Behind Closed Doors: How The Peer-Review Process Works and How Arts Councils Make Decisions about Arts Funding

by

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Dedication

Arts and Freedom Mean the Same to Me.

This Work is Dedicated to Every Starving Artist Out There Who Seeks the Freedom Within.
Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Behind Closed Doors: How the Peer-Review Process Works and How Arts Councils Make Decisions about Arts Funding

1.1 Introduction

The enjoyment of the arts is a basic human right, epitomized in the UN Declaration of Human Rights1, and arts funding plays a significant role in the development of the arts (Bellavance, 2011). Preconceptions exist about the decision-making process of arts funding (Breen, 2008; Vaughan, 2013). For many artists, there is a sense that the process of applying is unwieldy and overly tedious (Vaughan, 2013). Nevertheless, the peer-review model has become the standard process to assess the quality of achievement in creative occupations (CCA, n.d.). Under the peer-review system, visual artists’ works are judged by their peers (other artists) to determine whether they meet the criteria of excellence; however, many artists seem to have a limited understanding of how decisions are made, what evaluations are taken into consideration, and how the peer-review process works (artists, personal communication, 2011, 2012, 2013). Arts councils use peer expertise to warrant the practice of affording artistic excellence and artistic merit during the assessment of applications. Smith (2006) finds that the peer-review process is flawed: as he puts it, “We have little evidence on the effectiveness of peer-review, but we have considerable evidence on its defects…. it is slow, expensive, profligate

1 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 27): “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.” Retrieved October 9, 2014 from http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#ap
of academic time, [and] highly subjective” (p. 179). Still, why particular artists are supported
and others are not lacks clarity.

This dissertation explores the decision-making process for funding in three arts councils:
The Canada Council for the Arts (CCA), the Ontario Arts Council (OAC), and the Toronto Arts
Council (TAC). This study focuses on the adjudication of funding for the visual arts, which
include “drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, mixed media, printmaking, bookworks,
performance art, installation and fine crafts” (Toronto Arts Council, 2015). In order to
understand the complexity of the issues in the art world, I use a multi-disciplinary approach,
drawing from education, social psychology, business, economics, and the arts, as we will see in
the subsequent chapters. This study examines the dynamics of the decision-making process in
the peer-review process and it is organized in three chapters as guided in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 —Dynamics of Arts Councils’ Peer-Review Process

![Figure 1.1 —Dynamics of Arts Councils’ Peer-Review Process](source: D’Andrea, 2016)
This dissertation is comprised of three unique research papers, contained in chapters one, two and three. I begin with Chapter One to provide an overview of the subsequent chapters. In Chapter Two, the definition of “artistic excellence” is analyzed. I use discourse analysis in an effort to bring about clarity to the term excellence applied during the deliberation process. In Chapter Three, I examine government priorities that shape arts funding decisions. I draw from Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of Symbolic Power as the mechanism to analyze how government agencies exert influence on arts funding decision. Finally, in Chapter Four, I focus on group decision-making. Using discourse analysis, I draw from Irving Janis’ theory of Groupthink, a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people, wherein the desire for conformity in the group results in an irrational or poor decision-making outcome. Each of the three conceptual frameworks allows me to answer my research questions on how arts councils make funding decisions. The research questions are: first, what are the discursive practices that arts councils use in determining ‘artistic excellence’? Second, how do government agencies exert influence in the decision-making process of arts funding? And third, how do jurors make group decisions during the adjudication process?

1.1.1 Arts Councils

Arts councils’ decision-making processes are tied to their governing strategic priorities. Arts councils’ strategic priorities either are framed in terms of equity and diversity or narrowly formed to address a selective group, reflecting on the public good and government’s priorities. Shatz (2004) asserts that in the arts funding decision-making process there is a control or limit to the flow of communication. For jurors, applications are assessed based on definitions of merit and artistic excellence. Merit often implies artists’ qualifications or eligibility criteria. For
the councils, the definition of artistic excellence often relies on strategic priorities such as equity, diversity, and regional.

1.1.2 Artistic Excellence

Despite its centrality in evaluating grants, the concept of excellence is not defined in the arts councils’ websites, but is presumed by many artists to have some objective meaning to the professional art world of curators, critics, artistic directors, grants officers, and selected artists in the field. Using discourse analysis, I explore the concept of artistic excellence and how it is applied during the peer-review process for arts funding among Canadian arts councils. It is commonly acknowledged that the peer review has become the standard process to ensure equitable and effective distribution of funding. However, there are tensions about which applications get funded since the discourses of excellence are neither clear nor consistent. I examine the understandings of jurors’ discursive practices and the possibility of proposing a more clear definition of excellence is needed in order to improve confidence in the peer-review system employed by arts councils in Canada.

1.1.3 Symbolic Power - Impact of Government Priorities

This section sheds some light on the extent to which government priorities affect funding decisions. This paper explains (1) the government priorities that successfully shaped funding decisions; (2) arts councils’ priorities that flounder the exert of government influence; and (3) active resistance to government priorities. I interviewed visual artists, administrators and leaders at all three levels: federal (the Canada Council for the Arts), provincial (the Ontario Arts Council), and municipal (the Toronto Arts Council). I draw from Pierre Bourdieu’s concept
of symbolic power (See Bourdieu, 1992) to examine the means of influence of government priorities in funding decisions.

1.1.4 Groupthink

Decision making is a complex process, and because of limited funding, deciding on which arts projects are worthy of funding is demanding. Arts organizations appear to have many challenges because of the need to balance aesthetic considerations with the need to ensure the viability of the organization (Cray, Inglis & Freeman, 2007). Studies of strategic decision making reveal numerous versions of the decision-making process that depend both on internal elements and the organization’s culture (Eisenhardt 1989; Hickson, Butler & Cray, 1986). However, the theory of groupthink allows me to understand the factors that interact to affect the peer-review process. Janis (1972, 1982) explains groupthink as a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people, in which the desire for conformity in the group results in an irrational or poor decision-making outcome. This study illuminates some evidence of groupthink within the peer-review process in the arts councils.

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter One presents the research problem and statement of purpose for the dissertation. Chapter Two, the first research paper, use discourse analysis to explore the discursive practices of excellence. Chapter Three identifies how government agencies exert influence in the decision-making process of arts funding. Chapter Four identifies Groupthink symptoms and Groupthink Avoidance within the peer-review adjudication process. Lastly, Chapter Five recaps the findings and implications emerged from the analysis, highlighting aspects for future research.
1.2 Statement of the Problem

From their report, the Canada Council for the Arts concluded that there was a need for openness and trust related to decision-making (CCA, 2007) of the peer-review process. Breen (2008) added that a lot of artists are not happy; particular rejected applicants, “[b]ut they have to learn how the process works and how to present their project to the jury members” (p. 1373) in order to secure funding.

Visual artists have often expressed discouragement, skepticism, and mistrust of the peer-review process in the arts (Pero, 2013; WME Consulting Associates, 2000). In casual conversations and in interviews I conducted in 2012, visual artists explained that they mistrusted the decision-making granting system because they did not understand arts councils’ categorization policies and processes. Once artists were denied funding, they often did not reapply. They wished that they had learned the reason for being turned down. As a visual artist, I share this sentiment. In a 2007 Canada Council for the Arts Survey, artists responded that the biggest problem is the lack of clarity and “transparency of decisions” (CCA, 2007, p. 32).

Another issue is the inability of the arts councils to award all meritorious or “excellent” applications due to their limited funds. Although much of the literature suggests that arts funding is a public good (Horowitz, 1989; Fullerton, 1991; Netzer, 1978), the Canada Council for the Arts “has long admitted that it cannot keep up with the growth of individual artist community in Canada” (Wyman, 2004, p. 217). In a report prepared for the Arts Council in Ireland, Schuster (2001) asks: “How does the Arts Council know that what it is doing it is doing well?” (p. 1) and “How does one make informed choices in arts funding?” (p. 2). With limited funds, councils must decide, to the best of their ability, the work which has the most potential
to deliver excellence (Wyman, 2004). In that sense, it is not clear whether projects are rejected because of a lack of excellence, lack of funding, or aesthetic considerations. As a result, the understanding of the peer-review process, the definition of artistic excellence, as well as the decision-making process are in question.

1.3 Purpose and Research question

As competition for arts funding increases, Cray, Inglis and Freeman (2007) contend that there is an “increased pressure for accountability and greater transparency in the governance procedures of nonprofit arts bodies” (p. 296). In sum, this research concentrates on understanding the (group) decision-making for arts funding and demystifying the peer-review process, as well as discourses of artistic excellence. The following questions guide the research question: How do arts councils make arts funding decisions?

a. What are the discursive practices that arts councils use in determining ‘artistic excellence’?

b. How do government agencies exert influence in the decision-making process of arts funding?

c. How do jurors make group decisions during the adjudication process?

1.4 Significance of the Study

Between 1989 and 2013 there was a 56% increase in the number of artists in Canada, according to the National Household and the Labour Force Survey (Hill, 2014). During the same time period, government budgets for arts funding essentially have remained fixed (Hill, 2014). There are 136,515 visual artists in Canada, of which 12% (15,945) are visual artists (Hill, 2014, p. 31). Hill confirms that in 2010 the median income of a visual artist in Canada was $17,383,
below “the low-income cutoff for a single person living in a community of 500,000 people or more ($22,600)” (p. 31).

This study should benefit artists, arts councils, grant officers, policymakers, and the scholarly community interested in the arts. This research can lead future panelists toward greater understanding of, or even appreciation for, the peer-review process. The findings will contribute to growing bodies of literature on policy, peer-review processes, decision-making, and arts funding models. In addition, this research: (a) demystifies the peer-review process in arts councils at the federal, provincial and municipal levels; (b) strives to make transparent arts council decision-making practices; (c) illuminates the definitions of artistic excellence in practice; (d) advocates for openness and trust in decision-making; (e) identifies government priorities that affect arts funding decisions; (f) describes how decision-making practices are constructed by identifying signs of Groupthink; (g) reiterates the importance of arts funding; and (h) open doors for future research in the field of arts funding and decision-making.

1.5 Methodology

I conducted 26 face-to-face interviews, comprised of 16 former jurors (who are also visual artists) and 10 arts leaders in Toronto. See Appendix A for the data collection plan. I drew primary data from interviews and field observations. I gathered secondary data from arts councils’ internal reports and statistical data that arts councils provided. I selected three settings in which public grant funding is decided: federal, provincial, and municipal. Those are: The Council for the Arts (CCA) located in Ottawa; the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) in Toronto, and the Toronto Arts Council (TAC). These arts councils operate according to an arm’s length principle (CCA, 2013; Rushton, 2002; Sirman, 2008), where government decides what the
mandate and budget of arts council will be, but the arts council is free to decide who and what it will fund without political interference. The study employs qualitative approaches to data collection.

A. Face-to-face interviews: I conducted semi-structured interviews with visual artists, art administrators and leaders, and panel review members. The interviews took place in Toronto and Ottawa between January 2013 and March 2014. I conducted 26 face-to-face interviews and I sought out participation by snowball sampling with the already established community of artists, including arts organizations, as well as relying on arts councils’ website, which provided publicly available contacts of past peer-review panel members. Please see Appendix B for Face-to-Face Interview Guide.

I digitally recorded the interviews and also took observation notes. I transcribed each tape-recorded interview with the help of a research assistant. A verbatim transcript of each interview was created. Then, I sent transcriptions to the interviewees for their review.

B. Observation of Jury Process: It took a series of negotiations over a period of six months with the arts councils before I was allowed to observe one of the deliberations process at the Ontario Arts Council (OAC). My non-participant observation in the category of “Visual Artists: Established Program” lasted two full days (July 21 & 22, 2014). Prior, I had also attended a mock deliberation for funding arts organizations delivered by the Ontario Arts Council. This was a public event that took place at the Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre. Later in the same year, I attended the “Visual & Media Arts Grant” information session organized by Toronto Arts Council (TAC) at the Lakeshore Arts Not-for-profit Arts Service Organization at which the peer-review process was discussed. All of these workshops allowed
me to gain a holistic overview of the peer-review process, the discourses of excellence applied in process and how panel members, collectively, make decisions.

**Analysis**

I analyzed the data from triangulating sources of information, including primary documents, interviews, and independent reports. To help me with the data comparison, I built an index for each transcript in relation to my research questions and also identified commons themes. The analysis identified ideas, common themes, causes and relationships across the data in the face-to-face interviews and field notes. The analysis was grounded in the conceptual frameworks presented. I analyzed the interviews using mainly constant comparative analysis (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001; Boeije, 2002). The Constant Comparative Model (CCM) involved taking one piece of data (such as one interview, theme, or statement) and comparing it to all the other responses from the participants. Boeije (2002) contends the CCM is a step by step approach of comparisons:

[I]t is not necessary to compare everything with everything else, but that the comparisons must be conducted according to a sound plan. A plan implies that the researcher knows beforehand which comparative steps are needed in the analysis regarding the elements that are compared, the aims, the questions asked and the expected results of each step. (p. 406).

I identified the following major themes during the analysis of the data: the tension among definitions of excellence; several factors affecting decision-making for arts funding; and the homogeneity of the group driven by their field and shared subjectivity as a result of the social discourses. Each of these themes are developed in the subsequent chapters.
CHAPTER TWO: Inside the World of Arts Councils

Inside the World of Arts Councils: Artistic Excellence in the Peer-Review Process for Arts Funding

Abstract

The research objective of this paper is to explore the concept of artistic excellence and how it is applied during the peer-review process for arts funding among Canadian arts councils. It is commonly acknowledged that the peer review has become the standard process to ensure equitable and effective distribution of funding. However, there are tensions about which applications get funded since the discourses of excellence are neither clear nor consistent. I studied three arts councils: The Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Toronto Arts Council. This study is based on 26 face-to-face interviews and observation notes. I apply discourse analysis to understand and examine the tensions of discourses of excellence. I conclude by proposing a more clear definition of excellence in order to improve confidence in the peer-review system employed by arts councils in Canada.
2.1 Introduction

This is where people [applicants] say well, I don’t know what you mean when you say 
excellence and I don’t know how to write an application or make work that is excellent.

(Interview with visual artist)

Each year, Canadian arts councils devote millions of dollars to sustaining the cultural production of art in Canada, including the support of its artists. In 2013-14, the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) awarded grants to 1,903 individual artists (CCAa, 2014, p. 14) from 8,677 grant applications (CCAb, 2014, p. 1). In 2013, the CCA awarded grants to 360 visual artists (see Appendix C). This chapter focuses on visual artists. The visual arts includes “drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, mixed media, printmaking, bookworks, performance art, installation and fine crafts” (TAC, 2015).

It is commonly acknowledged that the peer review has become the standard process to ensure equitable and effective distribution of funding. Juror’s decisions are arrived at by consensus or majority agreement, and provide advice directly to council staff regarding specific grant applications. Applications are evaluated in terms of artistic merit and excellence, as well as councils’ strategic priorities. However, those artists who understand how discourses of excellence are applied during the peer-review process have a greater chance of obtaining funding. On the other hand, those who do not understand the discourses of excellence may refrain from applying, at times judging the process to be opaque and/or unfair (artists, personal communication, 2011, 2012, 2013). Indeed, there is a fundamental mismatch between the way jurors talk about excellence, what applicants think excellence means, and ultimately what arts councils value as excellence. Excellence itself is often embraced as an exclusive and canonical
term to cultural activity when peer-reviewers or jurors talk about excellence in their deliberations. However, their own personal opinions make for inconsistent conceptions of excellence.

The peer-review process is employed by the Canadian arts councils to award funding to individual artists as well as arts organizations. In the late 1940s in the United States, “within the Office of Naval Research (ONR), the first systematically organized government source of research funds for universities, peer-review began as an “informal seeking of a second opinion by the grants manager” (Roy, 1985, p. 74) based on the premise that peer-review would bring both integrity and aesthetic judgment (Galligan, 1993). As government budgets expanded during the 1950s, the peer-review system became enshrined to “harmonize the elitism of science with the political demands of a democracy” (Roy, 1985, p. 74). Historically, in Canada, the government has used the patron model in cultural policy for supporting arts and culture; this process has also been employed in the UK and Australia. The patron model relies on peer evaluations to exemplify cultural excellence (Craik, 2007; Hillman-Chartrand & McCaughey, 1989; Katz-Gerro, 2012). Importantly, as a process, “peer-review is expected to operate according to values of fairness and expediency, yet its product is to be trustworthy, high-quality, innovative knowledge” (Chubin & Hackett, 1990, p. 3). Although peer-review is also seen as the guarantor of quality (Chubin, 1994), it also comes under scrutiny as it is often seen as a source of problems, as superfluous and flawed (Chubin, 1994; Galligan, 1993, Smith, 2006, 2010). Smith (2010) contends that “we have little or no evidence that peer-review ‘works,’ but we have a lots of evidence of its downside” (p. 2). Indeed, because of its lack of clarity, the
peer-review process is frequently questioned by artists. In this study, the definition of *excellence* that applies during the assessment process is explored.

Despite its centrality in evaluating grants, the concept of *excellence* is not defined in the arts councils’ websites, but is presumed by many artists to have some objective meaning to the professional art world of curators, critics, artistic directors, grants officers, and selected artists in the field. This paper calls these presumptions into question. Remender and Lucareli (1986) asked: “How does the expert know that a work is of excellent quality?” (p. 209), and argued that excellence is not an intrinsic characteristic of the art to be discovered, but rather a shared standard that is applied and constructed by social actors. The concept of *merit* is clearly described from the data as equivalent to the qualifications of an applicant; however, *excellence* is formulated within a particular social context and it is neither equally applied nor understood to various art work across contexts (Remender & Lucareli, 1986). In the 2007 Canada Council for the Arts strategic framework, one respondent stated, “It is feared...that the meaning of excellence is slipping” (CCA, 2007, p. 48).

In a policy report commissioned by the Secretary of State, Culture, Media and Sport in Britain, Sir Brian McMaster succinctly addresses the discourses of excellence in the arts. McMaster asserts, “Excellence itself is sometimes dismissed as an exclusive, canonical and ‘heritage’ approach to cultural activity. I refute this. We need to be clear from the outset what we mean when we say ‘excellence’, ‘innovation’ and ‘risk-taking’” (McMaster, 2008, p. 9). The report defines excellence as new insights, new understandings of the world around us, and art that produces life-changing experiences. Indeed, as McMaster (2008) asserts, “Excellence in culture occurs when an experience affects and changes an individual. An excellent cultural
experience goes to the root of living” (p. 9). On the other hand, Graham (2009) critiques Sir Brian McMaster’s definition of excellence outlined above, arguing that the definition is subjective and is no longer sustainable. For instance, Graham (2009) notes “life changing experiences are unlikely to be one transformative moment,” meaning that excellence “remains as elusive as before” (p. 329). Graham asserts that “A three-day audit by peer-reviewers will not be able to capture that and, without a more nuanced and inter-connected view, it’s unlikely, in fact, that they’d be able to know excellence even if they did see it” (Graham, 2009, p. 329). Thus, there is “a fear that ‘excellence’ may just become the latest buzzword for practitioners, rather than the key principle upon which future decisions will be based” (Eckersley, 2008, p. 183).

