vais de l’avant pour une belle expérience et un avenir nouveau” (session 1). Sharlene shares this piece of her writing with the group:

I feel I lost my childhood because I was abused, my art is a way to get in touch with my inner child, I’m not perfect and I am perfect in a Divine way, my wing is broken but still beautiful and special. (session 4)

For her, feeling the loss of her childhood seems to be a way of letting go of the past and is linked to seeing herself as being a survivor. The theme of being reunited with children is linked to the one of being free as Cynthia states when writing about the drawing she made of her sons’ names. “I miss them so much it’s been months since I’ve seen them. I can’t wait to get out and see them!” (session 3). For her, this theme is translated as a feeling of eagerness to see her children again. Léa shares that feeling to be joined together again with her children and to share common activities with them. She states “j’ai hâte de faire un autre ‘objet’ comme ça avec mes filles” (session 1). For her, the whole weaving project serves a way to project herself into her soon to be renewed relationship with her children. This theme also comes forth as manifestation of trust and is linked to the theme of letting go when Sharlene shares this piece of her writing with the group: “stay in the day & be strong in faith, think of the future when I’ll see my son, let go & let God carry my burden” (session 6). These themes seem to connect the weaving with a sense of hope and purpose that Celinska and Siegel (2010) and Ferraro and Moe (2003) identified in how incarcerated mothers perceive their children as motivational factors towards making their future better than their past.

The art therapy group experience. Two participants wrote about their experience of the art therapy group through their witness writings. Both participants seem to consider the art therapy group as *a privileged space*. It appears to be a space that offers them a period of freedom from the authoritarian control of the prison environment and some independence. It seems that the freedom this space allows makes them feel safe to express themselves. It is also a space within the prison where they can be somewhat away from the restlessness of the prison environment, giving them an opportunity and a portion of time to bring their attention to their inner selves. Sharlene expresses it in these words: “it’s peaceful here and I feel kinda special and welcome” (session 2), and “I have time & space to regroup & heal” (session 6). Véronica writes: “Mes pensées sont efforts, calme, sérénité parmi agitation car en moi je me sens bien ici au moment présent même si je suis en prison...” (session 2). These participants’ accounts reflect the potentiality the art therapy space opens for incarcerated mothers. As Descroiselles-Savoie (2010), Ferszt et al. (2004), Deschamps (2001), and Merriam (1998) expose in their studies, the art therapy session can become a safe space within the turmoil of the prison allowing women to access “their inner world and feelings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 169). It is important to note that the data shows that the environment created in art therapy is experienced as a privileged space, but does not specifically point at the group experience within the art therapeutic environment. The group experience did not come out in the themes probably because the suggested methods of inquiry focused mainly on the experience of the self and of the creative process. Nonetheless, I believe that the group experience was significant for the participants. This type of task focussed group could also be seen as paralleling their imprisonment situation in the sense that they all faced similar challenges, with the difference that, as Sobol and Williams (2001) explain, the art therapy group experience fostered a sense of “universality, interpersonal learning and cohesiveness” (p. 276). As outlined in the Research Group section above, the mothers, going through a similar art making process together meant that they shared feelings, challenges, and similarities and differences in this common experience.

The weaving experience. The three major themes that stand out from the participant’s experience of the weaving are *a challenging experience*, *a creative experience* and *a healing experience*. Each of these themes encompasses weaving as process, product and therapeutic medium.

A challenging experience is a theme that encompasses the themes of *challenging oneself* and *challenging first part*. These themes show how some participants engaged in the weaving project, and reacted to a new and unfamiliar art making experience. This weaving project

appears to have given participants an invitation to travel into, learn about or become aware of parts of themselves which are less developed or that they had not yet explored. Rachel expresses challenging oneself in these words: “It’s time for me to explore my art making capabilities” (session 3). Véronica translates this idea as she writes: “J’ai l’intention d’exploiter le plus possible mon côté artistique...” (session 4). This project also seems like an opportunity to practice areas where they feel the need to improve. Véronica makes this statement when setting her intention: “Je m’engage ne pas me sous estimer sur ce que je suis capable de faire...” (session 2). Léa writes about the learning process she is engaged into:

J’ai dû défaire mon “art” car j’ai manqué deux rangées. Je suis donc un peu frustrée de ne pas avoir été assez concentrée. Je lui dis “maudite patente”. Et mon art me répond: la prochaine fois, ça ira mieux. Je n’ai pas été concentrée comme je voulais mais j’ai appris quand même. (session 2)

Building the wooden frame and setting up the thread on this frame constituted the first steps of the weaving project. Simone expresses her difficulties with this challenging first part as she writes:

I had real hard time at tying the structure. I could have done better by getting more straight wood, so it looks pathetic but from what I can see so far, it’s starting to look better. I just hope it will hold. (session 1)

Nadja seems to take this as a process of learning through trial and error: “It took me a couple of tries and now I think I got it” (session 1). Rachel expresses her initial discouragement, and how she steps over her fears to regain the courage to continue with the project. “At first I wanted to give up but I felt as if my piece was telling me to give or to keep hope and just wait for the outcome” (session 3). For Cynthia, it seems that this challenging first part brought too much disappointment or not enough satisfaction to continue with the weaving. She states: “Feelings of confusion; frustration; anger towards this piece it was my first time...” (session 1). This participant then decided to switch to drawing and collage, expressive mediums she seemed to feel comfortable with and use with pleasure. For some participants, the challenge related to the weaving experience seems to reference their perceived level of skill in relation to a creative process they were not familiar with initially. As shown in Blood’s (2007) and Collier’s (2012) studies, therapeutic benefits of fiber arts seem to increase with experience and skill. For some others, the necessity to call forth cognitive functioning such as planning and organization without enough time or guidance might have hindered the therapeutic benefits of the weaving process.

A creative experience encompasses the themes of *creating beauty and magic, seeing oneself*, and *trusting the process*. As mentioned in the introduction to this section of the research report, creating beauty appears as a fundamental aspect of these participants' experience. Through weaving they experience the power to create beauty and magic, where they find a source of pleasure and delight. Participants largely describe their weaving as a beautiful and powerful object. Nadja writes: "I see Beauty, I see strength, it turned out Beautiful" (session 5). Sharlene states: "I like what I have created, it's pretty & relaxing to gaze upon, proud of my piece, surprised by its beauty" (session 6). Véronica expresses the beauty she sees in her weaving in these terms: "Je vois une vague dans le fil... et cette vague est faite par le jaune, alors, je vois du soleil dans ma création aujourd'hui" (session 2). The power of their creation is also manifest through the symbolic qualities participants attribute to their weaving. Nadja states: "My piece is a symbol of love and beautiful intention" (session 5). Léa sees her weaving as an object that can hold and transmit her feelings of love and joy to her children. A few participants associate their weaving to a dream catcher. This probably has to do with the qualities of the materials used, and the weaving's shape and size. Nonetheless, this association indicates the ability of these participants to create something that gives them hope. For most participants, their weaving stands as a self-representative object. It allows them to see themselves in creating something that represents them, and they seem to develop confidence through this creative process. By seeing oneself in their weaving participants create a symbol of their own existence. Rachel writes:

When I first look at it "my piece" I'm amazed at the way it turned out. Besides amazement, I see my culture. Something that finally represents me in all aspects. It's simply beautiful and the gold glitter just adds glamour and fun to it. My piece in a way really describes my character. Also, it has my favorite color in it, which is yellow.
(session 6)

Through the voice of her weaving, Véronica offers a reading of how she perceives herself in relation to her situation. "Elle me dit «tu es le fils jaune...» «le métal sont les menottes que tu te met toi-même aux pieds et aux mains» l'écorce est ce que tu aimerais atteindre. Vivre libre..." (session 6). Trusting the process entails having faith in and being able to rely on what the art making brings in its course. It is a way to engage with the process freely with the belief that the art will be a sensible guide. Simone expresses this idea by writing "All in all, it is going to the right road that it should be going to" (session 5). Rachel uses these terms to convey her

confidence in the process: “I feel as if it will turn out beautiful but it is a waiting process” (session 3). The participating mothers developed what Johnson and Wilson (2005) explain to be a sense of ownership and “feelings of attachment” (p. 122) towards their piece. They give symbolic qualities to their weaving, making their pieces “symbols of self … [that] are connected to personal histories” (Johnson & Wilson, 2005, p. 115). The creative experience of weaving seems to have an “identity-enhancing function” (Reynolds, 2002, p. 99-100) for these mothers by helping them preserve or re-gain “a satisfactory sense of self” (Reynolds, 2002, p. 99), as well as a sense of power, knowledge and skill.

The theme a healing experience encompasses the themes of *reparation* and *peacefulness*. These themes express the idea of weaving as a way to bring back the wounded or distressed self into a better state. Weaving in the experience of these participants literally and symbolically offers the possibility of restoration. Simone expresses this idea when she writes about the process of doing and undoing her weaving: “I like what I’ve done to my weaving, but I see I made a mistake so I will correct it. I feel good about knowing how to make something pretty” (session 3). In a dialogue with her weaving, Véronica addresses this topic from a different angle:

La question que je poserais... Est-ce qu'un jour je vais être capable de me donner le droit d'être heureuse? Réponse... toi seule peux te le donner ce bonheur... Le résultat... j'ai réussie car je me suis laisser la chance de réussir! (session 2)

Here, she seems to expresses that giving herself a chance is a way to mend the suffering parts of herself. Through the participants’ witness writings, weaving appears to bringing a state of peacefulness or what can be considered an experience of flow, as discussed above. Rachel writes: “my work does make me feel inner peace within myself” (session 6). Through a dialogue with her weaving, Sharlene states: ““I am creative, keep working on me’. I feel so sad, I feel so sad – ‘I will cheer you up’ ‘you are worth it’ Creativity is healing me” (session 5). Weaving as a therapeutic experience speaks to the state of flow it can induce, producing a sense of enjoyment and happiness, as exposed in Blood’s study (2007). As Reynolds’ (2002, 2004) participants did in relation to their experience of chronic illness, it seems that the weaving experience allowed the mothers in the present study to express issues and feelings related to their experience of imprisonment while helping them symbolise, transform and transcend this experience.

There are multiple limitations to this kind of project. Holding the dual role of researcher and art therapist poses important challenges in regards to my influence on the research data production and analysis, even when adopting a reflexive stance. Moreover, the qualitative and

interpretive nature of the data and of the analysis renders this study specific to the context and to the actors in presence. The small group size, shortness of the project, voluntary participation and the lack of objective data about participants prevent the results from being generalizable. In seeking clearer and more rigorous results, a replication of this study could include collecting audio or video recordings of sessions and the material expressed by the participants in the check-ins. A lengthier project might permit the exploration of ‘disconfirming’ cases in a meaningful way and would allow for participants to attain a higher level of skill. It would be interesting to measure the impact this last aspect on the results. This exploratory study can nonetheless serve as inspiration for future practice and research. This project seems to open interesting avenues for the use of fiber arts as therapeutic medium with incarcerated mothers. Looking at the results from a theoretical perspective and connecting them further with art therapeutic concepts would add to the quality of this research. It would bring a complementary perspective which could solidify this preliminary work into an intervention model. Further studies could also focus on specific dimensions of the therapeutic potentials of weaving with this population. To push this research topic further, it would be interesting to use fiber arts in mother-child dyad intervention with the objective of maintaining the attachment relationship during imprisonment.

Conclusion

This research report accounts for a research project conducted with mothers in prison. The objective was to “seek to explain” (Scott, 1992, p. 26) their experience by using art as a way for them to explore and find meaning. From the use of the craft of weaving as primary mode of artistic expression and therapeutic medium, a group of nine mothers were invited to write witness writings (Allen, 1995, 2005, 2012) to describe their process and express their discoveries. This method of looking at and entering into relation with one’s artwork produced atypical written narratives of how these mothers experience the weaving process and object, and in parallel, their situation of imprisonment. I then analysed these texts by using a thematic analysis method to extract the most relevant themes in concordance with the research interrogations: How does weaving as therapeutic medium and creative mode of expression inform the participating mothers about themselves and their imprisonment experience in the context of an art therapy group? What experiences do the participating mothers portray through their weaving? Does their weaving refers to their sense of identity as mothers? If so, how? These questions were appraised from the three areas explored in the literature review: the

experience of imprisonment, of the art therapy group, and of the weaving. The findings show that most themes are at the intersection of the experience of weaving and that of imprisonment.