In academia, many scholars study the peer-review system (see Chubin, 1994; Demicheli & Di Pietrantonj, 2007; Lamont, 2009; Lamont & Huutoniemi, 2011; Magin, 2001; Neff & Olden, 2006; Olbrecht & Bornmann, 2010; Robergs, 2003; Shatz, 2004; Topping, 2009); however, in the arts, there is minimal research in this field. This paper sets out to address this gap and unveil the language used to describe excellence in arts funding in three Canadian arts councils: The Council for the Arts (CCA), the Ontario Arts Council (OAC), and the Toronto Arts Council (TAC). To accomplish this task, I draw from 26 face-to-face interviews as well as from observation notes. I use discourse analysis to examine the ways in which dominant discourses are operationalized when jurors apply the definition of excellence in the peer-review process for arts funding, and to understand and examine the tensions of discourses of excellence. I conclude by proposing a more clear definition of excellence in order to improve confidence in the peer-review system employed by arts councils in Canada.
2.2 Methodology

The study employed a qualitative approach and collected data, face-to-face interviews, field observations of the deliberation process and document artifacts in the form of arts councils’ internal reports. The data collected from the qualitative study is foregrounded with insights from the scholarly literature.

Qualitative research allows for an understanding of how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their words, and what meaning they attribute to their experience (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative information is a source of well-grounded data, rich description and explanation of processes; one can preserve chronological flow and derive fruitful explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Face-to-face interviews offer the best insight into a participant’s thought, feelings, and perceptions about a particular topic or issue (Edmonson & Irby, 2008; Merriam, 2009). The researcher can observe body language, tone of voice, facial expression, and other non-verbal cues (Edmonson & Irby, 2008; Merriam, 2009). Interviewed participants’ eye contact or body language signal that it is acceptable to ask further, probing questions.

Interviews allowed me to capture the participants’ language, while paying attention to non-verbal cues. In this context words are not assumed to speak for themselves; interviews allowed me to probe and ask for clarifications about the meaning of the responses intended to convey. Although I had certain preconceptions of some topics discussed, my background as a visual artist allowed me to elucidate and sympathize with the participants. In that sense, it allowed me to further examine answers and to ask informed and in-depth questions.
I conducted semi-structured interviews with visual artists, art administrators and leaders, and panel review members between January 2013 and March 2014. In total I conducted 26 face-to-face interviews, with 16 former jurors and 10 arts leaders in the city of Toronto (see Appendix A for Data Collection Plan). I sought out participation by relying on arts councils’ websites, which provided publicly available contacts of past peer-review panel members, as well as by snowball sampling. Most panel members had extensive previous experience serving on arts funding panels, ranging from one to 20 years of experience. Participants were not offered an honorarium for their participation. Interview questions focused on the peer-review process and how the criterion of excellence is understood and applied when making decisions for arts funding (see Appendix B for Face-to-Face Interview Guide). I digitally recorded the interviews and also took observation notes. These notes did not capture the demeanor of the participants. A verbatim transcript of each recorded interview was created with the help of a research assistant. Each transcription resulted in approximately 12 to 15 pages. I then sent transcriptions to the participants for their review. The interviews took place in Toronto and Ottawa (where the Canada Council for the Arts is located). By the 24th interview, saturation was achieved as participants’ responses had begun to repeat.

I observed a half-day mock jury workshop for funding for Arts Organizations organized by the OAC & TAC (January 13, 2014). It was open to the public and I took observation notes. Also, I engaged in lengthy negotiations over a period of six months with arts councils before I was given access to observe one of the deliberation processes. After I signed a formal agreement covering the conditions of participants’ confidentiality, the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) alone permitted my attendance. My non-participant (naturalistic) observation at OAC
lasted two full days in the category of Established Artists (July 21 & 22, 2014). I observed and wrote notes, but did not partake in the deliberation process or decision-making. My observation notes focused on the process of scoring and were shared with and approved by the OAC staff. Later, I attended the Visual & Media Arts Grant Information Session, a public event, presented by TAC (August 27, 2014).

My secondary data drew from arts councils’ internal reports and statistical data. I selected three settings in which public grant funding is decided: The Council for the Arts (CCA) located in Ottawa, the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) in Toronto, and the Toronto Arts Council (TAC). These arts councils operate according to an arm’s length principle (Rushton, 2002; Sirman, 2008), where government decides what the mandate and budget of an arts council will be, but the arts council is free to decide who and what it will fund without political interference.

Data Analysis

Once I received confirmation from the participants that I was free to use the data, I compared the transcriptions to the observation notes, paying particular attention to the research questions, language and text (discourse). I coded the data and built an index (manually) for each transcription. This analysis identified ideas, common themes, causes and relationships using the data in the face-to-face interviews. The variety of data offers the advantage of triangulating sources of information, including primary documents, interviews and independent reports.

I conducted a qualitative analysis that was thematic in nature, using NVivo to identify common themes and to analyze the data. Then followed three types of activity as per Miles and
Huberman (1984): data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In data reduction, I selected themes such as Artistic Excellence, Decision-Making, Peer-Review, and Experts, that provided answers to my research question, and created memos and notes from my observation notes. In data display the most common words used to define excellence from participants’ definitions of excellence emerged. Finally, in conclusion-drawing and verification, I stepped back to consider what the analyzed data meant and to assess their implications for the questions at hand. I revisited the data many times to cross-check or verify these emergent conclusions.

**Ethical Review**

This research includes human participants; thus, it was reviewed by the University of Toronto Ethics Review Committee in compliance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS-2)*. There were no foreseen risks for participants who took part in this study. Participants were required to read an information letter about the project and sign and return a consent letter prior to the interview. They were informed in the consent form that they were free to withdraw their participation at any time. The data collected follows the encrypted guidelines of the research ethics office. Participants in this study remain anonymous.

**Limitations**

While the observations provided insights into the adjudication process, grants officers and art leaders may have inflated the importance of the peer-review process to protect the arts councils’ reputation. This research is also challenged by the limited observation of the adjudication process. After much effort and lengthy conversations with the arts councils, I was
allowed to observe one adjudication meeting at the OAC. During the observation, jurors were made aware of this research study and might have acted differently than usual. I was only allowed to record notes about the peer-review process, not reactions. The Council reviewed and approved the observation notes. In an effort to capture diverse perspectives, I interviewed participants with a mixture of different backgrounds, genders and disciplines.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Discourses

Discourse is the use of language (Chilton, 2004; Johnstone, 2008) in terms of talk and communication. Fillingham (1993) adds, discourse is “anything written or said or communicated [verbal or visual]” (p. 100), and “talk and texts [are] parts of social practice” (Potter, 1996, p. 105).

Rogers (2011) succinctly defines discourse as “the way we use language, feel, and think, act and interact, and so forth, in order to be an ‘everyday’ (nonspecialized) person” (p. 38). Ball (2005) describes discourse as “about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority” (p. 48). Fairclough (1995) defines discourse as the “use of language seen as a form of social practice.” Discourses embody the meaning and use of words (Ball, 2005, p. 48).

Discourse theory goes back to the best known discourse theorist, French philosopher and sociologist Michel Foucault (1926-1984). Foucault was concerned with questions of power and institutional hierarchies, and was convinced that the world we live in is structured by knowledge, or in other words: certain people and social groups create and formulate ideas about our
world, which under certain conditions turn into unquestioned truths and start to seem normal. (Schneider, 2013, p. 2)

Rogers (2011) adds that people “talk and act not just as individuals but as members of various sort of social and cultural groups” (p. 36). These characteristics are reflective of the jurors, as each panel member is a professional visual artist sharing a community of art practice, including values, feelings, and emotions. One juror observes that discussion that takes place in the deliberation process is

really is a talking exercise. It’s really about thinking through and talking, and talking, and thinking through, and talking, and hearing what somebody else has observed, what somebody else knows, and weighing that, and making sure it’s not just a personal statement. (Interview)

Discourse analysis encompasses an extensive range of theories, and it relates to topics and analytical approaches for explaining language-in-use (Schneider, 2013; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Discourse analysis is also concerned with human expression, often in the form of language and these expressions are linked to human knowledge (Schneider, 2013), but it is also “interpretive and explanatory” (Wodak, 1996, p. 19). Shaw and Bailey (2009) identify three approaches to discourse analysis. First, the micro-level approach is the detailed study of language in use from an empirical understanding of actual linguistic events. It systematically analyses face-to-face talk. The participant’s perspective is the first point of analysis. Second, the meso-level approach places more emphasis on the connections with broader social and cultural contexts. The analysis begins with certain way of talking, writing, and conducting oneself and this can serve a range of social functions. For instance, analysis in this study reveals that how
“thinking of excellence” is an important, yet challenging discourse. Third, the *macro-level* approach involves the study of language and ideology in society. It begins by examining the role of power and knowledge in society (i.e., the Foucauldian approach). Analytical approaches can unravel assumptions, and determine what these assumptions might mean for individuals and wider society. Furthermore, Johnstone (2008) adds, discourse analysis helps us understand why people tell stories, and how decisions are made; in other words, “meaning-making” (p. 7) in society.

Discourse analysis lends itself to exploration, looking beyond the literal meaning of language (Rogers, 2011; Shaw & Bailey, 2009), and “understanding the context in which social interaction takes place and exploring what was said, when and why” (Shaw & Bailey, 2009, p. 417). Discourse analysts see research findings as socially constructed and discursive findings are seen as produced interpretations rather than discoveries (Shaw & Bailey, 2009). Jurors, as experts, interact and influence how they communicate. As experts, they each bring their understanding of identity and social practices in society to the table.

Rogers (2011) identifies seven tools for discourse analysis or seven building tasks of language. Rogers (2011) asserts that we use language to (1) to make things *significant* in certain ways; (2) to carry out actions and *activities* – for example, getting recognized as engaging in a certain sort of activity; (3) to get recognized as taking on a certain *identity* or role; (4) to build and sustain *relationships* of all different kinds; (5) to build and destroy social goods via politics; (6) to render *connections* visible or not in our language; and (7) to make certain sign systems and certain forms knowledge and belief better or worse, relevant or privileged, and ‘real’ or not in given situations.
As one can observe, “discourse” and “discourse analysis,” as such, integrate a variety of meanings and a plethora of interpretations. However, I rely on Phillips and Hardy’s (2002) empirical work to situate this study. In Figure 2.1, Phillips and Hardy’s empirical work describes the dimensions between text and context in the vertical axis, which includes interactions or genres of interaction the participants take during episodes; e.g., consultations. The horizontal axis reflects the choice between constructivist approaches (fine-grained explorations of the way in which a particular social reality has been constructed) and critical approaches (focusing more explicitly on the dynamics of power, knowledge, and ideology that surround discourse processes). Phillips and Hardy (2002) delineate four categorization of discourse analysis in theoretical dimensions:

1. First, social linguistic analysis, which is constructivist and text-based. Researchers examine specific examples of text and talk, such as recordings of conversation (e.g., interviews, participant observation, and stories). Phillips and Hardy (2002) assert that the goal of this work is to undertake a close reading of the text to provide insight into its organization and construction, and help us understand the discursive foundations of social reality in which those decisions (e.g., peer-review funding decisions) are located.

2. Second, interpretive structuralism focuses on the analysis of social context and the discourse that supports it. The aim is to understand how discourse makes action possible and legitimate based on a study of transcripts and reports, for example.

3. Third, critical discourse analysis attempts to analyze struggles as reflected in the privileging of a particular discourse and the marginalization of others (e.g., class struggle).
4. And fourth, *critical linguistic analysis* with emphasis in the dynamics of power that surround the text (e.g., how racist ideology is reproduced in conversations).

**Figure 2.1—Different Approaches to Discourse Analysis**

Adapted from: Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 20

The ‘X’ indicates where I have positioned this study. That is, this study is situated in the constructivist quadrant continuum, bringing a lens to deepen the exploration of *excellence* during the adjudication process. I examine how the understanding of excellence is produced and constructed by jurors through a close look at the words and shared meanings that are created through language in terms of what they said, heard, saw, or experienced. I analyze the search for textual evidence to show how language, or what words mean in a sentence, from context to text, and talk, as well as the analysis of social context and the discourse that supports it. In particular, the Social Linguistic Analysis quadrant helps understand the discursive foundations of social reality. Discursive practices is grounded in social realities is linguistically constructed. Discursive practices is explained in the conceptual framework next.
2.4 Conceptual Framework

During the peer-review process, when it comes to arts councils, Shatz (2004) asserts that when it comes to funding decisions, there is a control or limit to the flow of communication. Jurors or “[e]xperts are charged with controlling – including limiting – the flow of communication” (Shatz, 2004, p. 10). In other words, jurors are the agents of discourse; they have the power of knowledge. Hence, decision-making through their expertise is not to dominate others but rather to build relations and hierarchies that have their own logic and that no one is consciously steering. In this sense, jurors build their own discursive practices during the peer-review deliberation process.

2.4.1 Discursive Practices

**Figure 2.2—Linking Juror and Discursive Practices**

![Diagram](image)

Source: D’Andrea, 2016

Figure 2.2 shows the reciprocal relationship between discursive practices that are deployed by each juror during the peer deliberation process. Discursive Practices is a theory of the linguistic and socio-cultural characteristics of recurring episodes of face-to-face interaction (Young, 2009). Discursive Practices addresses the processes by which cultural meanings are produced and understood. “Practice” is the construction and reflection of social realities.
through actions that invoke identity, ideology, and belief (Language Learning, 2008). In other words, discursive practices involve paying attention not only to the production of meanings by participants as they employ in local actions the verbal, nonverbal, and interactional resources that they command, but it also requires attention to how employment of such resources reflects and creates the processes and meanings of the community in which the local action occurs. (Language Learning, 2008, p. 2)

In sum, discursive practices entail juror’s actions (e.g., language and talk) that invoke their identity, ideology, and beliefs. Jurors bring their socially constructed practices to a new situation (e.g., the peer review process) where they are further negotiated or contested. Hence, during their discursive statement, they share their knowledge, beliefs, values, and interests, which contribute to the discursive practices that shape the peer-review process of arts funding. This exercise creates the reality of the definition of **excellence** that jurors construed.

### 2.5 Findings—Inside the Peer-Review Process

The peer-review panel is often comprised of at least three jurors (artists’ peers). Their decisions, arrived at by consensus or majority agreement, provide advice directly to council staff recommending specific grant applications. Applications are evaluated in terms of “artistic merit” and “artistic excellence,” as well as councils’ strategic priorities. Webb (1989) argues that the “Peer evaluation procedures are kept fairly secretive, ostensibly to protect the assessors” (p. 93). In the arts councils, administrators are reluctant to make peer deliberation more open. Art administrators and grants officers argue that jurors need privacy to fully express their opinions with liberty and without reprisal, which would not be possible with any public
interference or government influence. A juror participant defended the idea of the closed doors by saying:

A jury is like a trial. We need the freedom to be able to say things about a project and about works and about productions that may be, you know, quite critical. And, by being in a jury and in a closed room, you feel a sense of freedom to express. (Interview).

The next section explores the discourses of excellence during the peer-review deliberation process in line with jurors’ discursive practices analyzed from the data. Figure 2.3 depicts the adjudication process based upon discourses of excellence, which is the focus of discussion in the next section. The adjudication process begins with a preliminary review of applications by councils’ staff, then the jurors are selected; later jurors convene at the councils’ facility and they are made aware of the council’s priorities and guidelines through the Charge. Scoring and negotiations materialize and jurors make recommendations for funding.
2.5.1 Preliminary Review: The Objective Assessment

The quest for excellence begins with an objective assessment of the excellence of each application. The CCA, OAC and TAC appoint grants assistants, who evaluate the eligibility criteria (incomplete applications are disqualified); however, first-time applicants whose applications are missing any information are contacted by the councils’ grants officer (Interview). In July 2014 at the OAC, I observed a two-day deliberation meeting for the established program in the visual arts; 59 applicants were reviewed, but one application was eliminated because the support material could not be opened. This shows the initial selection applied during the initial stages of the application where the facts (e.g., lack of support materials) are taken into consideration rather than judgements.
Holding arts backgrounds, grants officers are full-time staff and are the most important actors in the adjudication process because they hold the procedural power of the peer-review process. Grants officers are responsible for selecting jurors and for facilitating and chairing grant competitions. They are the liaisons between the applicants and the jurors. They implement council’s policies, such as the confidentiality of the process, and council’s strategic priorities.

2.5.2 Jurors=Peers=Experts

The discourse of excellence is also applied to jurors. Jurors are often artists (peers), and most likely were grant recipients themselves. They are considered “experts” or the artifex in the field. Experts must meet the definition of professional artist; someone who has specialized training in the artistic field, is recognized as a professional by his or her peers, is committed to devoting more time to artistic activity, and has a history of public presentation.

In How Professors Think, Lamont (2009) describes how experts (respected academics) recognize “excellence” or “the cream of the crop.” Lamont explains that the value of the expert is rooted in his or her ability to analyze complexity and recognize quality, in order to come to a fair decision about the criteria of excellence. Nevertheless, Lamont asserts that experts struggle to define excellence. Despite the definitional difficulty, Lamont (2009) suggests “[e]xcellence is the holy grail of academic life” (p. 1). The same can be said for arts funding, where funding decisions are made by peers (artists) based on the criteria of excellence. Lamont (2009) argues that excellence does not necessarily mean the “best and the brightest” because adjudication
members assess and define quality in various ways, utilizing competing academic definitions of excellence (p. 2). Lamont (2009) asks, “Do they [jurors] believe excellence has an objective reality? If so, where is it located—in the proposal (as economists generally believe) or in the eye of the beholder (as English scholars claim)?” (p. 4).

Arts councils seek out potential jurors who demonstrate excellence, as a guarantee to support their own discourses of artistic excellence and merit. These are also reflected in the composition of the panels. There is a consensus that councils look for individual jurors who have “the experience, knowledge and open-mindedness to make a fair and expert evaluation of the comparative merits of applications” (CCA, n.d.). In addition, grants officers say that often they looked for artists who are conversant in the field, with a degree of legitimacy, credibility, and multidisciplinary, and who represent regional diversity (Interview). Chubin (1994) concurs that “Peers are no longer defined solely in terms of substantive competence. Other characteristics—institutional, regional, and demographic—are also reflected in the composition of peer panels” (p. 22).