The weavings created by the participants clearly refer to their sense of identity as mothers. They show preoccupation for their children in various ways. The mothers usually brought issues and feelings related to their children in the check-ins, at the beginning of sessions. In concordance with the literature on the subject, expressing the concerns these mothers have and the emotions they feel about their children appears to be a primary focus in their experience. Expressing this in the beginning of the group sessions seemed to permit a focus on the self through the weaving, which includes but encompasses more than strictly being a mother. The themes related to keeping ties with children show their distress of being separated from their children and their preoccupations related to strains in their role as mothers, but also the means they use and decisions they make to keep their bonds with their children when these exist. Combined with the witness writing process, the creative and healing aspects of weaving helped some of these mothers make sense of their imprisonment experience in relation to their personal history. The findings of this research indicate that exploring their experience through creative means allowed these mothers to explore their sense of self, to connect to their strengths, and to use the weaving process to challenge themselves in a safe way. The challenge associated with the weaving project seemed to give them a sense of adequacy and of ability to accomplish something difficult. This feeling of empowerment bolstered their self-esteem and confidence in their capacity to face the emotionally challenging experience of imprisonment. The weaving process has shown to induce a state of calm, happiness, and peacefulness for most participants. The product of their art making seemed to hold powerful symbolic meaning. These findings all seem to be in concordance with the literature reviewed, but I would like to look at aspects of this research findings that seem to bring a unique perspective on the mothers' experiences. From the thematic analysis, the fundamental aspect that stands out about the experience of this group of mothers is the need to create beauty. In other words, their need to create something that will help them connect with a sense of pleasure, of well-being, something that will protect them and their children and help them survive through this period of imprisonment. This aspect of their experience seems to shed light on the harshness of the prison environment, the threatening dimensions of imprisonment and the state of deprivation it can cause. With this in mind, the weaving seemed to open a space for them to connect with their self in an integral way, as mothers, as women, and as individuals. The experience of weaving also showed their capacity for

resilience and their resourcefulness. The symbolic meaning some mothers attribute to their weaving makes me think of the concept of the talisman in art therapy where the relationship between the artist and the object or image created becomes “magically empowered” (Schaverien, 1992, p. 139). For these mothers, this relationship seems to allow them to transcend their state of imprisonment. The weaving seems to become an object in which they invest their love, their joy, and their protection, and which is capable of holding these feelings to transmit them to their children. The other symbolic meaning which seems to appear in relation to these mothers’ weavings is that of the amulet: “a ‘thing capable of working wonders’” (Schaverien, 1992, p.138). This meaning seems to appear when the weaving created becomes a self-representative object and brings good feelings in relation to the self. Finally, creating beauty seems to be a way to transcend the state of imprisonment in order to connect with, access and embody a sense of feeling alive and in connection with the world, as well as a sense of inner peace that they can only find within themselves. The weaving process becomes the vehicle that facilitates this connection.

It is important to remember that in this group, weaving was a medium that suited most participants, but not all of them. It would be interesting to investigate further the reasons that account for this lack of suitability. Another important factor to consider when looking at this research and its findings is the particularly interpretive methods used to produce narratives. This study does not pretend to account for an all encompassing view of mothers’ experience of imprisonment; rather it provides a vision through the lens of the weaving process. In this sense, it is aligned with the epistemological stance and the beliefs about the nature of existence on which this project was based. As Riessman (2008) puts it, it ought to be considered a ‘partial and situated truth’. Nonetheless, this study seems to point at the multidimensionality of incarcerated mothers identity and the lack of resources to attend to their needs. The imprisonment experience seems to make them face their anxieties and difficulties and adds a layer of complexity in relation to their identity as mothers. Findings show that these mothers feel they are left to their own devices. They need support and treatment services tailored to their specific needs. Services for incarcerated mothers should help them deal with the concerns and emotions related to their separation from their children, help them connect with a sense of hope and provide them support in maintaining and enhancing a sense of agency in their lives and a sense of confidence and esteem in themselves and in their capacities. The use of fiber arts in group art therapy shows benefits for incarcerated mothers. This project has shown to mitigate the negative effects of detention through the “natural healing process” (Schaverien, 1992, p. 224)

that fiber art offers. It allowed participants to create positive and powerful self-representations, to express difficult emotions, and to feel heard about their needs, while providing them with a sense of control and a feeling of peacefulness. This weaving project in an art therapy group, although an exploratory research, appeared to touch at several dimensions of the participating mothers experience of imprisonment in allowing them to create, reflect on, and share about how they perceive themselves and points at some of their needs.

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Appendix A

Dr. Pat B. Allen's *Witness Writing Process*
(Source: <http://www.patballen.com/pages/process.html>)

Intention: This is a statement made in writing at the beginning of the art making time. Prior to writing it is helpful to become quiet, focus on the breath, and relax, allowing the intention to rise up and make itself known. Intention should be worded clearly, in present tense, without using the word 'want'. For example: 'I explore my creativity' not 'I want to explore my creativity'. Intention can take several forms: Inquiry ('I receive information about...'), 'I explore possibilities about...'), engagement ('I commit to learning...', 'I am guided in my relationship to...'), celebration ('I give thanks for...', 'I remember...', 'I honor...', 'I mourn...').

Art Making: The intention is put aside for the period of art making. Use any simple materials that you enjoy, follow the marks you make and your sense of pleasure.

Witness: The witness is your chance to actualize your intention by turning your attention and full consciousness to what you have received in your art making. The steps are as follows:

1. Sit in front of your art quietly and just notice what it looks and feels like.
2. Describe in writing what you see as fully as you can without coming to conclusions.
3. Write down any feelings or thoughts, including judgments that come up for you.
4. Dialogue with the image or a part of the image; write it down as it comes, including any seemingly extraneous thoughts or tangents.
5. Check in with your intention; ask your image what it has to do with your intention.
6. Choose what you will read aloud from your text.

The **no comment zone** has proved very effective in ensuring a safe group environment: This is created when each person present is fully engaged in his or her own art process without interfering in the process of others. It is important to refrain from commentary, particularly when the group reads witness writing aloud. We allow ourselves to be touched by the words of another. We make no comment so each person speaking can hear the truth of his or her own words. We hold the space for one another with compassion and respect. We do not deny any judgments or conflicting feelings, we simply do not speak them aloud. Such responses can be invited into our art and witness practice.

Additional sources from Allen to inform the Witness Writing Process:

- Allen, P. B. (1995). *Art is a way of knowing*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
Allen, P. B. (2005). *Art is a spiritual path*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Appendix B

'Processus de l'écriture témoin' selon Dr. Pat B. Allen
(Source: <http://www.patballen.com/pages/process.html>)

Intention: Ceci est une affirmation faite par écrit avant de commencer la période de création artistique. Avant d'écrire l'intention, il est recommandé de prendre contact avec soi, dans le silence, en se concentrant sur sa respiration et en invitant un état de détente, pour laisser venir à soi l'intention. L'intention est ensuite formulée clairement, au temps présent, en évitant l'utilisation du terme 'vouloir' ou 'je veux'. Par exemple: 'J'explore ma créativité' et non 'Je veux explorer ma créativité'. L'intention peut prendre différentes formes: une demande ('Je reçois de l'information sur...'), 'J'explore les possibilités de...'), un engagement ('Je m'engage à apprendre...', 'Je suis guidée dans ma relation face à...'), une célébration ('Je remercie...', 'Je me souviens de...', 'J'honore...', 'Je fais le deuil de...').

Création artistique: Lors de la période de création artistique, l'intention formulée précédemment est mise de côté. Cette période est dédiée à l'utilisation des matériaux d'art. Il est recommandé d'utiliser des matériaux que l'on trouve agréable, de suivre son propre rythme et son sentiment de plaisir.

Témoignage: Le témoignage est le moment d'actualiser l'intention formulée en tournant son attention vers ce que l'on a reçu à travers la création artistique. Les étapes sont les suivantes:

1. Dans le silence, prendre connaissance de l'image ou de l'objet créé.
2. Décrire par écrit le plus précisément possible ce que l'on observe, sans tirer de conclusions.
3. Écrire les sensations et les pensées qui viennent spontanément, incluant les jugements.
4. Entamer un dialogue avec son image, son objet, ou une partie de celle ou de celui-ci. Écrire ce dialogue comme ça vient, en incluant toute pensée qui peut sembler étrange ou tangentielle.
5. Retourner à l'intention initialement formulée, en demandant à l'image ou à l'objet ce qu'elle ou il a à voir avec cette intention.
6. Choisir une partie du texte à lire tout haut au groupe.

La **zone sans commentaire** est une manière efficace de préserver un environnement de groupe sécuritaire. Cette zone est créée alors que chaque individu est engagé dans son propre processus artistique et n'interfère pas dans le processus des autres membres du groupe. Il est important de se garder de commentaires, particulièrement pendant que les membres du groupe partagent leurs témoignages, alors qu'on se permet d'être touché par les mots de quelqu'un d'autre. Ne pas émettre de commentaires permet à la personne qui parle d'entendre ses propres mots. Le rôle de chaque membre du groupe est de maintenir un espace empreint de respect et de compassion les uns envers les autres. Il n'est pas question de nier les jugements ou les sentiments conflictuels, il s'agit de ne pas les verbaliser. Ces réactions peuvent être transposées et traitées à travers la pratique de la création artistique et du témoignage.

Références additionnelles sur '*le processus de l'écriture témoin*':
Allen, P. B. (1995). *Art is a way of knowing*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
Allen, P. B. (2005). *Art is a spiritual path*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Appendix C

Vous êtes **mère et aimeriez participer à un **groupe d'art-thérapie** dans le cadre d'un **projet de recherche** ?**

PROJET DE RECHERCHE EN ART-THÉRAPIE

*L'expérience des mères en prison à travers le tissage et les mots:
une étude narrative basée sur l'art.*

Peu d'études s'intéressent à l'expérience des mères en détention. De plus, certaines études ont porté sur l'utilisation du tissage comme médium thérapeutique auprès des femmes, mais aucune de ces études ne s'intéresse aux femmes incarcérées.

Magali Henry, étudiante en art-thérapie de l'Université Concordia, vous convie à six rencontres en petit groupe (maximum de huit participantes), centrées sur les processus créatifs du tissage à la main et de l'écriture comme moyens d'expression dans le cadre de son projet de recherche universitaire. Les rencontres auront lieu entre mars et juin 2015.

**Pour plus d'information ou si vous êtes intéressée à participer, s.v.p.
envoyer un mémo à l'art-thérapie, à l'attention de Magali.**

... aucune expérience nécessaire ...
... un climat accueillant et respectueux ...
... un espace intime et confidentiel ...

Appendix D

You are a **mother** and would like to participate in an **art therapy group** as part of a **research project** ?

RESEARCH PROJECT IN ART THERAPY

*Mothers' experience in prison through weaving and words:
An art based narrative inquiry.*

Few studies look at the experience of mothers in detention. Moreover, some studies looked at the use of weaving as therapeutic medium with women, but none have been conducted with incarcerated women.

Magali Henry, art therapy student from Concordia University, invites you to participate in six small group meetings (maximum of eight participants) centered on the handcrafted weaving and writing processes as means of creative expression as part of her university research project. The meetings will take place between March and June 2015.

**For more information or if you are interested in participating,
please send a memo to art therapy, to the attention of Magali.**

... no experience needed ...

... a welcoming and respectful climate...

... an intimate and confidential space ...

Appendix E

INFORMATION SUR LE PROJET DE RECHERCHE

L'expérience des mères en prison à travers le tissage et les mots: une étude narrative basée sur l'art.

Vous êtes invitée à participer à un projet de recherche qui servira de base à la rédaction du rapport de recherche de Magali Henry dans le cadre de sa maîtrise au programme d'art-thérapie de l'Université Concordia, Montréal, Québec. Peu d'études portent sur l'expérience des femmes qui sont mères en détention. Toutefois, ces études dénotent l'importance de tenter de comprendre les représentations que les mères qui sont incarcérées se forgent d'elles-mêmes et de tenter de voir quels sont les impacts de l'incarcération sur le bien-être psychologique, matériel, et social de ces femmes. De plus, quelques études ont porté sur l'utilisation du tissage comme médium thérapeutique avec les femmes, mais aucune n'a été faite auprès des femmes qui sont incarcérées. Cette étude explorera si le tissage, comme mode d'expression créatif et comme médium thérapeutique, peut permettre à ces femmes d'articuler leur expérience de mère en prison, et comment cela s'exprime.