Jurors are active artists and are likely to know personally or by reputation many artists whose areas of practice closely overlap with their own. Smith (2006) raises the question “But who is a peer?” to which he adds, is it “somebody in the same discipline?” (p. 178). In that case, he or she is likely is a direct competitor with the artists whom they are adjudicating. Roy (1985) argues that competition encourages dishonesty and Smith (2010) wonders if panelists steal ideas from the rejected work. When I asked participants (jurors) if they have copied any of the works assessed during the peer-review process, one juror responded, “I don’t think jurors tend to do that. They might say wow, that’s a neat idea and they might incorporate it” (Interview). In
the arts, is hard to pin this down because it is common practice among those in the arts to build on other’s works; art practice even demands it. No work of art appears magically, arriving from nothing. A great example is Pablo Picasso’s famous quote “Good artists copy; great artists steal,” and once Salvador Dali said, “Those who do not want to imitate anything, produce nothing.” Wessely (1998) adds that the “fundamental dilemma is the trade-off between choosing reviewers who are peers and the increased risk of a conflict of interest that results from that choice” (p. 302). Thus, if an excellent mixture of panelists is chosen, does it mean they will all arrive at the same selection of the best, excellent candidate?

2.5.3 Panel Convenes: Discursive Practices

Application packages are mailed to jurors’ homes for initial review and scoring. Having reviewed the applications on their own time, they have already applied their subjectivities and their discursive practices (learned from past experiences as art jurors) in their individual scoring sessions periods prior to convening. One juror explains that during the initial review and scoring, jurors
don’t have a specific definition for artistic excellence. But I think it has to have a kind of intelligent approach to what it is working with, it has to have some skill, and it has to have some notion of the world it lives in. (Interview)

Another juror contends that during this preliminary stage he selects the application that stands out (Interview). When it comes to defining excellence, jurors employ their socially-constructed discursive practices when deciding what excellence means, which also draw from subjectivity. One arts administrator contends, “Excellence, rigor, merit quality—all of that is, highly subjective” (Interview).
For jurors, it is hard to apply the concept of artistic excellence during the deliberation not only because of the lack of a definition, but also because they use their subjectivities to decide on what constitutes an excellent work that deems funding. Indeed, jurors have built their discursive practices that are applied to new situations (new deliberations), which may neither be aligned with their new peers, nor with members of the council. While excellence is one of the top selection criteria for grant evaluation, jurors struggle with it. Hence, when asked about the definition of excellence, one juror contends, during the meetings “they [jurors] have a discussion on what that [excellence] could possibly mean and they come to a sort of consensus throughout the week on what they’re looking for” (Interview). This is the reason why unsuccessful applicants do not receive feedback because as the jury changes, the “ideas of excellence will change” (Interview).

Then the panel peer-review convenes at the Council’s facility; jurors are brought into the same room to make funding decisions, and given a limited time frame to provide their recommendations. A grants officer (acting as facilitator), a grant assistant, and jurors (at least three peers, often five jurors) are ready to assess every application. But first, the grants officer reads The Charge.

2.5.4 The Charge: Arts Councils’ Guidelines

Before commencing the assessments, the grants officer reads the Charge on behalf of the arts council, which outlines the policies and procedures for assessment. The Charge is very important to the process because it ensures compliance, reveals the council’s strategic goals and enables the fairness of the jury process. Councils use the Charge to explain and enact their policies and guidelines on funding decisions. They lay out the assessment criteria for the
program, for example, equity, conflict of interest and confidentiality, and the recommendation process. The Charge is quite comprehensive. For instance, at the CCA, it is a nine-page document, and contains the following sections: welcome, logistics and schedules, about the council and its core values, program categories, eligibility, assessment criteria, role of assessors, conflict of interest, peer assessment, scoring, budget, prizes, some advice to jurors, and making recommendations.

The discourses of excellence evolve as grants officers read the Charge. What stood out the most for me from the data were the mention of equity and diversity, which are part of the current discursive milieu. Discourses of excellence in the Canadian arts councils are significantly focused on diversity and equity goals, hence, affecting jurors’ definition of excellence. A former arts administrator explains that “Excellence that year was defined by identity politics, by work that is heavily rooted in cultural specificity, such as gender identity” (Interview). As a result, the yearly changes create a “new aesthetic” (Interview). One juror states the definition of excellence evolves and is negotiated and “artistic excellence is excellence is something that is a factor that arises and gets revisited and redone and reshaped and changed all the time” (Interview).

2.5.5 Scoring: The Quest for Artistic Excellence

After the Charge is read, a list of the applications under consideration is presented to the jurors in alphabetical order. The jurors call out their rankings (the ones already thought out) to the grants officer, and the grants assistant records them. The grant assistant prepares the cumulative ranking for each application. At the end of each round, the scores are tabulated on an Excel spread sheet, and those who are at the top of the list with close to a perfect score stay
at the top, and those who are at the bottom are eliminated. The grants officer acts as a facilitator, the grants assistant provides support, and jurors (at least three peers, often five jurors) assess applications. On average, for the visual arts programs, jurors read approximately 300-400 applications and spend between 1 to 2 minutes per application during the scoring process. The process typically requires meeting for three to five days, depending on the volume of applications. See Appendix D-Scoring Cards to see a sample of how scoring works.

At the CCA, applications are ranked based on a scale of zero to 10, “One to four indicates low merit, four to eight is medium and eight and above is high merit” (Interview & CCA’s Charge document). At the OAC and TAC, each application is ranked based on a scale of one to five: Excellent (5), Very Good (4), Good (3), Fair (2), or Poor (1) (OAC’s Charge document). All applications are examined in the context of the council’s strategic priorities, artistic merit (as well as excellence for TAC), and budget.

In the quest for excellence, a passionate negotiation takes place as each juror tries to authenticate his or her definition of excellence across the evaluation process. Jurors engage in vigorous discussion as they compare artists’ applications. As in the arts councils’ Charge, there is an expectation of professionalism in the deliberation room including a respectful tone towards one another, collegiality, and an amicable environment. If jurors lack any technical knowledge about the applications, they will seek the advice of the grants officer, who in turn will rely on the grant assistant to find the answer.

Artistic excellence is ubiquitously invoked during the interview and deliberation processes, but little consensus exists concerning its meaning. When peer-reviewers or jurors talk about excellence in their deliberations, they have already formed their discursive practices.
A juror contends, “I actually don’t like the idea of excellence—at least the way I’ve heard it used. I interpret it as a code word—as a kind of euphemism for conventions within the art world” (Interview). In other words, excellence is a social construct. An arts administrator stipulates, “We assess merit” and “We don’t define excellence. Excellence is the outcome of the discussion with that particular group of peers” (Interview). These same discursive practices get contested and negotiated during the deliberation process.

My findings concur with Lamont’s findings on the peer-review process: panellists are “pretty professional people, so they do their best. They have very different tastes so there’s a lot of potential for conflict. They stay cool-headed and they have to make these heroic efforts to agree” (Lamont, 2009, p. 107). However, in describing excellence, Lamont (2009) identified six formal criteria: originality, clarity, quality, significance, methods, and feasibility of the project. In addition to applying formal criteria, panellists use informal criteria during the evaluation process: signs of intelligence (articulate, competent, intelligent, and talented); elegance and cultural capital (cultural ease, cultural breath); personal qualities (interesting, exciting, and boring), and moral qualities (determination, humility, and authenticity) (Lamont, 2009, p. 190). In contrast to Lamont, I found distinctive criteria that construct the meaning of artistic excellence. I identify them below. Figure 2.1, a word cloud, depicts the words mentioned most often when participants were asked to define excellence; prevalence is indicated by font size (I used NVivo-selected stem words). Filler words and phrases such as I mean, you know, like, uh, and um have been removed.
Figure 2.4—The Most Mentioned Words That Define ‘Excellence’

![Diagram showing diverse meanings of excellence.](image)

Source: D’Andrea, 2016

Figure 2.4 shows the diverse meanings of excellence. For the majority of participants, excellence means interesting, which amounts to another vague term. For others, it means engagement to the community, as well as good writing proposal skills. Some argued that there is no definition for excellence. One juror exclaimed, “I don’t like work that's didactic and then there's nothing interesting.” Another one adds, “This isn't about what you like. And I thought well it's interesting.” The other juror states, “excellence related, the interesting qualities of the artwork they’re talking about” (Interview). Although the word “interesting” is repeated, the word itself is loaded with subjective meanings.

According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, excellence means: (1) the quality of being excellent; (2) an excellent or valuable quality, a virtue; and (3) excellency. And excellent means: (1) very good of its kind; and (2) eminently good, first-class. Rostan and Vaira (2011) assert that “Excellence has become the 21st Century buzzword” (p. vii), and Graham (2009) adds that it is a “tricky concept” (p. 323).

On the other hand, a juror contended, “The excellence for me comes not only how well put the argument is in a written application. To some extent it's how well written it is, but people's writings vary.” Another added, “I guess with the granting system, it is important to have succinct writing.” These different understandings reflect jurors’ discursive practices during
the overall peer-review process, which results in constant negotiation, and at times contestation. There is, indeed, ambiguity invoked by the curious mix of metaphors for excellence—interesting, engagement, writing, looks like art, fits the goals, work that is moving, pushes the boundaries, among others. These metaphors heightened a sense of vulnerability in the peer-review system, and I ponder where, on the scale of excellence, an artist’s work might lie. The context where the interaction occurs is quite fixed, happening in the arts councils; however, the discourse is vulnerable and filled with interpretations, which brings about discursive practices that get reproduced.

Art jurors follow principles analogous to those in academia. There is “an overall orientation toward producing consensual decisions and realizing the common good. Moreover, panelists are expected to convince one another with the force of reason” (Lamont, 2009, p. 117) that their selection is the most adequate. It is this setting that “gives rise to ‘deferring to expertise,’ a foundational rule for sustaining collective belief in the fairness of peer-review” (Lamont & Huutoniemi, 2011, p. 218).

During the second round of the deliberation process, the grants officer reveals the cut-off line. That is, those applicants above the score of 20, for example, will be considered for funding and jurors have the opportunity to express an opinion on those applications they prefer. Those applicants who are scored below 20 will receive a rejection letter. However, it is worth noting that jurors have the opportunity to bring those applications below the cut off point above to above 20 by re-ranking the applicants. The grants officer asks if any of the jurors would like to re-score any of the applicants from below the cut off line. At this point, negotiation is leveraged to authenticate discursive practices. The most articulate juror will make the case in favour of an
applicant. One juror says, “Usually you’re able to come up with a shortened list and then, sometimes, there’s a bit of... - sometimes you need a third round where the negotiation kind of sets in” (Interview). Another juror says “It’s always negotiation.” A third juror adds “Sometimes it works by negotiation. For instance, some will say, if there’s a jury that, where half thinks it’s really excellent and the other half says it’s mediocre then you might move into the mid-range” (Interview).

Lamont’s findings recognize that excellence is not only cognitive, but it is also driven by an interactional and an emotional undertaking, particularly, “pleasure, saving face, and maintaining one’s self-concept—as a part of the investment that academics make in scholarly evaluation” (Lamont, 2009, p. 20). In the arts councils, jurors often experience the greatest challenge and emotional experiences when applications are in the middle-rank or close to the cut-off line. These discussions consume the most time; emotions flow and views of excellence are contested. An art juror says,

There was one file that I felt very strongly against. I felt wasn’t worth supporting the work. And I think it touched on some of my feelings – like I didn’t fully understand the artistic process behind it and some of the artistic decisions, and I felt that it was not necessarily taking into account—I didn’t feel like it was critical enough for—there was something. And I felt very strongly. It was the only place where I felt very strongly to reject it .... It was an emotional experience where I was feeling offended. (Interview)

Another juror says, “You get into the emotional space of, you want to support the underdog” (Interview). In terms of assessing the application, a juror states, “That’s not to say that art shouldn’t be emotional; in fact, it should be absolutely emotional, it should evoke
emotion” (Interview). Another juror supplements, “it really is incredibly painful to get down to that stage in the jurying process, because there always are so many more applications that you think really should be funded. And it’s getting down to those decisions” (Interview). Hence the discourses of excellence are also affected by emotional acts.

2.5.6 ‘Highly’ Recommended

This is the last stage of the jury process. At this stage it is mainly the work that is judged rather than the artist. Here jurors are given full sovereignty over assessment. However, jurors’ decisions become recommendations rather than final decisions. Grants officers have discretionary power that affects the selection process, and in some cases, they may be able to overturn jurors’ decisions. This happens rarely, but it has happened, as one interviewee affirms. “The grants officers have the ability to make adjustments in order to make sure that the regional diversity is represented” (Interview) to fulfill council’s discourses of excellence. Furthermore, “they often do not communicate those changes to the jurors,” (Interview) and for that reason a juror’s discursive practices might not make it to the final decision. The ultimate decision-maker is the arts council board. As one jurors explains, with the “use of peer juries, we make recommendations to the arts council board,” but art boards have the ultimate arbiter of for excellence. For instance, at the OAC, “if the grant is $30,000 or less, the program officer takes the recommendations to the executive director for approval. But grants over $30,000 are approved by the OAC board of directors” (OAC, n.d.).

2.6 Discussion

Smith (2006) concludes that the peer-review process is “slow, expensive ... and highly subjective” (p. 179). A number of criticisms focuses on the reliability of the process and the
existence of bias, such as conflict of interest and subjectivity (Chubin, 1994; Demicheli & Pietrantonj, 2007; Galligan, 1993; Lamont & Huutoniemi, 2011; Thorngate, Dawes, & Foddy, 2010; Robergs, 2003; Roy, 1985; Rushton, 2002; Smith, 2006; Smith, 2010; Wessely, 1998). The act of peer-review suggests that panel approval would serve to legitimate art as public good. However, there is a general perception by artists that panels operate by peers for peers without consideration of the public that is both the intended audience and the ultimate source of the funds (Galligan, 1993). This apprehension will require future research.

When it comes to defining excellence, jurors bring their socially-constructed discursive practices when deciding what excellence means. The jury “pretty much decides themselves what artistic excellence means….it is not this sort of standard that you have to reach, it is sort of an acceptance of what excellence is” (Interview). In fact, the “Council (CCA) does not have an official definition of artistic excellence nor merit; this is for the peers in the milieu to determine” (Interview). In other words, it is the “artist’s job to produce excellence and is it for jurors to recognize it” (Interview). Buchanan, Henig and Henig (1998) explore the notions of subjectivity and objectivity to demonstrate that they are valuable concepts in decision-making. In terms of subjectivity, they explain,

We perceive the world through our senses. This sensory equipment generates our first and personal experience of the work that surrounds us. This type of experience is the natural way of acquiring information and extending personal knowledge. Thus, a subjective description of reality is someone’s account of his own perception of that reality. With this type of description, the observer is trying to convey the way reality appears to him or her. In this way, then, all is subjective. It is therefore not surprising to
find the cornerstone of modern thought the personal, subjective point of view, founded on René Descartes’ Cogito: ‘I think, therefore I am.’ (Buchanan et al., 1998, p. 337)

Although subjectivity is omnipresent (Buchanan et al., 1998, Peshkin, 1988), Buchanan et al., (1998) assert that applying subjectivity “in every facet of life can lead to a dead end” (p. 338) because we need to understand reality and hence, the objectivity to describe the underlying foundation of reality. Furthermore, “objectivity is interpreted as ‘having reality independent of the individual mind.’ This is achieved by a continuous effort of inspecting the information by the ‘community mind’” (Buchanan et al., 1998, p. 339). Roy (1993) postulates that objectivity “goes hand in glove with neutrality” during the decision-making process. As a result, subjectivity and objectivity are necessary in every process of decision-making. However, the separation of the two are imperative in every process of decision-making in the name of research, study methods, models and alternatives (Buchanan et al., 1998) and to handle complexity and uncertainty.

Remender and Lucarely (1986) asked, “Is it possible to obtain an objective understanding of artist excellence?” (p. 210). They concluded that “objectivity may often be equated with consensus” (p. 210). In fact, the definition of excellence emerges as a collective product of people involved in the deliberation room. Jurors create standards of excellence that speak to a prevailing notion of what constitutes an excellent work of art, which suggests that the peer-review system needs to be interrogated.

Given the difficulties defining excellence discussed above, in the book *Judging Merit*, Thorngate et al., (2010) argue that a clear definition might seem impossible because there are
so many ways a juror can disagree, and “there is not objective way to determine whose
definition should prevail” (Thorngate et al., 2010, p. 6).

At the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), wherein the principles
for SSHRC Merit, peer-review of academic research proposal are clear and defined, the arts
council states, “The chairperson [facilitator] may provide factual or background information
during a committee meeting. However, it is not the role of Canada Council to comment on the
artistic merit of an application” (CCA, n.d.).

On January 13, 2014, I attended a Mock Jury session organized by OAC and TAC for arts
organizations. In the session, jurors received a comment sheet with three categories for ratings:
Artistic Merit, Impact, and Viability. Each category was clearly defined. For instance, the
definition of Artistic Merit was as follows: “Quality of work based on: the artist statement;
resumes of the artists involved in the project; support material showing previous work and/or
the work of the individual artist(s) involved; the project description as it related to the artistic
objective (e.g., form, content, the degree of collaboration between the artist(s) and the non-
arts community, etc.)” (not available online). These definitions are clearly neglected in the
assessment of individual artists when it applies to particular excellence.

2.7 Implications

Still imperfect, the peer-review model continues to be the best model for participants—
a “human model” as one interviewee called it, subjective and emotional. This model perceives
jurors as experts and ‘excellent’ artists and thus entitled to evaluate artwork and their

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judgments are assumed to be the correct ones. Funding decisions are reached through consensus, mutual learning, compromising, or simply relying on the juror with the loudest voice. The persuasiveness of a juror is often enough to influence decisions at times. However, as one juror states, it “doesn’t happen very often where the person running the jury will try to influence people” (Interview).

In the art world, there is an assumption that a prominent artist/juror understands what excellence is, and needs to accept it. Socially-constructed discursive practices play out during assessments and negotiations. A number of criticisms of the peer-review process focus on the existence of biases (Demicheli & Di Pietrantonj, 2007; Robergs, 2003; Roy, 1985; Smith, 2010; Magin, 2001; Wessely, 1998). Others argue that there is a strong “lottery” component (Neff & Olden, 2006; Smith, 2010; Wessely, 1998). Peer-review is a complex process and can be very subjective. Then, how do we achieve confidence in the peer-review process when panel members involved in the deliberations invoke discursive practices during the assessment process?