Dans le cadre de ce projet de recherche, vous êtes invitée à participer à six (6) rencontres de groupe d'une durée de trois (3) heures chacune. Chaque rencontre de groupe commencera par dédier un espace à chacune des participantes pour exprimer comment elle se sent à son arrivé dans le groupe, par ses propres images et dans ses mots. Chaque participante procédera ensuite, pour la plus grande partie du temps en groupe à la création d'un projet de tissage libre, qui pourra s'échelonner sur plusieurs rencontres. Ce travail de tissage sera encadré par une approche qui supporte l'expression et le partage de l'expérience personnelle vécue à travers l'art appelée 'le processus de l'écriture témoin' (traduction libre de: Allen's *Witness Writting Process*, 1995). Les pièces tissées par les participantes, en progrès ou complétées, seront photographiées à la fin de chaque séance de groupe. Les 'écrits témoins' des participantes seront recueillis à la fin de chaque séance de groupe. Une sélection, faite par l'étudiante-chercheur, de photographies et d'écrits témoins des participantes sera incorporée au rapport de recherche. Les 'écrits témoins' serviront de textes narratifs desquels des thèmes spécifiques et généraux reliés à la maternité, à l'expérience féminine de l'incarcération, et à l'expérience féminine de création en art textile, tels que relatés dans la littérature, pourraient être extraits. Ces thèmes sont considérés d'après une approche féministe de l'expérience vécue des femmes. D'autres thèmes, qui ne sont pas reliés à ceux mentionnés ci-haut, pourraient aussi apparaître par l'analyse des données recueillies.

Une fois que Magali Henry aura terminé ses études, ces informations pourraient être utilisées pour fin de présentations ou de publications. Toutefois, votre anonymat sera préservé et toute information à votre sujet sera gardée confidentielle, c'est-à-dire que rien dans le rapport de recherche, ni dans de futures présentations ou publications ne vous identifiera. L'information vous concernant sera gardée dans une armoire verrouillée pour la durée du projet de recherche et

sera détruite lorsque le projet sera terminé. Magali Henry et son superviseur de recherche seront les seules personnes à avoir accès aux données recueillies dans le cadre du projet de recherche.

Votre participation à ce projet de recherche est confidentielle, c'est-à-dire que l'étudiante-chercheur ainsi que son superviseur clinique connaîtront votre identité mais ne la divulgueront pas. Cette confidentialité pourra être brisée dans le cas d'une menace sérieuse et éminente à votre sécurité, à votre vie, ou à la sécurité ou à la vie d'autrui. Dans un tel cas, l'étudiante-chercheur a la responsabilité de prendre les mesures nécessaires pour vous assurer et/ou assurer à autrui un support et/ou une protection adéquate.

Votre participation ne devrait vous causer aucun tort. Toutefois, il est possible que par sa nature, le projet suscite de l'inconfort ou des réactions émotionnelles. Pendant la durée du projet, l'étudiante-chercheur s'engage à vous offrir l'espace dont vous aurez besoin pour parler de toute question émanant de votre participation, et se rendra disponible pour vous offrir le support de sa présence et vous référer à d'autres ressources si votre situation le nécessite.

Vous êtes libre de mettre fin à votre participation à ce projet à tout moment.

Je vous remercie de votre collaboration.

Si vous avez des questions au sujet de ce projet de recherche, veuillez communiquer avec moi ou mon superviseur de recherche.

Étudiante en art-thérapie et chercheur principal:

Magali Henry du Département de thérapies par les arts (option art-thérapie) de l'Université Concordia (1455, boulevard de Maisonneuve ouest, VA 264, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H3G 1M8, 514-848-2424, poste 4790, creativeartstherapies@concordia.ca) ou en lui envoyant un mémo à l'art-thérapie.

Superviseur de recherche:

Dr. Janis Timm-Bottos, du Département de thérapies par les arts de l'Université Concordia (1455, boulevard de Maisonneuve ouest, VA 264, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H3G 1M8, 514-848-2424, poste 4799, Janis.Timm-Bottos@concordia.ca).

Si vous avez des questions sur vos droits en tant que participante de recherche, n'hésitez pas à communiquer avec le conseiller – Éthique de la recherche de l'Université Concordia (1550, boulevard de Maisonneuve ouest, GM 910.04, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H3G 1N2, 514-848-2424, poste 7481, ethics@alcor.concordia.ca).

Appendix F

INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Mothers' experience in prison through weaving and words: An art-based narrative inquiry.

You are invited to participate in a research project that will serve as the basis for the writing of Magali Henry's research report as partial completion of her MA degree in the art therapy program at Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec. Few studies look at the experience of women who are mothers in detention. However, these studies stress the importance of striving to understand the representations that mothers who are incarcerated forge of themselves and of trying to see how incarceration impacts their psychological, material, and social well-being. Moreover, some studies looked at the use of weaving as therapeutic medium with women, but none have been conducted with women who are incarcerated. This study will explore if weaving, as expressive and therapeutic medium, can allow these women to articulate their experience of being mothers in prison, and how this is expressed.

As part of this research project, you will be invited to participate to six (6) art therapy group meetings each lasting three (3) hours. At every group meeting, by means of introduction, each participant will have the space to express how she feels as she arrives in the group through her own images and words. Each participant will then move into the creation of a self directed weaving project for most of the group meeting time, this weaving project could be worked on for several meetings. This weaving process will be framed within an approach that supports the expression and sharing of personal experience through art making called the *Witness Writing Process* (Allen, 1995). Each participant's woven piece, in progress or completed, will be photographed at the end of every group meeting. Each participant's *Witness Writing* will be collected at the end of every group meeting as well. A selection made by the student-researcher, of photographs and *Witness Writings* from participants will be incorporated into the research report. The collected *Witness Writings* will serve as narrative text from which specific and general themes relating to motherhood, to women's experience of incarceration, and to women's experience of textile art making as found in the literature might be extracted. These themes are taken into consideration from a feminist approach to women's lived experiences. Other themes, unrelated to the ones previously mentioned, might also be found through the analysis of the collected data.

Once Magali Henry will have finished her studies, this information could be used for presentations or publications. However, your anonymity will be preserved and all information about you will remain confidential, this means that nothing in the research report, nor in future presentations or publications will identify you. The information will be kept in a locked cabinet for the duration of the research project and will be destroyed at its completion. Magali Henry and her research supervisor will be only people that will have access to the research data during the course of the research project.

Your participation in this research project will remain confidential, the student-researcher and her clinical supervisor will know your identity but will not disclose it. Confidentiality may be broken when there is a serious and immediate threat to your safety or your life or the safety or the life of someone else. In such instance, it is the student-researcher's responsibility to take the necessary measures to ensure you and/or others adequate support and/or protection.

Your participation should not cause you harm. However, it is possible that the nature of the project elicit a certain degree of discomfort and/or emotional reactions. During the course of your participation in this project, the student-researcher will make sure that you can benefit from the space you need to talk about issues related to your participation, and will be available to offer you a supportive presence and refer you to other resources if your situation deems necessary.

You are free to discontinue from participating to this research project at any time.

Thank you for your collaboration.

If you have any questions regarding this research project, please contact me or my research supervisor.

Art therapy student and principal investigator:

Magali Henry, Creative Arts Therapies Department (Art Therapy option), Concordia University (1455, de Maisonneuve Blvd. W., VA 264, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3G 1M8, 514-248-8484, extension 4790, creativeartstherapies@concordia.ca) or by sending a memo to art therapy.

Research supervisor :

Dr. Janis Timm-Bottos, Creative Arts Therapies Department, Concordia University (1455, de Maisonneuve Blvd. W., VA 264, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3G 1M8, 514-848-2424, extension 4799, Janis.Timm-Bottos@concordia.ca).

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor, Concordia University, (1550, de Maisonneuve Blvd. W., GM 910.04, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3G 1N2, 514-848-2424, extension 7481, ethics@alcor.concordia.ca).

Appendix G

CONSENTEMENT À PARTICIPER AU PROJET

L'expérience des mères en prison à travers le tissage et les mots: une étude narrative basée sur l'art.

Il est entendu que l'on m'a demandé de participer au projet de recherche dirigé par Magali Henry du Département de thérapies par les arts (option art-thérapie) de l'Université Concordia (514-848-2424, poste 4790, creativeartstherapies@concordia.ca) et supervisé par Dr. Janis Timm-Bottos, du Département de thérapies par les arts de l'Université Concordia (514-848-2424, poste 4799, Janis.Timm-Bottos@concordia.ca). À l'établissement de détention, il est entendu que Magali Henry est supervisée sur le plan clinique par Valérie Descroiselles-Savoie, art-thérapeute.

A. BUT

Le but de la recherche a été porté à ma connaissance, à savoir :

Le but de cette recherche est d'explorer l'expérience vécue des femmes qui sont mères et qui sont incarcérées dans un établissement de détention provincial du Québec (Canada). Ce sujet est exploré à travers l'utilisation du tissage comme outil d'expression créative et comme medium thérapeutique dans un contexte d'art-thérapie de groupe. Cette étude transmettra les récits de l'expérience vécue des femmes qui auront participé au projet dans l'espoir d'augmenter les connaissances sur le sens que prend ce vécu et d'en avoir une meilleure compréhension. Cette étude contribuera aussi à la recherche en art-thérapie sur les arts textiles comme médium thérapeutique pour les femmes.

B. PROCÉDURES

Il est entendu que ce projet de recherche sera mené dans le cadre d'un groupe d'art-thérapie dont le nombre de participantes sera restreint à un maximum de huit (8) femmes. Le groupe se rencontrera à six (6) reprises, deux fois par semaine, sur une période de trois semaines (si possible), entre mars et juin 2015. Il est entendu que chaque rencontre de groupe se déroulera comme suit: Phase 1: Au début de chaque rencontre, une période de temps sera dédiée pour me permettre d'exprimer comment je me sens à mon arrivée dans le groupe, par le biais de l'image et d'un court partage avec le groupe. Phase 2: Je suivrai ensuite '*le processus de l'écriture témoin*' qui consiste à fixer une intention personnelle par écrit, c'est-à-dire de noter une demande, un engagement, ou quelque chose à célébrer à travers la période de création artistique. Je procéderai ensuite à la création d'un projet personnel de tissage à la main, qui pourra s'échelonner sur plusieurs rencontres. En suivant '*le processus de l'écriture témoin*', je consacrerai une période de temps à poser un regard sur ma production artistique et à faire une démarche de réflexion à travers celle-ci par le biais de l'écriture. Phase 3: À la fin de chaque rencontre, je serai invitée à partager une partie de mes écrits avec le groupe. À la fin du projet, une rencontre d'information générale pour les participantes, à laquelle je serai conviée, sera planifiée pour partager les résultats de la recherche. Il est entendu que, dans le cadre de la recherche, je serai invitée à partager mon vécu de mère en prison. Il est entendu que le groupe d'art-thérapie sera centré sur les processus de tissage à la main et d'écriture comme moyens d'expression créative. Il est entendu que des photographies seront prises de ma (ou de mes) confection(s) tissée(s) et que mes écrits seront recueillis pour être incorporés, en totalité ou en partie, au rapport de recherche, et ce à la discrédition de l'étudiante-chercheur. Il est entendu que mon nom et toute autre information qui pourrait m'identifier sera omise pour protéger ma confidentialité et permettre de protéger mon anonymat envers tous sauf l'étudiante-chercheur ainsi que son superviseur clinique. Il est entendu qu'un code sera associé à l'information me concernant, celui-ci ne sera connu que de l'étudiante-chercheur. Toute l'information me concernant, incluant les photographies et les écrits, seront gardés dans une armoire verrouillée, à laquelle uniquement l'étudiante-chercheur ainsi que son superviseur clinique auront accès. Toute l'information confidentielle contenue dans les données de recherche sera détruite à la fin du projet.

C. RISQUES ET AVANTAGES

Il est entendu que ma participation ne devrait me causer aucun tort. Il est possible que par sa nature, le projet de recherche suscite de l'inconfort ou des réactions émotionnelles chez moi. L'étudiante-chercheur s'engage

à m'offrir l'espace dont j'aurai besoin pour parler de toute question émanant de ma participation, et se rendra disponible pour m'offrir le support de sa présence et me référer à d'autres ressources si ma situation le nécessite.

Il est entendu que ma participation peut m'apporter des bénéfices, tels que ceux découlant de pouvoir partager mon histoire dans le cadre d'un groupe d'art-thérapie, ainsi que ceux reliés à ma contribution à l'avancement de la recherche et à une meilleure compréhension du sens que les mères qui sont incarcérées attribuent à leur vécu, ainsi qu'à propos de l'utilisation du tissage comme médium thérapeutique auprès des femmes en art-thérapie.