The criterion of excellence is indeed subjective and how best to define it is challenging—in particularly the case in the arts, which constantly evolve and change. Is it possible to conduct peer-review procedures in which the effectiveness of the process is not compromised by the vagueness of the definition of excellence? There is a need to design standards of “excellence” that guide the deliberation process. Indeed, disinterested views of excellence challenge the peer-review process.
2.8 Conclusion

The peer-review model has been pivotal in making and justifying funding decisions for the arts. In the quest for excellence, the peer-review selection process is rigorous, and jurors have made a commitment to discover the best artist(s) and their works. The interviews showed emotions and strong belief in the peer-review system. Jurors are, indeed, believers of the peer-review model. When assessing applications, there often was a clear consensus within the group. When there was no consensus, jurors had the opportunity to explain their rationales and negotiate at times fiercely (Interview). On occasions, jurors felt influenced by their peers to take a particular side, or to increase the scores of preferred applicants (Interview). There was a consistency to the process and the council’s Charge was clear enough. Panels were presented with the same information about each applicant, and the process was also efficient. However, the application of excellence during the deliberation process builds on jurors’ discourse practises and well as that of the councils. In order to improve the understanding of the process, I propose guidelines to address definitions of ‘excellence’ to improve the confidence in the system.

This study does not substantiate claims that the peer-review is biased or flawed. As in all systems, perceptions of subjectivity and bias are common, and inevitable in our everyday life. Decision-makers are human, and hence, we have a tendency to make decisions based on subjectivity of “what one likes” versus “what is best.” However, with limited funds in the arts, we are left with more future research questions about effectiveness of the process based on lack of definitions. Nevertheless, building trust in the peer-review process is very important for the artists and the community. As Lamont (2009) puts it, “it rejects the vast majority of
applicants, who could easily lose faith. Thus this system [must] maintains representations of itself as open and driven by meritocracy” (Lamont, 2009, p. 52).

Although the peer-review process is perceived as the “best” model to award grants, as a guarantor for excellence it is an imperfect model and it could be improved. A new framework of assessment for funding bodies will need to lay out clear definitions of what applicants should expect in the assessment of excellence. The discourses of excellence that jurors construct tend to obviate the need for individual responsibility for meaning. Artists need to have confidence in the funding system. Peer-review, in effect, demands understanding, validation, collaboration, expertise, and hard work. The aim should be a more confident articulation of the definition of excellence embedded in the peer-review process to award applicants based upon established criteria of excellence, rather than discursive practices.
CHAPTER THREE: SYMBOLIC POWER — Impact of Government Priorities

Symbolic Power: Impact of Government Priorities on the Peer Review Process

Abstract

Canadian arts councils make funding decisions using the peer-review model at arm’s length of government agencies. In theory, the government decides what the mandate and budget of an arts council will be, but arts councils are free to decide who and what will be funded without political interference. Contrary to this belief, the peer review process does not always award funding based solely on artistic merit. This is because the peer review process is influenced by government priorities that shape their funding decisions. I interviewed visual artists, administrators and leaders at three levels: federal (the Canada Council for the Arts), provincial (the Ontario Arts Council), and municipal (the Toronto Arts Council). This paper explains (1) the government priorities that successfully shaped funding decisions; (2) arts councils’ priorities that flounder the exert of government influence; and (3) active resistance to government priorities. This study shows that even though arts councils are at arm’s length, they often fulfill the government’s agenda as filtered through symbolic power.
3.1 Introduction

Canadian arts councils make funding decisions using the peer-review model, at arm’s length from government agencies. In theory, the government decides what the mandate and budget of an arts council will be, but the arts council is free to decide who and what it will fund without political interference (Interview; Sirman, 2008). Peer review is often conducted with a panel of at least three jurors who evaluate grant applications. Their decisions are arrived at by consensus or majority agreement, and then jurors provide recommendations to council staff regarding their selected grant applications. Applications are evaluated based on artistic merit and often shaped by the council’s strategic priorities as well. Contrary to this belief; however, the peer review process does not always award funding based solely on artistic merit. This is because it is influenced by external priorities that may or may not have anything to do with artistic merit. Even though the peer review process is supposed to be free of government influence, it continues to be shaped by the priorities of the government of the time.

In Canada, all three levels of government have the authority to fund the arts (Sirman, 2008). The model for arm’s length funding in the arts council is one where the government decides what the mandate and budget of an arts council will be, but the arts council is free to decide who and what it will fund without political interference (Interview; Sirman, 2008). In theory, “the government is set a distance from its arts council” (Quinn, 1997, p. 127).

The Canada Council for the Arts is a Crown corporation and operates at arm’s length from government. The council has the ability to make judgments and to base its funding decisions on the evaluation of artistic merit. “In order to fulfil its legislated mandate, the council is empowered to set its own priorities, strategic directions, budgets, and operational practices.
It can independently establish funding programs and make granting decisions free from political interference” (CCA, n.d.). As a Crown corporation that administers public funds, the CCA is accountable for its operations. The CCA complies with federal legislation and is subject to regular audits by the Auditor General of Canada and to strategic reviews (government-mandated assessments) (CCA, 2011a). Each year, the CCA reports to Parliament through the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

The Ontario Arts Council (OAC) is an agency of the provincial government and also operates at arm’s length from the government. However, since the council relies 100 per cent on government funding, that gift comes with “a great deal of control from the government officials” (Interview). That is, the Council needs to attend to government’s priorities and may allow intervention in the decision-making process. What governments “don’t have control over is the decision-making of who should receive funding” (Interview). In other words, governments do not control which particular individuals should receive funding; however, what they often control are the councils’ strategic priorities.

The Toronto Arts Council (TAC) is also an arm's length arts funding agency. It comprises a volunteer board and committees made up of artists, other arts professionals, and arts supporters. In addition, the city council appoints five of its members to Toronto Arts Council’s 29-member board of directors. Under the arm’s length principle, TAC's board approves the grants under the terms of its contract with city council, and then awards the funds without the city council’s interference (TAC, n.d.a).

It is worth noting that there is government representation in each of the boards; hence, this facilitates government influences and/interventions. Historical accounts suggest that the
government intervenes or retaliates if councils resist abiding by its agenda. This is explained in Policy Matters, where Robertson (2006) recounts that

Over the life of the [Canada] Council various federal governments have deposited new programs within the Council and earmarked increases to the Council’s annual appropriation. When the Council resisted the less compatible or more invasive forms of intervention—special one-time allocations of monies or responsibilities that could be used as policy precedents by governments or funding applicants—the government of the day has frequently retaliated by attempting to erase the protections of the Canada Council Act by changing the agency status of the Canada Council itself. This occurred in 1979, 1984, and 1992. (p. 114)

This paper sheds some light on the extent to which government priorities affect funding decisions. This paper explains (1) the government priorities that successfully shaped funding decisions; (2) arts councils’ priorities that flounder the exert of government influence; and (3) active resistance to government priorities. I interviewed visual artists, administrators and leaders at all three levels: federal (the Canada Council for the Arts), provincial (the Ontario Arts Council), and municipal (the Toronto Arts Council). I draw from Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic power to examine the means of influence of government priorities in funding decisions. This study shows that even though arts councils are at arm’s length from government, they often fulfill the government’s agenda as filtered through symbolic power.

3.2 Methodology

This paper employed a qualitative approach. The data collected included face-to-face interviews, field observations of the deliberation process, and document artifacts in the form of
arts council’s internal reports. Data analysis was conducted with insights from the scholarly literature.

Qualitative research allows for an understanding of how people construct their words, and what meaning they attribute to their experience (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative data are a source of rich descriptions and explanation of processes; one can preserve chronological flow and derive fruitful explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Face-to-face interviews offer insight into a participant’s thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about a particular topic or issue (Edmonson & Irby, 2008; Merriam, 2009). The researcher can observe body language, tone of voice, facial expression, and other non-verbal cues (Edmonson & Irby, 2008; Merriam, 2009). Interviewed participants’ eye contact or body language signal whether it was acceptable to ask further probing questions. Interviews allowed me to probe and ask for clarifications about the meaning the responses intended to convey. My background as a visual artist allowed me to elucidate and sympathize with the participants, as well as to further examine answers and to ask informed and in-depth questions.

I conducted 26 face-to-face interviews, 16 with former jurors (who are also professional or established visual artists) and 10 with art leaders in the city of Toronto (see Appendix A for the Data Collection Plan). I conducted semi-structured interviews with visual artists, art administrators and leaders, and panel review members between January 2013 and March 2014. I sought out participation by relying on arts councils’ websites (which provided publicly available contacts for past peer-review panel members) as well as by snowball sampling. Most panel members had extensive previous experience serving on art funding panels, ranging from one to 20 years of experience. Participants were not offered an honorarium for their
participation in my study. Interview questions focused on the factors that influenced arts
tuition decisions. I digitally recorded the interviews and also took observation notes. A
verbatim transcript of each tape-recorded interview was created with the help of a research
assistant. Each transcription resulted in approximately 12 to 15 pages. I then sent transcriptions
to the participants for their review. The interviews took place in Toronto and Ottawa (where
the Canada Council for the Arts is located). By the twenty-fourth interview, saturation was
achieved; participants’ responses had begun to repeat.

I observed a half-day mock jury workshop for funding for arts organizations organized by
the OAC & TAC (January 13, 2014). It was open to the public and I took notes. Also, I engaged in
lengthy negotiations over a period of six months with arts councils before I was given access to
observe one of the deliberation processes. After I signed a formal agreement covering the
conditions of participants’ confidentiality, the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) alone permitted my
attendance. My non-participant (naturalistic) observation at OAC in the category of
“Established Artists” lasted two full days (July 21 & 22, 2014). I observed and wrote notes, but
did not partake in the deliberation process or decision-making. My observation notes focused
on the decision-making process in arts funding. My data have also been collected from
secondary sources (arts councils’ internal reports, statistical data, and field observations).

Data Analysis

Once I received confirmation from the participants that I was free to use the interview
data, I began performing a qualitative analysis that was thematic in nature, using NVivo to
identify common themes such as characteristics of the arts community councils serve, local and
external factors that affect decision making. I proceeded to use NVivo to analyze the data. I
selected themes such as Arts Councils’ Strategic Priorities, Governments Priorities, Arm’s Length, Peer-Review process, and Symbolic Power. I also created memos and notes from my observation notes. I looked at the statements that link councils to government agencies and identify their relationships of power (symbolic). Additionally, I revisited the data as many times as necessary given the integral importance of cross-checking and verification of emergent conclusions. The variety of data enabled me to triangulate sources of information, including primary documents, interviews and independent reports.

**Ethical Review**

This research includes human participants; thus it was reviewed by the University of Toronto Ethics Review Committee in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS-2). There were no foreseen risks for participants who took part in this study. Participants were required to read an information letter about the project and sign and return a consent letter prior an interview. They were informed in the consent form that they were free to withdraw their participation at any time. The data collected follows the encrypted guidelines of the research ethics office. Participants in this study remain anonymous.

**Limitations**

While the observations provided insights into the adjudication process, arts administrators and arts leaders may have inflated the importance of the realities of the arm’s length peer-review process to protect the arts councils from government retaliation. This research is also challenged by the limited opportunity for observation of the adjudication process. During the observation as a single adjudication meeting, jurors were made aware of
this research study and might have acted differently than usual. I was only allowed to record
notes about the peer-review process, not the reactions of jurors. The Council reviewed and
approved the observation notes.

3.3 Conceptual Framework

In developing the conceptual framework for the study, I draw from Pierre Bourdieu’s
theory of symbolic power to reflect the realities of government relationships with the arts
councils. Symbolic power is the mechanism of how government agencies exert influence on arts
funding decision.

3.3.1 Pierre Bourdieu’s Symbolic Power

Power is visible everywhere (Bourdieu, 1992), ubiquitous and pervasive. Symbolic power is
“the form material power relations assume when they are perceived through social
categories that represent them as legitimate” (Cronin, 1996, p. 65). Symbolic power is
manifested as the imposition of categories of thought as the legitimate social order, which
leads to perceptions among dominated social agents or communities, who, in turn, perpetuate
a social structure favoured by and serving the interests of those agents who are already
governing. For instance, government agents put pressure on arts councils to justify the
importance of the arts with an economic aim, and thus, arts councils perpetuate the economic
justification of the arts (See Jenkins, 2009). Thus, through symbolic power, the government
entrenches a reality that defines the basis of legitimacy in the arts within economic logic.

Under the arm’s length principle, arts councils operate with relative autonomy in
relation to the central government, but traces of government control characterize
government’s dealings with the arts councils (Quinn, 1997). The notion of symbolic control
provides a valuable tool for understanding the symbolic mechanisms of power between individual councils and government. The concept symbolic power provides a theoretical framework for understanding arts councils and the government agent’s interactions.

Bourdieu “conceives of society as a social space where people exist in relation to one another (primarily) based on their economic capital, cultural capital (i.e., credentials, titles, tastes, dispositions), and social capital (i.e., networks)” (Hallett, 2003, p. 130). Bourdieu employs the concepts of cultural capital (non-financial social assets that promote social mobility, e.g., education), field (social space or setting with its own rules, where social agents interact) and habitus (dispositions, values, perception, thought, and action). Habitus “reflects the relations of power that structure the social world in which it is inculcated and the cultural understandings” (Cronin, 1996, p. 65), and those who dominate the field shape social practices (Cronin, 1996). In other words, Canadian arts councils, which depend on government funding, allow government agents to shape the field and habitus of the arts. That is, Canadian arts councils’ decisions and strategic priorities reflect government priorities. To have symbolic power is to have symbolic capital that entitles the agent (the government) to establish discourses of legitimacy and generate consensus about reality (Edwards, 2009). Symbolic capital is also “the acquired reputation or image of respectability that is easily converted into political positions” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 291). This in turn, reinforces a person’s own position in the field, establishing a moral order (Bourdieu, 1984; Edwards, 2009).

By comparison, symbolic power is also manifested in appointments to the Arts Council in Britain. Quinn (1997) explains that the current state of the arts council no longer follow the rules of the arm’s length principle; the government has become increasingly proximate to this
arts council intimacy rather than distance and consequently the “arm’s length principle” is not, nor ever has been, a true representation of the government and arts council relationship in the British context (Quinn, 1997). Quinn adds, “Arts Council closer to government, made it easier to control and led to an increase in political influence over its activities .... Ideals were installed throughout the power structure” (p. 131). Government actions “have had the effect of streamlining the arts to meet the demands of government .... towards promoting a positive image of State involvement in the arts” (Quinn, 1997, p. 152). This raises the question of the extent of closeness and resistance between government agencies and the arts councils.

3.4 Findings

3.4.1 Government Priorities that Successfully Shaped Funding Decisions

As we have learned, the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) is a Crown corporation and presumably operates at arm’s length from government. The council has the ability to make judgments and to base its funding decisions on the evaluation of artistic quality. The Ontario Arts Council (OAC) is an agency of the provincial government and also presumably operates at arm’s length from the government. However, since the OAC relies 100 percent on government funding, there is a great deal of control from the government officials (Interview). That is, the Council needs to attend to government’s priorities and the government may intervene in the decision-making process of arts funding. The Toronto Arts Council (TAC), also presumably an arm’s length arts funding agency, comprises a volunteer board and committees made up of artists, other arts professionals and arts supporters (TAC, n.d.a).

The data show that although the three arts councils operate at arm’s length, the peer-review process for arts funding is shaped by government’s priorities, permeated with symbolic
power. The arts councils have become increasingly susceptible to economic and political forces at work due to their ongoing financial demands to meet the needs of the arts community.

### 3.4.1.1 Economics Forces

“So, it’s economics, in a way” (Arts administrator, Interview)

In justifying the arts, government officials, policy makers and academics have widely accepted that spending on culture can bolster the economic impact of a political entity (Caust, 2003; Jenkins, 2009; also see literature on the Creative Economy and Urban Economic Development). Economists believe that “education has economic value” (Carnoy, 2009, p. 27), and thus, the choice of career and the course of policy should follow a market-driven order. Carnoy contends that as a society we are taught to think in economic dimensions with the focus on costs and returns. He explains,

> As a society … we may want the achievement gaps between different groups to close, but accomplishing these goals requires sacrifice, and economics can help us to think about how great those sacrifices may have to be and whether the gain to society is worth the cost. Economics can also help us decide how to achieve goals most “efficiently” (in terms of costs). (Carnoy, 2009, p. 27)

Furthermore, government subsidy “has had to provide economic reasons for continuing its government involvement” (Caust, 2003, p. 52). There is an economic tension conveyed by government to the councils to make a case for the arts (Interview). An arts administrator narrates, “In recent years, we have achieved gains [funding] by relaying to government the story about the economic importance of the arts” (Interview). The same administrator adds, “We all know that there is a strong linkage between culture and a strong economy. And by
doing that, we actually promote sustainable communities, cohesive communities, and a strong economy (Arts leader, Interview).

Bourdieu views the state as “a field of power in which agents who occupy dominant positions in the restricted cultural fields struggle for control over the power invested in the institutions of the state to impose the official representations of the social world” (Cronin, 1996, p. 72). Canadian arts councils’ strategic priorities reflect state or government priorities: in this instance, economics. The government, as a dominant agent, inculcates the cultural community with its economic values. Consequently, the relationship between the government and the arts is market-driven and that seemingly needs economic justification (Caust, 2003). Hence, the sustainability of the councils rests on their ability to justify the arts in economics terms.

That, the arts sector has been compelled to justify and develop arguments for the economic value of its output, which depreciates its intrinsic value (Caust, 2003). This approach is also common in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, where “arts funding agencies have been restructured to reflect a market-driven agenda rather than an arts-driven agenda” (Caust, 2003, p. 51). Thus, in general, it is the prerogative of the arts councils’ leaders to go to the government with a case for support of the arts (Interview). But the arts councils are also required to justify and measure their worth to government agencies. An arts leader argues, there is

an increasing understanding of the economic importance of the [arts] sector. So as you move away from a manufacturing based economy to a service-based economy, there’s
been a tremendous understanding of the value of the [arts] sector in terms of creating intellectual property that can be monetized in the future. (Interview)

An arts leader adds that the government views the arts sector “in both perspectives from a pure cultural perspective, but also from an economic perspective. The economic perspective, more so than it did in the past” (Interview). Therefore, the importance of the arts is value-laden with economic arguments, as one arts administrator concurs, “Arts councils do a lot of things for economics” (Interview) in order to justify and protect arts funding. Since the councils cannot lobby the government that already provides them with funding, indirect advocacy efforts are necessary. As another arts administrator illustrates, “We also need to measure our own impact according to our own corporate plans, our own reports to the...government, because the government asks for us to demonstrate impact as well” (Interview). Exposing the impact of the arts programs is a form of indirect advocacy. One arts administrator contends, “We want to get the most impact that we can” to satisfy government agencies and “if at some point a program is not having impact, or something in the environment has changed and we need to re-look at our programs to shift them or adjust them, then we make consultations” (Interview). Hence, the quest for economic impact makes arts councils wary and sensible about their arts funding decisions. An arts administrator enlightens us:

One of the other things that is a concern to me is the external pressure from the government on the councils, in trying to justify why you would give money to the arts when we could be giving money to housing, or we could be giving money to children, or we could be giving money to cancer in hospitals. To make a case for funding the arts, I think there’s been
more and more pressure on the councils to diversify, and funding community initiatives. Which, I have to say I kind of feel two ways about. It is like we’re going to fund things that are commercially viable as opposed to funding pure research. (Interview)

An economic tactic that government agencies use to support the “arts economy” is tourism. Tourism plays a key role in injecting funds to the economy. The Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sport (MTCS) reiterates that tourism and sustainability are key priorities for the province (Interview), and also contends that the importance of the arts is understood in an economic dimension (See also MTCS, 2015). Arts councils also need to address tourism discourses (serving the government agency’s symbolic power) by repositioning their strategic priorities to focus on economic impact. As an arts council administrator explains, “As a government agency, we very often have to respond to requests from the government [regarding tourism income]” (Interview). Later, the administrator adds, “We were interested in knowing about cultural tourism, and we were able to demonstrate that cultural tourists ... spend on average twice as much money as other tourists. They stay on average 33 per cent longer” (Interview). The administrator notes, “This helps make a case for the arts. We are trying to demonstrate the economic impact, the impact of art on the quality of life” (Interview). This reveals that art leaders are affected by government’s agenda.

Meanwhile, at the TAC, there is a clear focus on the influences of economic forces. The TAC’s website contains a section exclusively about economic impact of the arts, more or less measuring the rate of return for every dollar spent on the arts as the guiding principle to justify the arts in economic terms. The TAC estimates, “For every $1 granted to an arts organization by TAC, $14.56 is received from other levels of government, the private sector or earned revenue
including ticket sales” (TAC, n.d.b). These are outcome that have filtered via symbolic power to the councils from governments economic priorities.

3.4.1.2 Political Forces

There is a conviction that arts and politics must never mix (Quinn, 1997), but in reality they do. Splintering arrangements for arts funding provision has often been based on government’s interventions. The nature of government intervention has brought attempts to influence the arts funding decision by means of invasive forms of interference (e.g., cutting funding) of the Councils which is filtered through symbolic power, as Robertson (2006) explains in Policy Matters:

Over the life of the Council various federal governments have deposited new programs within the Council and earmarked increases to the Council’s annual appropriation. When the Council resisted the less compatible or more invasive forms of intervention—special one-time allocations of monies or responsibilities that could be used as policy precedents by governments or funding applicants—the government of the day has frequently retaliated by attempting to erase the protections of the Canada Council Act by changing the agency status of the Canada Council itself. This occurred in 1979, 1984, and 1992. (p. 114)

As a result of the fear of cut backs or government retaliation, arts councils have learned to navigate political forces to assure ongoing funding and government financial support.

An arts administrator asserts that politics are always present, including government and office politics, particularly in large organizations. Since arts councils are unable to lobby the government, political maneuvers are a useful tool. An arts administrator states, “People from
the arts community can’t lobby the government... It’s just not done, but we can mobilize people from the arts community .... I will be sending an invitation to attend meetings with the MPP in the councils” (Interview). A former administrator contends that political maneuvers occur in the form of “tweaking success rates, reporting on tourism, destroying peer-review notes, and keeping a minimum amount of information in order to safeguard reputation and fulfill a government agenda” (Interview). A former juror adds, in reference to a program cut, “There are some political maneuvers and shifts that have happened and one would have to look at each” (Interview) to understand priorities based on funding. An arts leader confirms the existence of government politics, noting that the community government official makes sure to get recognition for the arts funding awarded to the institution; as the art leader explains, “I always get a letter from a government official saying, Dear X, I was delighted to be informed that you received a grant for so and so every year...” (Interview). In this sense, intervention may also depend on the party in power and what they sought to achieve in the arts.

The arm’s length principle is a symbolic representation that is used, similarly, as a political maneuver that protects the government from controversies or fiascos, as an arts administrator states, “The arm’s length principle allows the government to be distanced from that [controversies], and say, ‘We didn’t do that, we didn’t fund that’” (Interview).

Drawing from Bourdieu, Swartz (2013) argues that the political field is the arena where there is a struggle to accumulate political capital, “which give access to positions of power with the state” (p. 137). In the case of the arts councils, the arts leaders are figureheads who were appointed by a board (also comprised of government officials). These figurehead’s role is to
fulfil government’s demands (Interview) and hence, address government’s subdued interest that influenced the arts funding decision.

3.4.2 Arts Councils’ Priorities that Flounder the Exert of Government Influence

Government priorities flounders as arts councils have the power to act independently to implement their own strategic priorities, the aim to meet the needs of arts community, and to provide a transparent funding process.

3.4.2.1 Arts Council’s Strategic Priorities

Canadian arts councils fund artists in the context of the councils’ strategic priorities. A juror recounts that during the peer deliberation process, “the grant officer reminds everyone [jurors] about our strategic priorities and the aims of the program to fund visual arts” (Interview). Another juror adds,

At the beginning of the process, they give you a list of the council’s priorities. I think there were about five priorities last time I was there. And they’re very typical ones; they’re like we should take into consideration cultural diversity, for example.

(Interview)

Historically, in the arts councils, there has been an urgency to address “equity, access, and new practices” (Fatona, 2011, p. 113). Fatona explains despite the fact that the 1980s was an era of fiscal constraint due to government cuts, advocacy efforts carried out by artists led to an “increased representation of women, First Nations, and visible minority artists at the Canada Council” (p. 106). She explains that diversity refers “to the distinctness of cultural and geographical Canada’s regions but also to ethnicities and races other than English and French” (p. 107). Hence, arts councils’ strategic priorities have been swayed in those directions.
Diversity and equity are also important at the OAC. The OAC has launched a plan entitled Vital Arts and Public Value: A Blueprint for 2014 to 2020. The plan states that equity for the following groups is a priority: aboriginal artists, artists of colour, reaching out to regions across Ontario, deaf and disabled artists, Francophones, and new generation artists between 18 and 30 years of age (OAC, 2014). However, regionality actually seems to take priority at the OAC. In October 2014, the OAC strategic priorities were set out to serve a culturally diverse community with focus on artists situated “outside of the Toronto ‘M’ postal code” (Interview). As one administrator confirmed, “The panel knows that the OAC has made it a priority to fund regional work” (Interview). Furthermore, during my field observation of the peer-review process, the OAC grant officer read to the jurors a Jury Charge that highlighted its strategic priority—regionality. The grants officer stressed (by means of showing the data) to the jurors to consider that priority in their decision-making. However, those directions went unheeded by jurors as they solely based their funding decision on their understandings of “merit” and “excellence.”

At the Toronto Arts Council, cultivation of creativity, valuing excellence, embracing cultural diversity, community connections, innovation, and partnership are among the strategic funding priorities (TAC, 2013a & 2013b).

The literature and the data also demonstrate that the arts councils’ strategic priorities are constantly evolving. As one arts administrator asserts, priority “evolves, [and] it’s contested” (Interview). Since releasing CCA’s Moving Forward report in 2007, the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) has taken a different approach in framing its new strategic plan. In the Strengthening Connections 2011-16 report, the CCA’s priority has been to “focus on the
impact of the transition to a digital society on the arts” (CCA, 2011b, p. 7). The Canada Council’s priorities have also expanded to include engaging the public in the arts and taking a more active role in public dialogue on the needs and aspirations of citizenry. The council has expanded its planning time from three to five years to better address its priorities (CCA, 2011b). An arts administrator explains that the councils’ strategic priorities are revised from time to time, as he explains,

   It is about a constant examination and revisiting of what the social body is …. when one looks at the strategic plans they, of course, change every five years, there’s a bit - and the councils themselves do a lot of reviewing. And, I find them quite consultative actually, where they go out to the community and hold information sessions and are generally very receptive to changes in the field. (Interview)

Canadian arts councils set out their priorities under the rubric of diversity, equity, access, regionality, and more recently, new technology. However, the criteria keep expanding, and often councils tend to emphasize one factor more than the others.

   These distinctive strategic priorities of each council (CCA, OAC, and TAC) often are subject to those of government agencies. Resources are limited and funding may come with a great deal of influence. Hence, dependency on funding makes councils accountable to align the distribution of resources to the direction of the government agency rather than the councils. In other words, while arts councils seek out intrinsic values, government agencies seek out symbolic recognition.
3.4.2.2 Aim to Meet the Need of the Community

At the Canadian arts councils, a decision often begins with a need, that is, to “meeting the need” of the community. With limited funding, councils’ decisions demand to find innovative ways to generate a new or review programs. Canadian arts councils are constantly concerned about meeting the needs of the arts community and their decisions are based on finding the right balance between what the artists, the public wants and needs in the cultural landscape. However, addressing the needs of the community, the arts council’s decision-making process is persistently challenged “to achieve a fair and an equitable distribution of resources” (Interview). For instance, at the OAC, “the council has been operating with frozen funds for the past five years. Trying to do more with shrinking funds, population growth, and inflation is taking its toll on the capacity of the OAC” (Interview). Decisions are often revised to reflect the social and economic realities of the times. The arts evolve and tough decisions need to be made because there are “programs that are no longer as relevant as they once were, no longer as good as they once were or not meeting the public need as they once did” (Interview). During the adjudication process, a well-balanced (equitable and fair) decision is the key. As one council administrator adds, “finding the right balance between the existing and the new, that’s how you keep an ecosystem healthy. Like a forest, we are making ways for sunlight to shine on new things and let them grow” (Interview). An administrator adds, “understanding what the ecology of the arts is, where there is need [of the community], and if the needs are big enough, usually you find that the councils respond to them” (Interview). The need factor is a critical factor that shapes how councils make funding decisions in serving the community’s desire. Arts
councils are constantly assessing the needs of the community as one administrator
communicates,

You know things have changed. There are new art forms have emerged, there are
definitely new societal needs. We have established as an organization at the moment, as
part of our last plan, we established five strategic priority groups, and those groups are
culturally diverse, which means people of colour. They didn’t call it people of colour five
years ago but, that’s what is meant by culturally diverse. It does not mean different
religions or anything, it means people of colour. Francophone, aboriginal, new
generation, which is basically individual artists. (Interview)

It is the prerogative of arts council to go to the government with a case for support, in
order to fulfil that need, and the administrator’s shrewdness is needed to find the right balance
between what the artist, the government and the public want, without political interference.

3.4.2.3 Focus on Clarity of the Process

When it comes to the transparency of the peer review process, the government leave
the arts councils open to continuing criticism. Arts councils will endeavour to maintain a
transparent process and address whatsoever could damage their reputations. For instance, the
different funding models have created hurdles for artists in identifying the relevant field to their
practices; these many different classifications affect the way the arts funding decision works
and/or is applied. As such, the ability to differentiate the different fields for applicants, and for
that matter, practice effective decisions related to which category applies to their work is
opaque rather than transparent. Visual artists are confused when it comes time to choose an
application category. Artists may feel that they do not fit into the described disciplines when
trying to apply for grants (Interview). Artists have raised concerns about the way the councils have shuffled categories and have questioned the changes. A visual artist explains about the lack of clarity of arts council’s categories (e.g., media art, photography) the fields to which visual artists can apply. A visual artist voices,

There’s a really fine line, there’s really - blurry, that division [of categories] ....They need to have that kind of categorization....so it could improve on kind of redefining or reflect better on what is actually happening. So I’m glad you’re doing this research, because hopefully this will also have some sort of an influence on furthering their system right. (Interview). Another visual artist concurs, “Their kind of categorization - their understanding or their kind of shaping of what discipline/field means, I don’t think that’s a necessary reflection of what is actually happening” (Interview).

A visual artist states that at one point, the CCA decided to stop funding performance art, which was originally under the umbrella of the visual arts. It was then moved to Inter-Arts, and currently is back under the visual arts umbrella (Interview). Others questions whether photography should be assessed with film and/or media arts. In fact, many artists said during their interviews that they had problems relating to the available categories for arts funding at all three arts councils. A former juror contends that “there has been a turf war about what kinds of work should be considered by disciplines [field of categorization]” (Interview). He adds, “Not long ago, the CCA decided to collapse categories for emerging, mid-career, and established artists, by treating all artists at all stages in their careers the same way, which created misunderstandings for artists applying” (Interviews). An arts administrator echoed this, saying that “There was concern in the community about what would happen if one category
would be favoured” (Interview). In response, the arts administrator showed that the results have been consistent and the three categories have been funded equitably. Appendix E shows this fairly equitable distribution of funds. However, for long-term grants, this is not the case, because long-term grants are often awarded to the same pool of established artists. Hence, the clarity of the process is one of the preoccupations for arts councils.

As we have learned, the problem of categorization of the funding models is left with arts councils to sort out, with the aim to promote their own positive image and reputation in the field (social space, setting with its own rules). Recently, the CCA has recognized these shortcomings and it is in the process of creating a new funding model. By 2017, six new non-disciplinary programs are expected to replace the existing 147 programs (CCA, 2015). Some artists are troubled by this new funding model because “Most of them [artists] don’t know what the new categories mean” (Smith, 2015, para 1). The choice to put these decisions in place has surely taken up resources that otherwise could have been distributed to artists through grants. It will take some time until the final funding model is clear and up and running; the CCA will need to provide some education on this topic to applicants.

3.4.3 Active Resistance to Government Priorities

Although the arts councils are accountable to government, this pattern of accountability does not extend to the arts community, and hence, who rejects government’s symbolic power. The arts community by means of jurors actively resist government’s priorities as well as that of council’s.
3.4.3.1. The Arts Community

Jurors as artists invoke the arts community they represent. They advocate for the intrinsic value of the arts rather than the commercial outcomes. A great number of arts professionals serves as juror. Every year, arts councils invite arts professionals to serve as jurors to make decisions about who is awarded grants. For instance, each year “The OAC invites approximately 300 arts professionals in Ontario” (OAC, n.d., p. 2). This way the arts community is involved in assessing grant applications. An arts administrator contends, “All the way through, first with the jury, the arts community is involved. They decide which of the groups they think should be funded...; it’s the community saying that this is excellent” (Interview). The same arts administrator adds, “We are fundamentally rooted in the community and we are always about making connections” (Interview). Another arts administrator affirms the arts community (jurors)’s distance from politicians, “The arts community doesn’t have the same kind of resonance with politicians” (Interview). That is, arts councils’ “Figureheads talk about things in political terms .... and don’t understand what the community’s all about. They’re ... the bitches, in a way, to use the term, of the governments that they serve” (Interview). For some jurors, the impact of the art work in the community is of major importance for the selection process. One juror said, “what kind of impact these works will have in the community and the art world” (Interview).

The aforementioned statements demonstrate the arts community active resistance to attend to political or government priorities or even the councils’ priorities. Furthermore, during my observation in the category of Established Visual Artist at the OAC, after the second round of scores, the grants officer addressed the jurors to give them an opportunity to review any of
their scores, and brought to their attention the council’s strategic priorities, i.e. regional. The officer clarified that there is no quota for regional artists, and asked them if they would like to reconsider the scores. After consideration, the jurors firmly stated that the applicants they selected were optimal, based on artistic merit. The jurors concurred that diversity and regionality were already represented by the jury. Therefore, the jurors signed off on the scores and no changes were made. In this way, the arts community construct their own cultural and social capital without government interference.

3.5 Discussion

Governments seek out symbolic recognition to fulfil their political agendas in the form of symbolic power that is deployed by them and/or their agencies for the decision-making process in the arts councils. Although arts councils are at arm’s length from government interference, councils are vulnerable, and thus, inclined to fulfil the government agenda because of their dependency on funding. Largely, artists depend on councils for funding support, whereas arts councils rely on government “gifts” to support the arts community. Indubitably, those gifts come with “a great deal of control from the government officials” (Interview). Government agencies shape the decision-making process by filtering their own priorities, which are economic and political ones. In this sense, given the arts councils’ dependency on government funding; their positions are weakened by their fear of losing funds; as one administrator contends, “There was some fear that the money would be cut” (Interview). In the need to fulfill government agendas with economic constructs, arts councils tend to cater to this “legitimatized” economic need. Bourdieu would agree, government agencies excel in reinforcing their own position in the field—the field of power. While such
power is symbolic, it is also real and affects how decisions are made, who gets funding, and how decisions ought to be rendered.

Economists, urbanists, and politicians may ask, what is wrong with focusing on economics? We live in a capitalist world where economics is a priority in everyone’s lives. However, it is important to give weight to other factors, such as the equal distribution of wealth and opportunities, including the artists. Recently, in The Globe and Mail, Babad (2015) wrote, “The rich really do get richer, studies show.” Drawing from a study conducted by the Boston Consulting Group, Babad (2015) argues that those who already have wealth will be getting wealthier because they have more opportunities to invest, and the markets favour the wealthy. Conversely, the poorer are getting poorer, and the general expectation of poverty in an arts career appears universal. Abbing (2002), who is a painter, a photographer and an economist from Amsterdam, contends that artists are poor because of the exceptional economy of the arts. The lack of job opportunities, combined with time constraints and uncertain economics, create a particularly challenging art economy and impose limitations on visual artists in the creation of their art (Abbing, 2002). Under this economic urgency, the rich will get richer and the artists will get poorer.

One of the major challenges is that the arts are not high priorities for governments. In Canada, other government priorities take precedence, such as social services, crumbling infrastructure, health care, and higher education (Interview). The scale of government agencies supporting the arts is small. For instance, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sports (MTCS) is small in size and funding compared to the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (Interview). The symbolic power of the MTCS in comparison to the
other ministries is limited and fragile. The issue of limited funds for strategic planning usually affects small councils such as TAC as well. One former arts administrator explained that at TAC, “There was never money to strategize around things …. There was never money to think about, ‘Okay, if we want, if artists want ...’” (Interview).

Several questions should be addressed in future studies: How does government influence affect the outcome of cultural production? And how could councils find a balance between what government, councils, artists, the art community, the public, and patrons want?

3.6 Implications

As government focuses on the rate of return, only a few will enjoy the arts. The implication is twofold. First, the elite or “privileged group tries to secure the hegemonic status of its culture as superior and legitimate and to establish a consensus on what constitutes cultural capital in the field” (Feder, Katz-Gerro, 2012, p. 361). Those groups may influence policy directives to fit their own interests (Feder, Katz-Gerro, 2012). Hence, in these models, the raison d’etre of the arts will cater to the few, ignoring the pluralistic democratic society that arts councils intend to serve.