D. CONDITIONS DE PARTICIPATION

- Il est entendu que les citations de mes écrits et que les photographies de mes productions artistiques seront incorporées, en tout ou en partie, au rapport de recherche, et ce à la discréption de l'étudiante-chercheur. Les écrits originaux et les œuvres produites au cours du projet de recherche sont ma propriété. Je les récupérerai à la fin du projet, ou ils seront détruits de manière sécuritaire par l'étudiante-chercheur si je ne désire pas les garder.
- Il est entendu que je suis libre de me désister et d'interrompre ma participation à tout moment sans conséquence défavorable. Si je me désiste, les données recueillies jusqu'à ce point seront incluses dans le rapport de recherche, sauf si je refuse. Dans ce cas, l'étudiante-chercheur détruira de manière sécuritaire toute les données me concernant et effacera les dossiers digitaux, et/ou me remettra mes écrits et mes productions artistiques si je désire les garder.
- Il est entendu que ma participation à l'étude est :
CONFIDENTIELLE (mon identité, connue de l'étudiante-chercheur et de son superviseur clinique, ne sera pas divulguée, sauf en cas de menace sérieuse et éminente à ma sécurité, à ma vie ou à celle d'autrui). Toute information pouvant m'identifier dans mes écrits sera omise pour protéger mon identité. Toute information pouvant m'identifier dans mes productions artistiques sera cachée lors de la prise de photographie.
- Il est entendu que les données de l'étude, incluant les citations et les photographies de productions artistiques, peuvent être publiées.
- Il est entendu que ma participation à l'étude n'aura aucune répercussion sur les conditions et la durée de ma peine.

J'AI LU ATTENTIVEMENT LA PRÉSENTE ENTENTE ET J'EN COMPRENDS LA PORTÉE.
JE CONSENS LIBREMENT ET VOLONTAIREMENT À PARTICIPER À L'ÉTUDE EN QUESTION.

NOM (en majuscules) _____

SIGNATURE _____

Si vous avez des questions sur la recherche proposée, veuillez communiquer avec le chercheur principal de l'étude: Magali Henry du Département de thérapies par les arts (option art-thérapie) de l'Université Concordia (1455, boulevard de Maisonneuve ouest, VA 264, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H3G 1M8, 514-848-2424, poste 4790, creativeartstherapies@concordia.ca) ou en lui envoyant un mémo à l'art-thérapie.

Ou son superviseur de recherche: Dr. Janis Timm-Bottos, du Département de thérapies par les arts de l'Université Concordia (1455, boulevard de Maisonneuve ouest, VA 264, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H3G 1M8, 514-848-2424, poste 4799, Janis.Timm-Bottos@concordia.ca).

Si vous avez des questions sur vos droits en tant que participante de recherche, n'hésitez pas à communiquer avec le conseiller – Éthique de la recherche de l'Université Concordia (1550, boulevard de Maisonneuve ouest, GM 910.04, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H3G 1N2, 514-848-2424, poste 7481, ethics@alcor.concordia.ca).

Appendix H

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN

Mothers' experience in prison through weaving and words: An art-based narrative inquiry.

I understand that I have been asked to participate in a research project being conducted by Magali Henry of the Creative Arts Therapies Department (Art Therapy option) of Concordia University (514-848-2424, extension 4790, creativeartstherapies@concordia.ca) under the supervision of Dr. Janis Timm-Bottos of the Creative Arts Therapies Department of Concordia University (514-848-2424, extension 4799, Janis.Timm-Bottos@concordia.ca). At the detention center, I understand that Magali Henry is under the clinical supervision of Valérie Descroisselles-Savoie, art therapist.

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is as follows:

The purpose of this research is to explore the lived experience of women who are mothers and who are incarcerated in a Quebec (Canada) provincial detention centre. This topic is explored through the use of weaving as a means for creative self-expression and therapeutic medium in an art therapy group. This study will tell the stories of the lived experience of the participating women in the hope to increase the knowledge and understanding about the meaning of their experience. This study will also add to the body of research in art therapy on textile arts as therapeutic medium for women.

B. PROCEDURES

I understand that this research project will be conducted as part of an art therapy group welcoming a maximum of eight (8) women. The group will meet six (6) times, twice a week, over a period of three weeks (if possible), between March and June 2015. I understand that each group session will unfold as follows: Phase 1: In the beginning of each session, a space of time will be dedicated to express how I feel as I arrive in the group through image making and a brief sharing with the group. Phase 2: I will follow the *Witness Writing Process*, which consist of stating my personal intention in writing (such as a request, a commitment, or something to celebrate through the artistic creation process). I will then proceed in the creation of a personal hand woven project, which can be drawn up over a few sessions. In following the *Witness Writing Process*, I will dedicate time to look at and reflect on my artistic production in writing. Phase 3: In the last part of each group session, I will be invited to share a piece of my writing with the group. A debriefing meeting for the group participants, to which I will be invited, will be scheduled at the end of the project to share general research findings. I understand that, as part of the research project, I will be invited to express my personal experience as a mother in prison. I understand that the group will be centered on the handcrafted weaving and writing processes as means of creative expression. I understand that photographs of my woven piece(s) will be taken and my writings will be collected at the end of each group session. A selection of these, made by the student-researcher, will be incorporated in full or in part to the research report. I understand that my name and any other information that may identify me will be omitted to protect my confidentiality and to allow me to preserve my anonymity regarding everyone except the student-researcher and her clinical supervisor. I understand that a code will be used to identify information that concern me, and to which only the student-researcher will have access. All the information about me, including the photographs and the writings will be kept in a locked cabinet, to which only the student-researcher and her clinical supervisor will have access. The confidential information contained in the research data will be destroyed at the end of the research project.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

I understand that my participation should not cause me harm. However, it is possible that the nature of the research project elicit a certain degree of discomfort or emotional reactions for me. The student-researcher will

make sure that I can benefit from the space I need to talk about issues related to my participation, and will be available to offer me a supportive presence and refer me to other resources if my situation deems necessary. I understand that my participation may have possible benefits for me, such as the therapeutic effect of participating in an art therapy group where I can share my story, and the contribution to the advancement of knowledge and understanding about the meaning of the lived experience of mothers who are incarcerated, and about the use of weaving as therapeutic medium for women in the field of art therapy.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that citations from my writings and photographs of my artistic productions will be incorporated, in whole or in part, to the research report, and this to the discretion of the student-researcher. My original writings and artistic productions created during the research project are my property. I will recuperate them at the end of the project, or the student-researcher will safely dispose of them if I do not wish to keep them.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences. If I withdraw, the data collected so far will be included in the research report, unless I refuse. In this case the student-researcher will safely dispose of the data concerning me by destroying it and erasing digital files and/or will give me back my writings and art work if I wish to keep them.
- I understand that my participation in this study is:
CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., the student-researcher and her clinical supervisor will know, but will not disclose my identity, except in case of serious and immediate threat to my safety, my life or the safety or life of a third party). Any identifying information in my writings will be removed to protect my identity. Any identifying information in my artistic production will be hidden when the photograph is taken.
- I understand that the data including direct quotes and photographs of art work from this study may be published.
- I understand that my participation in this study will have no repercussion on the conditions or length of my penalty.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT.
I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

If at any time you have questions about the proposed research, please contact the study's principal investigator: Magali Henry, Creative Arts Therapies Department (Art Therapy option), Concordia University (1455, de Maisonneuve Blvd. W., VA 264, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3G 1M8, 514-248-8484, extension 4790, creativeartstherapies@concordia.ca) or by sending a memo to art therapy. Or her research supervisor: Dr. Janis Timm-Bottos, Creative Arts Therapies Department, Concordia University (1455, de Maisonneuve Blvd. W., VA 264, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3G 1M8, 514-848-2424, extension 4799, Janis.Timm-Bottos@concordia.ca).

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor, Concordia University, (1550, de Maisonneuve Blvd. W., GM 910.04, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3G 1N2, 514-848-2424, extension 7481, ethics@alcor.concordia.ca).

Appendix I

Questions démographiques / Demographic Questions

Code assigné à la participante / Participant code assigned: _____

Âge / Age: _____

Genre / Gender: _____

Appartenance(s) culturelle(s) / Cultural appurtenance(s): _____

État civil / Civil status: _____

Niveau d'éducation / Level of education: _____

Source du revenu / Source of income: _____

Échelle du revenu / Scale of income:

< \$ 20 000 par an / per year

\$ 20 000 - \$ 30 000 par an / per year

\$ 30 000 - \$ 40 000 par an / per year

\$ 40 000 - \$ 50 000 par an / per year

\$ 50 000 - \$ 60 000 par an / per year

> \$ 60 000 par an / per year

Nombre d'enfant(s) / Number of children: _____

Âge de(s) (l')enfant(s) / Age of child(ren): _____

Appendix J

Collier's textile survey (Question 1): Tell us about your experience with the textile handcrafts.
 Sondage textile de Collier (Question 1): Quelle est votre expérience en artisanat textile.

	Check all that you have tried	Rate your skill						How much time do you typically spend when using this technique?				
		Check	Poor Faible	Low Basse	Moderate Passable	Good Bonne	Excellent Excellente	Less than 1 hr	1-2 hrs	3-4 hrs	5-8 hrs	8+ hrs
Basketry / Vannerie	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Beadwork / Travail des perles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Bookcrafts / Confection de livres, reliure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Braiding, macramé, or kumihimo / Tressage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Dyeing fibers / Teinture des fibres	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Fabric surface design (e.g. dye, paint, embellishments) / Design sur tissu	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Felting (e.g. wet, dry, needle) / Feutrage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Knitting and crocheting / Tricot et crochet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Lace-making (e.g. tatting, needle, cutwork, bobbin, tape, guipure) / Dentelles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Mixed-media / Médiums mixtes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Needlework (e.g. embroidery, cross-stitch, needlepoint) / Travaux d'aiguille	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Paper-making / Fabrication de papier	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Rug-making (e.g. braided, woven, hooking, rag, needlepunch, prodded) / Fabrication de tapis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Sewing: Clothing and functional objects / Couture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Sewing: Quilting / Couture: courtepointe	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Spinning fibers / Filage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Temari balls / Pelotes temari	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Weaving / Tissage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Other / Autre:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					

Combien de temps passez-vous habituellement lorsque vous utilisez cette technique?

Participant code assigned / code assigné à la participante: _____

Source:

Collier, A. F. (2012). *Using textile arts and handcrafts in therapy with women* (pp. 231-233). London, UK: Jessica Kingsley.

Appendix K

Results from Collier's textile survey (Question 1): Tell us about your experience with the textile handcrafts.

Techniques listed in Collier's survey	Number of participants that reported having tried this technique	Number of participants that reported rating their skill as poor	Number of participants that reported rating their skill as low	Number of participants that reported rating their skill as moderate	Number of participants that reported rating their skill as good	Number of participants that reported rating their skill as excellent
Basketry	1			1		
Beadwork	5		1	2	2	
Bookcrafts	2				2	
Braiding, macramé, or kumihimo	5			3	2	
Dyeing fibers						
Fabric surface design	3			1	2	
Felting	2				2	
Knitting and crocheting	5		1	1	2	1
Lace-making	1			1		
Mixed-media	1				1	
Needlework	3				2	1
Paper-making	5	1	1		3	
Rug-making	1				1	
Sewing: Clothing and functional objects	9	1		6	2	
Sewing: Quilting	2	1			1	
Spinning fibers						
Temari balls						
Weaving	1	1				

Results from Collier's textile survey (Question 1): Tell us about your experience with the textile handcrafts (continued)

Techniques listed in Collier's survey	Number of participants that reported typically spending less than an hour when using this technique	Number of participants that reported typically spending 1 - 2 hours when using this technique	Number of participants that reported typically spending 3 - 4 hours when using this technique	Number of participants that reported typically spending 5 - 8 hours when using this technique	Number of participants that reported typically spending more than 8 hours when using this technique
Basketry		1			
Beadwork	2	3			
Bookcrafts		1	1		
Braiding, macramé, or kumihimo		2		2	
Dyeing fibers					
Fabric surface design		2			
Felting		1			
Knitting and crocheting	1	1	2		1
Lace-making		1			
Mixed-media				1	
Needlework		1	1		
Paper-making	2	1	2		
Rug-making			1		
Sewing: Clothing and functional objects	3	3	1		2
Sewing: Quilting	1	1			
Spinning fibers					
Temari balls					
Weaving	1				