Second, as government intervene based on economic arguments, councils will tend to fund large-scale investment projects, such as popular exhibits and performances that reach out to the masses. Such funding is in opposition to smaller scale projects, which has an impact on artistic practices (Jenkins, 2009) and local artists. This may well affect the identity of the arts and the ability to create new meanings and cultural possibilities.

A related point to consider is that the Canada Council is currently restructuring its funding model, which is expected to be implemented by 2017. In this new model, 147 existing
programs will be replaced with 6 new non-disciplinary programs (CCA, 2015). However, I wonder about the degree of symbolic power pressure from government agencies in support of these modifications.

3.7 Conclusion

As we have seen, the symbolic power pressure from governments to arts councils to adhere to government agenda may continue, as the arm’s length principle is, as Quinn (1997) declared, “a mask” (p. 155). On the other hand, there is a tension of arts councils’ priorities and arts community that resist this symbolic power.

The cultural problem facing Canada is to find a practical means of giving the artist a place in our “national life as important as the place which he himself [sic] in his art gives to the moral and material aspects of our way of living” (Royal Commission, 1951, p. 211). Art is cultural capital (a non-financial, social asset) that “must be preserved and replenished” (Colonna, 2011, p. 47). Attending to what the government wants and less on what the arts community needs or wants, skews the development of the arts sector.

Arts funding is important. As one arts administrator and leader asserts, “There are certain art forms that need public support. It wouldn’t exist without it. The symphony would not exist without it. The opera would not exist without it” (Interview). The funding an artist receives is minuscule but significant, serving as “symbolic recognition” within the art community (Interview). However, drawing from the data, it is clear that the opportunity to receive arts funding is upheld as the key opportunity to explore innovation in the field and seek out cultural breakthroughs. As one arts leader adds, arts funding has given artists the “impetus to see things he had never seen before,” and adds, “arts is education” (Interview) and the
expectation of economic returns weakens this *raison d’être*. It is the arts council’s duty and government’s responsibility to bring that education back to the community they serve.

A visual artist and former juror contend, “We should be funding pure research as opposed to applied research” (Interview). That is, governments prefer commercial viability to pure research in academics, and commercial viability also applies to the arts. Arts councils, however, do not value commercial viability as a singular focus. What is good for the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport may not be good for the arts council, the arts community, nor the artist, nor the community at large. If the arts councils represent the interests of the arts over those of government, the characteristic of this relationship must be one without the pressures of symbolic power.
CHAPTER FOUR: GROUPTHINK

Behind Closed Doors: Analysis of Groupthink in the Peer-review Process for Arts Funding

Abstract

Two heads are better than one. Evidence shows that a group often outperforms individuals. Good group decisions can allow us to reach new heights and achieve more than an individual might accomplish. But poor group decisions can jeopardize successful outcomes. In this paper I draw from Irving Janis’ conceptual framework on groupthink, a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people in which the desire for conformity in the group results in poor decision-making outcomes. Specifically, this paper explores the extent to which the eight symptoms of groupthink are present during the adjudication process for arts funding in the three Canadian arts councils: The Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Toronto Arts Council. Using discourse analysis, I rely on 26 face-to-face interviews and a field observation. I argue that during the deliberation process, there is a tension between groupthink symptoms and groupthink avoidance. I find that groupthink symptoms are often mitigated by negotiation tactics, which create conditions that are insufficient for groupthink avoidance.
4.1 Introduction

Many suggest two heads are better than one. Scholarly evidence shows that groups often outperform the individuals (Laughlin, Hatch, Silver, & Boh (2006); Schultze, Mojzisch & Schulz-Hardt, 2012). Often, working in a team allows a group to complete tasks, finish projects quickly, and learn from each other. Groups can provide people with the opportunity to reach new heights far greater than any individual might accomplish. But poor group decisions can jeopardize successful outcomes. I draw from Irving Janis’ influential book, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, which was originally published in 1972 and revised and enlarged in 1982. Janis’ conceptual framework on groupthink describes a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people in which the desire for conformity in the group results in irrational or poor decision-making outcomes.

Scholarly literature on the performance of jurors in the field of the arts funding is lacking. This paper demonstrates that beneath the jurors’ decision-making process lies a gray area of groupthink symptoms. For instance, “horse-trading” often takes place during deliberations. Horse-trading refers to the hope of a reciprocal exchange. In my study, a juror explains, “Horse-trading is that thing where a juror... looks at somebody else and says, ‘I really want this guy to get the money and you didn't like him but, I'll like your guy if you'll like my guy'” (Interview). Another juror admits, “There’s also a little bit of horse-trading that goes on at the end of the process” (Interview). This instance is symptomatic of groupthink that exists within the realm of the deliberation process, and as such should be examined.

Groupthink theory is utilized by many scholars (See Esser, 1998; Hart, 1990; Longley & Pruitt, 1980; McCauley, 1998; Nijstad, 2009; Whyte, 1989) and can be found in journals and
textbooks in a variety of disciplines such as sociology, psychology, business, management and political science. The notion of groupthink was originally developed to illuminate political failures that resulted in fiascos (Hart, 1990; Janis 1972 & 1982; Whyte, 1989) as the Bay of Pigs invasion, the escalation of the Vietnam conflict, the Watergate cover-up, as well as for flawed group problem solving in organizations. As a model it offers an array of testable assumptions regarding symptoms that lead to poor decision-making process. The consequences of groupthink may certainly be poor outcomes (Janis 1982), although “defective decisions based on misinformation and poor judgment sometimes lead to successful outcomes” (Janis 1982, p. 11). In any case, any symptoms of groupthink affect decision-making outcomes.

This paper is intended to open the doors to a continuing exploration of group decision-making in the arts and to reiterate the contributions of the groupthink model, while illuminating the limitations of groupthink as a concept. Additionally, this paper also acknowledges the uphill battles jurors are faced with in arts funding decisions. To be an arts juror is not an easy task: hundreds of arts grant applications sail through their hands and only a select few secure funding. This paper is intended to engender increased awareness and understanding of the process of decision-making regarding arts funding while also imparting analyses that will signal areas for jurors to reflect on related to group homogeneity and its effects.

I explore the extent to which the eight symptoms of groupthink occur under three major categories: Overestimation of the Group, Closed-Mindedness, and Pressures Toward Uniformity. Each of these categories was found to be present in the adjudication process for arts funding in the three Canadian arts councils researched in this study: Canada Council for the
Arts (CCA), Ontario Arts Council (OAC), and Toronto Arts Council (TAC). Using discourse analysis, I analyze 26 face-to-face interviews and a field observation. This qualitative study identifies some evidence of groupthink within the peer-review process. At the same time, I examine the tension between groupthink symptoms and groupthink avoidance. Groupthink symptoms are often mitigated by negotiation tactics, which creates conditions that are insufficient for groupthink avoidance.

4.2 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach. I collected data based on face-to-face interviews, a field observation of the deliberation process, and document artifacts in the form of arts council’s internal reports. Qualitative research allows for an understanding of how people construct their words, and what meaning they attribute to their experience (Merriam, 2009). Face-to-face interviews offer the best insight into a participant’s thought feelings, and perceptions about a particular topic or issue (Edmonson & Irby, 2008; Merriam, 2009). The researcher can observe body language, tone of voice, facial expression, and other non-verbal cues (Edmonson & Irby, 2008; Merriam, 2009). Interviewed participants’ eye contact or body language signaled to me that it was acceptable to ask further, probing questions. Discourse analysis allowed me to capture the participants’ language, including references to other discourses. In this context, words are not assumed to speak for themselves; interviews allowed me to probe and ask for clarification about the meaning the responses intended to convey. Although at first I had certain preconceptions of some topics discussed, my background as a visual artist allowed me to elucidate and sympathize with the participants. In that sense, it allowed me to further examine answers and to ask informed and in-depth questions.
I conducted 26 face-to-face interviews, with 16 former jurors (who are also professional or established visual artists) and 10 art leaders. I conducted semi-structured interviews with visual artists, art administrators and leaders, and panel review members between January 2013 and March 2014. I sought out participation by relying on arts councils’ websites, which provided publicly available contacts of past peer-review panel members. Additionally, I sought participants through snowball sampling. Interview questions focused on the peer-review process and the definition of excellence, and in particular, the decision-making process (see Appendix B for the Face-to-Face Interview guide). I digitally recorded interviews and took observation notes. A verbatim transcript of each recorded interview was created with the help of a research assistant. Each transcription resulted in approximately 12 to 15 pages. I then sent transcriptions to the participants for their review. The interviews took place in Toronto and Ottawa (where the Canada Council for the Arts is located). By the 24th interview, saturation was achieved as participants’ responses had begun to repeat. Most panel members had extensive previous experience serving on arts funding panels, ranging from one to 20 years of experience. Participants were not offered an honorarium for their participation.

I engaged in lengthy negotiations over a period of six months with arts councils before I was given access to observe one of the deliberation processes. After I signed a formal agreement covering the conditions of participants’ confidentiality, the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) alone permitted my attendance. My non-participant (naturalistic) observation at OAC in the category of Established Artists lasted two full days (July 21 & 22, 2014). I observed and wrote notes but did not partake in the deliberation process or decision-making. My observation notes focused on the process of scoring and were shared and approved by the OAC staff.
My concepts have also been collected from the literature, and secondary data (arts councils’ internal reports, statistical data, and field observations).

**Data Analysis**

Once I received confirmation from the participants that I was free to use the data, I began by performing a qualitative analysis that was thematic in nature. I used NVivo to analyze the data and identify common themes. Then I followed three types of activity as per Miles and Huberman (1984): data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In data reduction, I coded the data and built an index (manually) for each transcription. This analysis identified ideas, common themes, causes and relationships based on the data. I created memos and notes from my observation notes. My analysis of the data led to the “data display”—the selection of themes under the major categorizations of groupthink, including: overestimation of the group, closed-mindedness, and pressures toward uniformity. I also compared the transcripts within and across each interview to the observation notes, paying particular attention to the research question, language and text (discourse). Finally, in conclusion-drawing and verification, I stepped back to consider what the analyzed data meant and to assess the implications for the questions at hand. Moreover, given the inherently circular nature of conclusion-drawing, I revisited the data as many times as necessary to cross-check or verify these emergent conclusions. The variety of data offers the advantage of triangulating sources of information, including primary documents, interviews and independent reports.

**Ethical Review**

This research includes human participants; thus it was reviewed by the University of Toronto Ethics Review Committee in compliance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical*
Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS-2). There were no foreseen risks for participants who took part in this study. Participants were required to read an information letter about the project and sign and return a consent letter prior to the interview. They were informed in the consent form that they were free to withdraw their participation at any time. The data collected follows the encrypted guidelines of the research ethics office. Participants in this study remain anonymous.

Limitations

After much efforts and lengthy conversations with the arts councils, I was only allowed to observe one adjudication meeting at the OAC. During the observation, jurors were aware of this research study and might have acted differently than usual. I was only allowed to record notes about the peer-review process, not the reactions or words of the participants during the adjudication process. The Council reviewed and approved the observation notes. In an effort to capture diverse perspectives, I interviewed participants with a mixture of different backgrounds, genders and disciplines. However, the majority of the participants reside in Toronto.

4.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework stems from conception of discourses analysis and the conceptual framework draws from the psychological field for group studies.

4.3.1 Discourses

Discourse is the use of language (Chilton, 2004; Johnstone, 2008) in terms of talk and communication. Fillingham (1993) describes discourse as “anything written or said or
communicated [verbal or visual]” (p. 100), while Potter (1996) describes discourse as “talk and texts as parts of social practice” (p. 105).

Discourse theory goes back to the best known discourse theorist, French philosopher and sociologist Michel Foucault (1926-1984). Foucault was concerned with questions of power and institutional hierarchies, and was convinced that “certain people and social groups create and formulate ideas about our world, which under certain conditions turn into unquestioned truths and start to seem normal” (Schneider, 2013, p. 2).

Rogers (2011) succinctly defines discourse as “the way we use language, feel, and think, act and interact, and so forth, in order to be an ‘everyday’ (nonspecialized) person” (p. 38). Ball (2005) describes discourse as “about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority” (p. 48). Fairclough (1995) defines discourse as the “use of language seen as a form of social practice.” Discourses embody the meaning and use of words (Ball, 2005, p. 48).

Rogers (2011) adds that people “talk and act not just as individuals but as member of various sorts of social and cultural groups” (p. 36). Jurors reflect these, as each panel member is a professional visual artist, sharing a community of art practice, including values, feelings, and emotions. One juror observed that discussion that takes place in the deliberation process is “about thinking through and talking, and talking, and thinking through, and talking, and hearing” (Interview).

Discourse analysis encompasses an extensive range of theories, and it relates to topics and analytical approaches for explaining language-in-use (Schneider, 2013; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Discourse analysis is also concerned with human expression, often in the form of
language, and these expressions are linked to human knowledge (Schneider, 2013), but discourse analysis is also “interpretive and explanatory” (Wodak, 1996, p. 19). Shaw and Bailey (2009) identify three approaches to discourse analysis. First, the micro-level approach is the detailed study of language in use from an empirical understanding of actual linguistic events. It systematically analyses face-to-face talk wherein the participant’s perspective is the first point of analysis. Second, the meso-level approach places more emphasis on the connections with broader social and cultural contexts. The analysis begins with certain way of talking, writing, and conducting oneself and this can serve a range of social functions. For instance, analysis in this study reveals that how jurors apply the concept of “excellence.” Third, the macro-level approach involves the study of language and ideology in society. It begins by examining the role of power and knowledge in society (i.e. the Foucauldian approach). Analytical approaches can unravel assumptions, and understand what these assumptions might mean for individuals and wider society. Furthermore, as Johnstone (2008) adds, discourse analysis helps us determine how people tell stories, and how decisions are made; in other words, the construct of “meaning-making” (p. 7) in society.

In turn, Rogers (2011) identifies seven tools for discourse analysis or seven building tasks of language. Rogers asserts that we use language to: (1) to make things significant in certain ways; (2) to carry out actions and activities – for example, gaining recognition for engaging in a certain sort of activity; (3) to get recognized as taking on a certain identity or role; (4) to build and sustain relationships of all different kinds; (5) to build and destroy social goods via politics; (6) to render connections visible or not in our language; and (7) to make certain sign
systems and certain forms of knowledge and beliefs better or worse, relevant or privileged, and ‘real’ or not in given situations.

“Discourse” and “discourse analysis,” as such, integrate a variety of meanings and a plethora of interpretations. Good decision-making is formulated within a particular social context. Arts councils presume professional artists make objective funding decisions. However, art jurors are connected to the discourses, values and norm of the community and often make subjective, rather than objective, decisions about arts funding. This paper examines these tensions using the concept of groupthink. Hence, this study is about the analysis of text and language to identify the extent to which groupthink symptoms and groupthink avoidance operate within Canadian arts councils’ decision-making practices.

4.4 Conceptual Framework

This section draws from group theories to study the conditions why which jurors make decisions when making art funding deliberations in a group.

4.4.1 Groupthink

Groupthink (Janis 1972 & 1982) is a psychological phenomenon, in which people strive for consensus within a group based on the desire for harmony or conformity in the group, resulting in a poor decision-making outcome. In Janis’ words, groupthink is “a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members’ strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action” (p. 9). Janis adds, groupthink “refers to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures” (p. 9).
People end up engaging in groupthink when, for example, they silence dissenting viewpoints, suspecting that their ideas/objections might disrupt the harmony of the group. Suppressing viewpoints can lead to poor decision-making and disappointing outcomes. The groupthink concept upends some of the traditional ideas about the effects of harmony or cohesiveness on group performance (Hart, 1990), and interactions.

In order to identify the symptoms of groupthink, Janis studied selected fiascos that were the result of the U.S. Government’s foreign policy decisions. Janis drew his analysis from texts such as internal documents (e.g., record kept of the policy-makers’ meetings).

The symptoms of groupthink are characterized by Janis (1982)’s data as three major categories. First, Overestimations of the Group—its power and morality: its high degree of optimism and group cohesion, where a group wants to remain affiliated and is inclined to ignore the ethical or moral consequences of its decisions. Second, Closed-Mindedness — collective efforts to rationalize in order to discount warnings, and stereotyped views that weaken decision-making. In other words, the group is insulated from outsiders, has a lack of leader impartiality, and has high group member homogeneity. Third, Pressures Toward Uniformity — self-censorship of deviations from the group consensus, a shared illusion of unanimity concerning judgments conforming to the majority view, direct pressure on any members who expresses strong arguments, and self-appointed mindguards who protect the group from adverse information that might shatter their shared complacency about the effectiveness and morality of their decisions.

Janis argues that there are antecedent conditions that produce or facilitate the occurrence of groupthink symptoms, such as: (a) structural faults of the organization—
insulation of the group, lack of tradition of impartial leadership, lack of norms requiring methodical procedures, and homogeneity of members’ social background and ideology; and (b) provocative situational contexts—high stress from external threats with low hope of better solutions, or low self-esteem temporarily induced by, for example, moral dilemmas.

In summary, Irving Janis’ concept of groupthink is described as a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people, in which the desire for conformity in the group results in an irrational, dysfunctional or poor decision-making outcome. The adjudication process of arts funding is shaped under consensus-oriented decision-making. Hence, this study uncovers the extent of the tensions of groupthink symptoms and groupthink avoidance within the arts adjudication process.

4.5 Analysis and Findings: Groupthink Symptoms vs. Groupthink Avoidance

There have been case studies of groupthink and groupthink avoidance (Esser, 1998). The peer-review process contains both. In order to present these findings, I turn to the subsequent tables (4.1, 4.2, and 4.3), where I list, for direction, the eight symptoms of groupthink as defined by Irving Janis (1982) under three major themes: Overestimation of the Group, Closed-Mindedness, and Pressures Toward Uniformity.

The examination of groupthink and groupthink avoidance in the deliberation process follows.
Table 4.1—Type One: Overestimation of the Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groupthink SYMPTOMS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Invulnerability</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Excessive optimism</td>
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<td>▪ Encourages taking extreme risks</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Fail to respond to clear warnings of danger</td>
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<td>2. Morality</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Believe in the inherent morality of their in-group, the rightness of their cause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Inclined to ignore the ethical or moral consequences of their decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Things are left unsaid in group meetings</td>
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Adapted from: Janis, 1982

Groupthink Symptoms

Invulnerability and morality are the first two symptoms of groupthink. Under the groupthink spell, Janis (1982) argues, group members share the optimistic belief that “we are a good and wise group” that inclines them to use group concurrence as a major criterion to judge the morality, as well as the efficacy, of any policy under discussion” (p. 256). Janis adds,

Since our group’s objectives are good, the members feel that ‘any means we decide to use must be good.’ This shared assumption helps the members avoid feelings of shame or guilt about decisions that may violate their personal code of ethical behavior. (p. 257)

At the arts councils, jurors shared collective assumptions that helped them to make decisions. There is a shared optimism based on the panel’s expertise, autonomy, and discourses to decide which art works are worthy of funding. Jurors, who are also peers of other artists, are deemed experts by councils, creating the sense that they are the most qualified to assess peers’ grants application. Bonner, Baumann, Lehn, Pierce and Wheeler (2006) argue that group members, when making collective choices, are twice as likely to “adopt an option proposed by
an expert compared to other group members” (p. 617). The interviews uphold the groups’ consensus that experts are the best candidates to judge the works of their peers. An arts administrator argues, “There is expertise that we don’t run into problems with the jury not being able to comment knowledgeably” (Interview). A juror contends, “A jury is composed of people who have expertise in a variety of areas, right?” (Interview). Another arts administrator contends, “We try and have the right expertise for a given competition” (Interview).

The data show that jurors strongly believe in the inherent morality of the group and the rightness of their cause. Arts councils construe jurors as “reasonable” people to use group concurrence to judge artists’ applications based on the criterion of excellence. A participant contends, “Jurors are generally very reasonable people,” and then adds, “Jurors know they’re not here to only support work that looks like theirs, or their favourite art form” (Interview).

According to the Oxford dictionary, reasonable (of a person) means “Having sound judgement; fair and sensible, based on good sense.” Based on this definition, one may ask whether jurors are reasonable in their acts for arts funding. A participant illustrates, “Jurors try to argue why they want their favourites to be it. So, there's lots of tricks, not tricks, but lots of like games they try to play in that sort of space to have people sort of look at it from other sides” (Interview). Thus, favouritism plays out during the decision-making process. A juror supplements, “There’s also a little bit of horse trading that goes on at the end of the process.” Another juror adds, “There always a case or two like that. That somebody makes a strong case for somebody they know personally.... in those cases, you feel a bit uncomfortable” (Interview).

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The degree of expertise is at play; not all jurors are well-prepared for the deliberation process, as an arts administrator contends, “There's always degrees of not prepared” (Interview). Another former administrator elaborates,

I have experienced everything from absolute negligence to just somebody who just really maybe they got the book a month before, they skimmed it, and then they didn't pick it up again until they walked into the room that morning and they've forgotten half of what they read. Or, they skimmed it and didn't make any notes. Didn't circle anything, didn't highlight anything, and didn't even put a question mark in a margin. That's a bit of a problem (Interview).

Even though this apparently happens only occasionally, when some jurors fail to prepare for the deliberation process, their votes are considered equally valid (Interview).

Some jurors assert that that often panel members may act in self-interest; as a juror contends, “We found people [jurors] have their own agendas” [Interview] during the deliberations. When jurors were asked “What do you like the most of the peer-review process?”—two jurors responded, “Networking.” Networking is an important activity in many careers, and in this study was one of the reasons jurors take part in the process. A juror stated, it is “very, very important for building a kind of cultural network and fabric” (Interview). Another juror expressed, “I like connecting, networking with other professionals within the field” (Interview).

Another issue is that jurors might lack knowledge or expertise in a particular field; as one interviewee states, “I didn’t know anything about abstract art, painting, so I tended to say
yes or maybe if the juror in the group was keen on the work” (Interview)—ignoring the moral manifestations of their decisions. As well as, a juror admits,

I had one situation where there was this very sweet guy, but every time a photographer came up he’d say no. And I finally turned to him and I said, why are you saying no to all the photographers? And he basically said, well I don’t know anything about photography. So I just said, okay, well then if you don’t know anything about photography, don’t say no, because you’re not going to ever learn anything about it.

(Interview)

The aforementioned illustrates a belief in the overestimation of the group. There are symptoms of invulnerability and morality reflected in the discourses of favouritism, horse trading, unpreparedness, and self-interest, as well as ignoring the moral and ethical consequences of decisions. This can be construed as rather “unreasonable” acts because calibrating the votes, being unprepared, or horse trading discredits the criteria of merit and excellence. This evinces an illusion of invulnerability and morality, which leads to a degree of over-optimism and overestimation of the group where decisions are made mainly based on the reliance of “experts.”

Groupthink Avoidance

There are also signs of groupthink avoidance. Jurors grapple with “trying to make sense out of each applicant’s work, out of each proposal” (Interview) and engage in negotiations. Groupthink avoided stands out in the ability of jurors and grant facilitators to ensure enough room for discussion and negotiation, to not let “things be left unsaid.” During the adjudication process, relevant information of the applicant is shared amongst the group, but also the act of
negotiation and persuasion are pivotal during the deliberation process to make final decisions. As one juror affirms, “it comes down to persuading your fellow juror” (Interview). Another juror adds, “There are people who sit on juries and they fight and fight” (Interview). Similarly, another juror echoed, “You push back, and then I say okay ... then I push back to you. And in the end, it’s a negotiation” (Interview). This statement evinces that things may not be left unsaid, “even if you vehemently disagree with each other, you need to be open about it” (Interview). It is worth noting that decisions are made by majority; if three out of five jurors agreed on X, X gets a grant regardless whether the other two jurors have said something or “left it unsaid.”

Groupthink avoidance appears in the peer-review deliberation process manifested during closed-door negotiations. A related point to consider is that my field observation did not witness significant negotiations, but rather an agreeable approach. However, groupthink avoidance comes with a cost—groupthink symptoms, which must not be ignored.

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Groupthink SYMPTOMS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Rationale</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Collectively construct rationalizations in order to discount warnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Avoid critical discussion of prior decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Do not reconsider their assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Stereotyping</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Construct negative stereotypes of anyone outside the group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: Janis, 1982
Groupthink Symptoms

There is a spattering of evidence of closed-mindedness among jurors. There is high group member homogeneity, as all jurors are artists and all represent the contemporary arts scene. Relying on enhanced optimism of the fields of jurors, they collectively construct rationalizations to explain why everyone conforms to subjective decisions. Moreover, the closed-door nature of the peer-review process discounts the warning from those in the community who seek out transparency in the process.

Subjectivity is the result of this cohesive social construct; similarly, individual jurors rely on their own subjectivity to rationalize and make decisions. A juror contends, “I definitely have my own subjective preferences” (Interview), and another juror reiterates, “it is subjective...It is what you think makes a good artwork” (Interview). A third juror states, “I try to be objective as possible but I think there is quite a bit of a subjective view that gets applied to who gets the grant” (Interview). A fourth juror said that his decisions are based on “subjective interpretation of what that means” (Interview).

The literature on subjectivity describes that it is a common dilemma faced by decision makers (Ravitch, 1989) and it is inevitable in the decision-making process (Peshkin 1988; Ravitch, 1989). Social psychology presents us with an array of subjectivity theories (See Ellis, 1992; Ortner, 2005; Peshkin, 1988; Ratner, 2002; Ravitch, 1989) in an attempt to improve decision-making. A dictionary definition (Merriam-Webster online) notes subjectivity is “the way a person experiences things in his or her own mind: based on feelings or opinions rather than facts.” I am addressing subjectivity in the psychological sense, in terms of the inner feelings, intentions, desires, taste and so on of individuals.
Alternatively, Ravitch (1989) contends that “Subjectivity is part of decision-making and is not intrinsically bad” (p. 281), because decision analysis requires judgement to structure, estimate and evaluate decisions. Subjective judgments are inescapable and part of being human, but understanding them are crucial to better decision-making and problem solving (Peshkin, 1988; Ravitch, 1989; Ortner, 2005). Peshkin (1988) argues that it is better to acknowledge that subjectivity is an invariable component of decision-making rather than trying to achieve objectivity. Awareness of subjectivity will help shape decision-makers’ inquiry and outcomes. Understanding one’s own subjectivity will allow us to “have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset” (p. 17). Peshkin adds, “Untamed subjectivity mutes the emic voice” (p. 21), and affirms that being conscious of one’s own subjectivity will limit biases that subjectivity engenders. Understanding subjectivity requires a degree of reflexivity (Ortner, 2005).

As the literature suggests, subjectivity is inexorable, and during the deliberation process, subjectivity is a product of social discourses. Discourses that are often unanimously shared are employed to assess the arts applications. One major example of subjectivity is how most jurors define artistic “excellence” as “interesting.” A juror describes the awarded applicant’s work as “the most interesting work” (Interview). Another juror said that the selected artwork is “interesting work. It’s new work” (Interview). A third juror comments, “they [jurors] were fighting for work that I just thought was not interesting at all” (Interview). Thus, the shared discourse of “interesting” can be found among jurors as characteristic of artistic excellence emerged, yet such conceptions were often subjective and jurors’ conceptions of “interesting” were not always congruent.
Jurors do not criticise or suggest that reconsiderations should be made related to the secrecy of the deliberation process for arts funding. Indeed, arts councils insulate the panel members from outsiders where decision are made behind closed doors. Councils appoint grants officers to act as facilitators who are expected to demonstrate objectivity in the group. However, an impartial external observer is neither allowed to observe nor participate because jurors and arts administrators collectively construct rationalizations of discourses of freedom related to the secrecy of deliberations. A juror contends, “In a closed room, you feel a sense of freedom to express” (Interview). A former arts administrator states that jurors “have to be free to say something and not expect it to go on the record” (Interview). Another juror contends, “A jury is like in a trial, we will need the freedom to be able to say things about a project” (Interview). However, most legal trials are open to the public and at least the evidence jurors use to make decisions is open for deliberations, and adjudications are not.

Jurors also construct negative stereotypes of those outside the group. They feel that if the deliberation process is open to the public, it will lead to controversial outcomes. The assumption is that the public (including emerging artists) is not skilled in the field to make funding decisions; only professional artists have the competency to do so. As one juror asserts, “They [the general public] don’t have that knowledge, education or understanding” (Interview) to make funding decisions. Incongruously, the cores of their decisions are often made subjectively. Are we then to assume that an expert will have better subjective outcomes than a non-expert? Only one of the interviewees supported the idea of having an open door process, as he states, “You can have this sort of shadowing process that you’re allowed to come in,
you’re sworn to secrecy like everybody else is, but you can come in and just really sit at the table and understand what the process is. I think that would help” (Interview).

**Groupthink Avoidance**

Jurors do not avoid critical discussion. On the contrary, all jurors are encouraged to debate the “excellence” of the work. An arts administrator contends, “It’s a negotiation, they have to reach consensus around the results” (Interview). From my field observations, it was evident that jurors are passionate about the work they want to support. However, discussions are characterized by negotiation discourses. The words disagree, fight, persuasion, and convince were recurring during the interviews. As one juror puts it, “negotiate and disagree sometimes and come to and to be enlightened by each other” (Interview). Another juror posits, “even if you vehemently disagree with each other, you need to be open about it” (Interview). A second juror said that when they believe in a work and others disagree, “Then you are going to fight it” (Interview). The next juror states, “To a certain degree you’re trying to persuade each other” (Interview).

**Groupthink Symptoms**

The pressures towards uniformity that emerged in these data are depicted in Table 4.3. Pressures toward uniformity are reflected at the Canadian arts councils. Jurors are a cohesive group who share a common background (artists) and social discourses in the realm of the contemporary arts field.
Table 4.3 — Type Three: Pressures Toward Uniformity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groupthink SYMPTOMS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 Self-Censorship</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Keep silent about their misgivings; doubts and deviations from the perceived group consensus are not expressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6 Illusion of Unanimity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Majority view and judgment assumed to be unanimous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Conformity to the majority view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Reliance on consensual validation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Silence seen as consent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7 Pressure on Dissenters</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Members under pressure not to express arguments against any of the group’s views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Reinforces the concurrence-seeking norm that loyal members are expected to maintain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8 Mindguards</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Self-appointed members protect the leader and fellow members from information that is contradictory or problematic to the group’s cohesiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Protect from breaking group complacency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: Janis, 1982

The symptoms of groupthink are discernible in the ways pressure towards uniformity emerged from the data. When a dominant voice is leading the discussion during the deliberation process, some jurors keep silent about their misgivings and let the grant officer mediate the discussion (Interview, field observation). As one juror contends that if the councils get an application from a more senior artist, somebody whose opinion tends to be rather overbearing. So that depends also on the grants officer. How much they’re able to keep that person down. So that their voice is - doesn’t become the dominant voice in the room. (Interview)
There is a strong *illusion of unanimity*, where the majority view and judgements are assumed to be consistent across participants. Dressler (2006) defines majority voting as an instance when “group members agree to adopt whatever decision most people (or some determined threshold percentage of the group) want to support” (p. 8). The concurrence-seeking tendency is manifested by shared illusions of overestimation, which helps the members to maintain a sense of group solidarity, seeking concurrence “at the expense of seeking information, critical appraisal, and debate” (Janis, 1982, p. 47). It is worth noting that councils and jurors describe the peer-review model employing the discourses of a consensus model, when in fact, the peer-review process abides by the majority vote. A juror confirms, “the majority - nobody gets funded with less than majority” (Interview). A second juror reaffirms, “Overall - it’s a majority deciding” (Interview). A third juror states, “we resort to a majority vote” (Interview). During discussion, juror’s social discourses encompassed persuasion and/or negotiation, and/or trade-off; jurors reinforce the concurrence-seeking norm that loyal members are expected to maintain.

There is strong pressure on reliance on consensual validation and conforming to the majority view, as one juror contends, “If people can’t reach consensus, then we resort to a majority vote” (Interview). Another juror adds, “Consensus does not mean they have to agree on each individual application, but importantly that they agree on the final results” (Interview) by signing off the successful applicants. Dressler (2006) defines *consensus* as “a co-operative process in which all group members develop and agree to support a decision that is in the best interest of the whole” (p. 4). Janis (1982) explains that the group’s “superficial conformity appears to have been motivated by a fear of being humiliated by being expelled from the group
altogether” (p. 246). The fear of rejection and disapproval in the group is manifested when it involves “a constant striving for homogeneous beliefs and judgments among all members” (Janis, 1982, p. 114). The desire to conform and the challenges therein were expressed by a juror who disagreed with the merit of one application and admitted that this disagreement “was the only place where I felt very strongly to reject it, and the others’ scores were like five, fives; it was an emotional moment where I was feeling offended” (Interview). Also, striving for consensus helps members “achieve a sense of group unity and esprit de corps” (Janis, 1982, p. 114)—the psychological basis for the symptoms of groupthink. A juror argues, “I prefer that people reach consensus” (Interview). At times, the preservation of friendly relationships at the expense of making the best decision is preferred (Janis, 1982). The discourses of consensual validation are also reflected on juror’s ‘trade-off’ practices, as a juror contends that there will be “always a trade off …. you may have one that you really want to support because you think that's the best work in your opinion and then they'll say these are the ones they prefer and you'll say yes” (Interview)—to conform with the majority of the team.

**Groupthink Avoidance**

For the most part, silence is not seen as consent as grants officers ensure every juror has the opportunity to speak. As a juror states, “you hear everyone’s debate, everyone had opinions and we talked about it for a while” (Interview). The only instances discussions do not take center stage is when jurors, as a whole, do not like a particular application, then they say “we don't need to talk about it” (Interview). Doubts and deviations from the perceived group consensus are expressed to the point that jurors are “not dismissive by any means. They try
very earnestly to get a good sense of whether or not a proposed project makes sense” (Interview).

There is no clear evidence of “Mindguards” or self-appointed members who protect the leader and fellow members from information that is contradictory or problematic to the group’s cohesiveness. However, grant officers, who are not self-appointed but rather appointed by the councils as facilitators, act as mindguards—members who protect the group and the leader from information that is problematic or contradictory to the group’s cohesiveness, control dissent and direct the decision-making. Indeed, grant officers act to protect the interests of the council and preserve group contentment, at the same time, nurturing of a fair process. This appointment protects negotiations from groupthink symptoms. Jurors inform, “Grants officers do a debriefing session after a jury takes place” and “remain neutral” (interview); however, grants officers “have a little bit of influence because they’re the ones who are actually facilitating and can keep the debate open or close on any particular artist. And, they sometimes bring things-facts-to the table” (Interview), but “those influences are quite minor” (Interview). These previous statements are posited in groupthink avoided because, grant officers are not self-appointed; they are rather elected by the arts council they work for.

4.6 Discussion

_Madness is the exception in individuals but the rule in groups _“Friedrich Nietzsche
I have now painted a portrait of the symptoms of groupthink in the themes or types within the arts council adjudication process. Type 1 is Overestimation of the Group: invulnerability and morality, evinces a degree of over-optimism about the expertise of jurors. Type 2 is Closed-Mindedness: rationale and stereotype, opens up the element of subjectivity, along with the justification for the ‘secrecy’ of the deliberation process. Finally, Type 3 is Pressure Toward Uniformity, which is the most contemplative in the councils. Jurors share common backgrounds and rely on consensual validation and often conform to the majority view.

Groupthink symptoms transpire in the panel peer-review because the peer-review process is consensual, but also because there are no formal guidelines for the judgment process if, for example, the panel includes unprepared jurors or jurors who are unable to speak outside their fields of expertise. Evidence suggests that there is an over-optimistic perception of the jurors as experts “who know best,” regardless of their lack of knowledge in a particular field or moral inclinations to support work that may reflect their own. As one juror says, “We found people had their own agendas that they were trying to advocate” (Interview). Furthermore, a couple of jurors who lack expertise in a particular art field fall prey to pressure toward
conformity with the group; a juror states that due to lack of expertise, “I tended to say yes or maybe if the other juror in the group was keen on the work” (Interview). Baron, Vandello, and Brunsman (1996) found that individuals tend to conform more to the opinion of others when faced with difficult tasks, relying on others’ judgments when they are unable to check their own judgments. Making arts funding decisions is a demanding, challenging and emotional task as jurors need to essentially compete to secure limited funding for their preferred work. Baron, et al. (1996) argue that

when task difficulty increases... participants cannot as easily rely on their own perceptions as a guide to accuracy. In cases of high judgment difficulty, where the participant is highly uncertain, the most sensible guide to a correct response is the responses of others, particularly if they are in unanimous agreement. (p. 916)

In *The Wisdom of Crowds*, Surowiecki (2005) contends that people tend to simply go along with the group because it is easier to change one’s opinion than to challenge the group, and also we often “let emotion affect our judgment” (p. xiv). However, Surowiecki asserts that “when our imperfect judgments are aggregated in the right way, our collective intelligence is often excellent” (p. xiv). Although the majority vote takes precedence, consensus is the discourse of the deliberation process. Ball (2005) would agree that discourses in the panels embody subjective meanings, and that the use of words, text (e.g., the council’s strategic priorities), and negotiation discourses often steer the discussion toward conformity of the in-group. There is a strong reliance on consensual validation and the use of persuasion or negotiation which is also filled with social discourses.
Hart (1990) contends that “groupthink is a partial rather than a generalist theory of group decision-making” (p. 19). There are several factors that further affect the jury decision-making process in the arts council. For instance, limited funding, time pressures, stress, and other sentiments all play a role. This requires further research.

One may ask what constitutes sound group decision-making. According to Janis (1982), the criteria of sound decision-making are employed when the decision-makers (1) thoroughly canvass a wide range of alternative courses of action; (2) survey the objectives and the values implicated; (3) carefully weigh the costs, drawbacks, and subtle risks of negative and positive consequences; (4) continuously search for relevant information; (5) take into account the information and the expert judgment to which they are exposed; (6) re-examine the positive and negative consequences of all main alternatives; and (7) make detailed provisions for executing the chosen course of action (p. 136). Surowiecki (2005) adds that one of the keys to successful group decisions is “getting people to pay much less attention to what everyone else is saying” (p. 65). I differ with him on this point; I believe we need to pay detailed attention to what everyone else is saying (or trying to say) because we might miss relevant information in order to make sound decisions. Also, having no fear of disagreeing with others is a sign of groupthink avoidance, an approach art jurors in this study seem to be doing very well.

4.7 Implications

Decision-making is a complex process, and making decisions in the arts is multifaceted and subjective. This paper has illuminated more questions than solutions. How do we know when jurors, for example, act in self-interest on behalf of the artist? What constitutes a bad decision? Can the quality of work be measured? Or should it be based on feedback? What are
the consequences of poor decisions in arts funding? What constitutes sound decision-making when selecting the art works worthy of funding? Do juror-experts guarantee best decision-making? To what extent do juror’s discourses affect the outcome of art? To what extent are negotiations well-founded?

The funding of controversial art would definitely speak to the outcome of the decision-making because it will cause an immediate response and perhaps a fiasco in the public realm. However, not all bad or poor decisions end up in fiascos (Janis, 1982).

4.8 Conclusion

*Individual commitment to a group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work* ~Vince Lombardi

The leitmotif of groupthink is concurrence-seeking, “[b]ut concurrence-seeking generally occurs in group decision-making, and it is not unique to group decision-making, and it is not unique to groups that perform poorly” (Whyte, 1989, p. 41). This paper has intended to enhance transparency in the decision-making process of arts funding and to engender reflection on the discursive practices that affect the process. Fortuitously, the fierce negotiations that take place in the deliberation process mitigate many of the groupthink symptoms. However, there are some symptoms that ought not to be ignored (i.e. favouritism, horse-trading, self-interest, and unpreparedness). Overall, there are also pitfalls that can arise from group interaction. People often reach unanimous agreement even when the facts point to another, perhaps more appropriate outcome. What a group needs to keep in mind is that the tendency to seek concurrence in the in-group could be at the expense of good outcomes. In sum, this paper has hopefully shed some light on what happens behind the closed doors of the
peer-review process in a group environment where arts funding is concerned. Moreover, this paper aims to generate discussion and reflection on the group decision-making process in order to increase the chances of effective, equitable and successful group decision-making processes. Without a doubt, the best decisions lead to the best outcomes of excellence.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to explore the peer-review decision-making in arts councils at the federal, provincial and municipal levels: The Canada Council for the Arts, The Ontario Arts Council and The Toronto Arts Council. Under the policies of the peer-review system, visual artists’ funding proposals are judged by their peers who decide the fate of the applicant. The study has sought to bring transparency to the peer-review process, as many artists seem to have a narrow understanding of how decisions are made behind the closed doors. The literature undergirding the study was drawn from the fields of education, social psychology, decision-making, economics, and critical theory. This exploratory study was presented in three papers, and each paper sought to answer one of the three research questions:

RQ1. What are the discursive practices that arts councils use in determining ‘artistic excellence’?

RQ2. How do government agencies exert influence in the decision-making process of arts funding?

RQ3. How do jurors make group decisions during the adjudication process?

5.1 The Importance of This Study

This study should benefit artists, arts councils, grant officers, arts administrator, policymakers, and the scholarly community interested in the arts. The findings will contribute to growing bodies of literature on peer-review processes, decision-making, policy, social psychology, administration, and leadership. In addition, this research contributes to the literature in several ways: it (a) demystifies the peer-review process in arts councils at the federal, provincial and municipal levels; (b) strives to make transparent arts council decision-
making practices; (c) illuminates the definitions of artistic excellence; (d) advocates for openness and trust in decision-making; (e) identifies interactive factors affecting the decision-making process; (f) describes how decision-making practices are constructed by identifying signs of Groupthink; (g) reiterates the importance of arts funding; and (h) opens doors for future research in the field of arts funding.

5.2 Findings

RQ1. What are the discursive practices that arts councils use in determining ‘artistic excellence’?

Chapter Two explored the concept of artistic excellence and how it is applied during the peer-review process for arts funding among Canadian arts councils. It is commonly acknowledged that the peer review has become the standard process to ensure equitable and effective distribution of funding. However, there are tensions between which applications get funded versus which applications should be funded since the definitions of excellence are inconsistent. I applied discourse analysis to understand the tensions among meanings.

In this the study, applied subjectivity evolves among jurors when trying to define excellence. Overall, jurors and arts administrators struggled to agree on the criteria for artistic excellence; they relied often on their subjective views and socially-constructed discursive practices when they evaluate applications. As a result, I argue that the definition of excellence should be solidified that all jurors commonly understand, rather than being reflective of discursive practices.
RQ2. How do government agencies exert influence in the decision-making process of arts funding?

Chapter Three looked closely at how government agencies exert influence in the decision-making process of arts funding. Canadian arts councils make funding decisions using the peer-review model at arm’s length. Contrary to this belief, the peer review process does not always award funding based solely on artistic merit. This is because the peer review process is influenced by government priorities that shape their funding decisions. Then, I contend that even though arts councils are at arm’s length, they often fulfill the government’s agenda as filtered through symbolic power.

RQ3. How do jurors make group decisions during the adjudication process?

In Chapter Four, I drew from Irving Janis’ theoretical framework on groupthink—a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people, in which the desire for conformity in the group results in poor decision-making outcomes. This paper examined the symptoms of groupthink in the peer-review process for arts funding in the Canadian arts councils. I analyzed to extent to which, during the adjudication process, the jurors’ decision-making process exhibit any of the eight signs of groupthink. Using discourse analysis, the findings of this qualitative study ascertained symptoms of groupthink. I argue that during the deliberation process, there is a tension between groupthink symptoms and groupthink avoidance. I found that groupthink symptoms are often mitigated by negotiation tactics, which however create conditions that are insufficient for groupthink avoidance.

In sum, the aforementioned three research questions have shown that decision-making is a complex process. First, the arts community struggle to agree on the meaning of artistic
excellence. Second, although arts councils seek feedback from the art community, their decisions often also reflect the government’s agenda. The crux of symbolic power affects how arts councils distribute funding. On one hand, councils are set out to serve the arts community, and on the other, they serve the government’s priorities, often for fear of losing government support. Thirdly, there is a tension between groupthink symptoms and groupthink avoidance. Power influenced executive decisions, and hence also shapes decision-making in the arts field, where the agents with the power (or money) legitimize a dominant status of arts consumption. Is this the society we want to perpetuate? One of the major challenges is that the arts are not a high priority for governments, the major funders of the arts in Canada. While government officials, and by extension arts councils, focus on economic priorities, artists are preoccupied with the ability to create art, new meaning and cultural possibilities. This dichotomy has been observed throughout this study.

5.3 Theoretical Implications

There are numerous considerations that affect how arts funding decisions are made. All of these affect how the peer-review process in the arts is conducted. Despite its flaws, there is consensus that the peer-review model is the best model for distributing funding. However, the effectiveness of the process is compromised by subjective deliberations and vague definitions that impinge on the effectiveness of decision-making. Additionally, the peer-review process is a complex process. Addressing this study required me to draw from diverse disciplines and several conceptual frameworks. I had help in understanding the process by viewing it through various pairs of eyes: I use discourse analysis to examine the data and also, Pierre Bourdieu to recognize symbolic power, and Irving Janis to learn the concept of groupthink, which argues
that the desire for conformity in the group results in poor decision-making outcomes. Discourse analysis, symbolic power, and groupthink are useful methodological and theoretical tools to study the peer review process. Discourse analysis allowed me to study the text in the transcripts and build themes. The theory of symbolic power showed how economic priorities can infiltrate arts funding decisions. It allowed me to understand the influence of power that would not have been visible otherwise. Groupthink theory provided another perspective on decision making and revealed jurors’ strength in decision making (e.g., negotiation).

I found these theories complemented each other and utilized each one as a conceptual framework in one of the chapters. Therefore, this study confirms their utility in the case of the artistic peer review processes in Toronto, Ontario and Canada.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

The study encountered a number of limitations which need to be considered:

- This research was challenged by the limited opportunity to observe the adjudication process. After much effort and lengthy conversations with arts councils, I was allowed to observe only one adjudication, at the Ontario Arts Councils. Hence, I relied on face-to-face interviews to analyze the peer review process.

- The peer-review process is confidential and discussions are not meant to become public. During my field observation, jurors were informed of my research endeavour and I was allowed to neither participate nor interact with them. Hence, I was unable to probe or ask any follow-up questions.
• Grant officers and art administrators may have inflated the importance of the review process to protect the councils’ reputations. As well, arts councils may not want to admit to government political interference for fear of losing funding.

5.5 Implications

There are a number of implications. This study has shown numerous factors that intertwine and influence jurors’ decisions. The following are the major implications that emerged from this study.

Implications for Future Research:

• Based on the findings of power relationship further studies of these questions is warranted: Who benefits from executive decision-making of arts councils? How does attending to government agendas affect the outcome of cultural production? What factors have been overlooked in the study of decision-making in the arts?
• Will economics be always a government priority in the arts?
• There is also a need to examine the cultural outcomes of the jury decisions.

Implications for Policy:

• I propose a more clear definition of “excellence” is needed (e.g., the development of guidelines) in order to improve artists’ confidence in the peer-review system employed by Canadian arts councils.

Implications for Practice:

• As Canadian councils focus on regionality and/or diversity and excellence and merit, there is a need to practice a balanced approached between councils and jurors, where all dimensions of evaluation are equally weighted during the adjudication process.
• In rendering better decisions, there should be an awareness of groupthink symptoms and groupthink avoidance.

5.6 Final Remarks

_The arts are the best insurance policy a city can take on itself_

~Woody Dumas, former Mayor of Baton Rouge

This is the first research study of its kind, since there is minimal research in arts funding in Canada, I relied on a multidisciplinary literature to demystify the peer review process. Making decisions for arts funding is multidimensional. Initially, I discovered some aspects that affected decision-making of the peer-review process for arts funding (e.g., the extent of expertise, juror’s interactions and emotions, juror’s horse-trading and the level of preparedness). As I analyzed the data into the chapters, I encountered elements that spoke to how arts funding decisions are affected. One of the elements that resonated with me is symbolic power, where Canadian arts councils’ priorities are reflected by government priorities embedded in economic discourses. Canadian arts councils rely on government funding and that gift comes with a great deal of control from the government officials, acting as a symbolic power.

The analysis of peer-review process also illuminated symptoms of groupthink; such as homogeneity and consensus. Jurors concurrently struggle to agree on the criteria for artistic excellence with other counterparts; they rely on their discursive practices to evaluate artistic excellence. All together, jurors review hundreds of applications to find the “best” application. The question that emerges is the extent to which decisions based on discursive practices seem appropriate.
The overall significance of this study is that there is reason to be optimistic about the peer-review process, since the participants in this study perceive the process as the “best” model although imperfect. This finding, of course, was a significant result of this study.

Succinctly, I have ascertained throughout the three papers and corresponding chapters that arts councils play a significant role in the advancement of culture by serving the community. Even though, arts funding for each visual artist is minuscule, this funding is important because it acts as an education tool to further develop the artistic career, and for artists to access those funds they need to comprehend how the peer review process works.

The overall significance of this study is that it has created a clearer picture of how the peer-review process works for arts funding, and most importantly, how decision-making for arts funding is construed and influenced by symbolic power, and how jurors think together when making decisions about funding. All in all, this study has hoped to open the closed doors of the peer-review process in the Canadian arts councils because arts funding matters.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION


CHAPTER TWO: ARTISTIC EXCELLENCE


The politicization of peer-review panels at the NEA. In J. H. Balfe (Ed.), *Paying the piper* (pp. 254-270). Urbana & Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.


CHAPTER THREE: SYMBOLIC POWER


Caust, J. (2003). Putting the “art” back into arts policy making: how arts policy has been “captured” by the economists and the marketers. *International Journal of Cultural Policy, 9*(1), 51–63.


CHAPTER FOUR: GROUPTHINK


APPENDICES

Appendix A

I. Data Collection Plan

- Literature Review
  - Journals
  - Books
  - Public reports
  - Policy documents

- Secondary Data
  - Art councils’ internal reports
  - Brochures
  - Statistical data

- Qualitative
  - Face-to-face interviews at the CCA (Ottawa), OAC (Toronto), TAC (Toronto)
  - Naturalistic Observations

II. Face-to-Face Interviews

- Art Leaders (10)
  (Councils heads, museum leaders, grant officers, independent art leaders)

- Adjudicators (16)
- Professional Visual Artists (12)
- Art Professors (2)
- Curator (1)
- Lawyer (1)

Note: All 26 participants have an arts background as visual artists or other arts field, with the exception of one art leader who was interviewed because of his role as policymaker for arts funding.
Appendix B—Face-to-Face Interview Guide

ART ADMINISTRATORS
1. Background
   • What lead you to this role, are you an artist?

2. Understanding the Peer-review Model & Process
   • How does the council make decisions, what is the process?
   • How are the peer panel selected? What are the criteria to assess candidacy?
   • What specific experiences or factors led to the success of the peer-review process(es) in which you have participated?
   • What specific experiences or factors led to the failure of the peer-review process(es) in which you have participated?
   • How would you improve the peer-review process(es) in which you have participated?
   • What are the major challenges as a grant officer and how do you overcome it?
   • What are the factors affecting the decision-making process?

3. Definitions
   • What is “Merit” and “Artistic Excellence”? How does the council ensure that the criterion of merit and artistic excellence is fairly applied?

4. Decision-Making Process
   • What do you value the most when have to make a decision which artwork is worthy of funding? And what strategies do you follow in order to ensure the “best” work gets awarded?

PEER-REVIEW PANEL
1. Background
   • What lead you to this role, are you an artist?
   • How many times have you participated as a peer-reviewer?

2. Understanding the Peer-review Model & Process
   • What is the process of the peer-review system and deliberations?
   • What specific experiences or factors led to the failure of the peer-review process(es) in which you have participated?
   • What are the criteria to assess candidacy? Is it based on the presentation of the application, the ability to write, the work or the artist?
   • When it comes to decide who is worthy of funding, do you feel influence/pressure by your peers?
   • Tell me about a specific occasion when you disagreed with a particular work and how did you reach a consensus?
   • Have you thought of a “better” or more effective model to award funding to artists? Please explain.

3. Definitions
   • What is “Merit” and “Artistic Excellence”? How does the council ensure that the criterion of merit and artistic excellence is fairly applied?

4. Decision-Making Process
   • Do you select the work of art because it gives you pleasure, satisfaction or happiness?
   • What do you value the most when have to make a decision which artwork is worthy of funding?
   • What factors affect decisions? And what strategies do you follow in order to ensure the “best” work gets awarded?
Appendix C


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Source: Prepared by The Canada Council for the Arts (CCA), June 12, 2014

Note: International Residencies for visual artists are excluded from the data. On average, the CCA awards 12-14 visual artists per year to travel abroad.

From the above, in 2013, 360 visual artists received grants from the CCA

133
Appendix D

Scoring Cards

Observation notes taken at the OAC, July 21 & 22, 2014, grant deliberations for Established Visual Artist. The score card is divided into three groups (top tier, middle-tier and lower tier). A score of 25 (perfect score) and 24 would secure granting.

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<td>57 1 1 1 4</td>
<td>57 1 1 4</td>
<td>57 5 4 4 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58 1 1 1 3</td>
<td>58 1 1 3</td>
<td>58 5 4 4 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: These tables aim to illustrate the scoring process developed from my two-day observation notes.

In Table 1- Round 1, there was a consensus that the shaded area, or middle tier, would proceed for further consideration in Round 2. After much discussion, jurors agreed that scores of 11 and lower, in the lower tier, would be eliminated from consideration. As per the OAC site, the Officer reviewed items that are not eligible for project funding. For instance, event, fundraising activities, student projects, among others.
Thus 37 applications were revisited and discussed (shaded area above); support materials were reviewed again, wherever necessary. The juror provided his/her evaluation of the application, referring to ‘artistic merit.’

In Table 2 - Round 2, from the 37 ‘mid-range’ applications revisited, 13 applications were eliminated and 24 were re-scored (shaded area in Table 2). After much discussion about the applicants with an equal score of 15, jurors were asked to assign a new score to each application and these were collected. The applications were ranked again and the lowest scores eliminated from further discussion. At this point, a new excel table with scores of 14 and more is tabulated. The officer revealed the amount of funding available, and the cut-off line is drawn. In this case, there was $270,000 to fund 18 artists). See Table 3.

In Table 3 - Round 3, those with a score of 21 and up were to receive grants. Note that cut-off ranges will change in each peer-review meeting, depending on budget, jurors and OAC strategic priorities. After the cut-off point, the grants officer addressed the jurors to give them an opportunity to review any of the scores, and brought to their attention the council’s strategic priorities, i.e. regional. The officer clarified that there is no quota for regional artists, and asked them if they would like to reconsider the scores. After consideration, the jurors firmly stated that the applicants they selected were optimal, based on artistic merit. The jurors concurred that diversity and regionality were already represented by the jury. Therefore, the jurors signed off on the scores and no changes were made.
## Appendix E

### Project Grants for Visual Artists

**Project Grants for Visual Artists (grants awarded)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EMERGING</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MID CAREER</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESTABLISHED</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>175</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>859</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Long Term Grants for Visual Artists (grants awarded)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EMERGING</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MID CAREER</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESTABLISHED</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Project and Long Term Grants Combined (grants awarded)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EMERGING</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MID CAREER</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESTABLISHED</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>181</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>936</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Canada Council for the Arts, June 12, 2014
Appendix F - Infographic: How the Peer-Review Process Works