

**Title**

Life course transitions and their impact on the artistic trajectories of older artists

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### **Abstract**

Research on older people's artistic participation has increased. However, the inclusion of a life course theory and the examination of differences between men and women in artistic trajectories is still scarce. In this study, we explored how life course transitions influence the artistic trajectories of older people throughout the lifecycle, and analysed whether life course transitions affecting older artists' trajectories differed between men and women. We conducted semi-structured individual interviews with 30 older visual artists, craftsmen and craftswomen, and identified eight life course transitions in the participants' stories that affected their artistic trajectories. Five of these life course transitions were linked to the family domain and three to the work domain. Most were visibly different between men and women, and influenced the artistic trajectories of female and male artists in different ways. Our study expands on previous research on artistic participation among older adults by considering life course elements in the analysis of relationships between artistic trajectories and life transitions.

**Keywords:** life course transitions; artistic participation; gender; older people; life course

## **Introduction**

In recent decades, there has been increased interest in older people's artistic participation (Reynolds, 2015). The emphasis of research on the topic is frequently on the benefits of artistic activities (Chacur, Serrat, & Villar, 2022), such as improvements in physical health (Liddle, Parkinson, & Sibbritt, 2014), well-being (Kenning, 2015) or cognitive function (Masutani, Yamamoto, Konishi, & Maeda, 2010). However, research about the artists' experiences is lacking, particularly from a life course perspective (Chacur et al., 2022).

In many cases, artistic participation begins at young ages. These individuals have been significantly involved in creative activities throughout their lives (Hanna, 2013). Thus, it is not uncommon for older professional and non-professional artists to have an extensive artistic trajectory. However, the inclusion of a life course approach in research about older people's artistic participation is still insufficient, although it is known that life course transitions and life events in relevant developmental domains, such as changes in work (Hennekam & Bennett, 2016) or family (Bernard et al., 2015), may well influence this type of participation. The present study was designed to understand how life course transitions in significant developmental contexts influence older people's artistic trajectory across the lifecycle.

*What do we know about life course transitions and older people's artistic trajectories?*

From life course theory (see Elder & Shanahan, 2007), we know that each individual experiences numerous transitions in status and roles through the life course (Hutchison, 2011). Life course transitions imply changes that affect one or several life domains. They are typically circumscribed to definite points in time and often act as landmarks that delimit life phases. In contrast, trajectories comprise long-period patterns of continuity and change concerning a specific domain in the individual's life and include several transitions. Since people are involved in numerous domains, their lives are composed of multiple intersecting trajectories

such as family, education or work. However, life transitions should be seen as a relational element, rather than an exclusively individual one. In this way, the concept of linked lives (Elder, 1998) emerges as an interesting topic, as it highlights our interconnectedness. Lives are rooted in relations with other people and are influenced by them, providing both support and control in the individual's behaviour (Elder & Shanahan, 2006). Social support refers to the help provided by others that benefits an individual or a group and is a key element in linked lives. However, at the same time, relationships control the individual's behaviour by means of expectations, rewards and punishments (Hutchison, 2011).

In artistic trajectories, transitions related to work and family domains are particularly important, with some studies addressing these topics. The main background on life course transitions that affect artistic trajectories is described below.

#### *Life course transitions related to the family domain*

Partnering and parenthood have been addressed in studies about life course transitions connected with the family domain. Partners could have varying effects on the trajectory of an artist. For example, a study of women found that partners could play a significant role in inspiring women's artistic participation by offering support and recognising their need to have some distinct activities and interests (Reynolds, 2009). In addition, the study by Greathouse (2014) found that between couples comprised of two world-renowned artists, the influence could occur through a constant stimulus, resulting in collaborative art as a duo. Having children could pause the artistic trajectory and move careers to non-artistic fields, to bring in a better income (Mullen, Davis, & Polatajko, 2012). An empirical study about classical ballet dancers (Turner & Wainwright, 2003) found that maintaining a typical family life is difficult for dancers, since they spend a large amount of time on their dance activities.

Nevertheless, parenthood-related transitions affect women and men differently. Research evidenced that domestic responsibilities attributed to women and maternity could reduce the time available for their artwork, and that female artists avoid economic subsistence through arts (Dekel, 2014). In this way, women's situation in performance professions, such as music, theatre and dance, is extremely dependent on how the occupational and domestic domains combine. For women in performing arts disciplines, it is very hard to balance family and work. Such difficulties can have a detrimental impact on their labour market participation (Coulangeon, Ravet, & Roharik, 2005). In the field of visual arts the same conflict emerges: the family domain influences women's artwork by decreasing the time devoted to creative practice due to family responsibilities. In addition, situations related with the family domain seem to harm women's artwork more than men's (Flisbäck & Lindström, 2014).

However, not every family transition necessarily hampers artistic trajectories. Some studies have found that transitions in this domain can enhance or reinterpret the artistic production or commitment in positive terms. For instance, analysing the experience of arts practices for leisure in older women with a lengthy history of caring for a relative with dementia, Hunt, Truran and Reynolds (2016) found that artistic commitment offered a way of processing the end of intense caregiving. The women's art had experienced significant changes since their caregiving role had concluded. Similarly, in the literary field, the illness and death of a loved one, for example a brother or a father, could motivate the production of new creative works such as poems as a means of ascribing new meanings to life events (Swinnen, 2018).

Other topics related to the family domain like divorce or widowhood have been scarcely studied. In some cases, widowhood was a relevant transition for a greater involvement and deepening of artistic participation, particularly for women (Bernard et al., 2015). Thus, certain older women began an artistic career through arts and crafts-making as a way to deal with the grieving process (Tzanidaki & Reynolds, 2011).

### *Life course transitions related to the work domain*

In the work domain, some scholars have explored the process of transitioning from being a music student to entering the professional area. They noticed that the process was easier when mentoring opportunities and strong peer networks were present (Creech et al., 2008).

A second type of transitions are those connected to changes in job roles. In this sphere, Hennekam and Bennett (2016) focused on artists who had experienced an involuntary change in their artistic trajectory, from focusing only on artistic work to working in non-artistic jobs due their inability to earn enough money. The study noticed that although artists had expected to be able to manage simultaneous artistic and non-artistic activities, they had found that the development of their artistic practices was highly limited by the great amount of time spent on non-artistic work.

In a more advanced life stage, a third significant transition refers to retirement. Retirement could be seen by professional musicians as an opportunity to continue creating and working, providing freedom and new opportunities to accomplish different forms of art expression (Davis & Cannava, 1995). However, retirement could have a varying impact depending on the artistic discipline. For instance, the study of the retirement trajectory of professional dancers is very complex, as they retire at early ages and move to other less distinguished companies or dance groups, or into administrative or educational roles (Turner & Wainwright, 2003). In the case of non-professional artists, retirement could provide the opportunity to dedicate more time to a lifelong interest, such as the practice of theatre (Bernard et al., 2015), music (Jenkins & Southcott, 2016) and textile arts (Reynolds, 2010), or even to start an artistic commitment for the first time (Rodeheaver, Emmons & Powers, 1998). Thus, the impact of life course transitions seems to vary depending on the level of artistic practice, that is, whether it is professional or non-professional.

### *Justification and purposes of the study*

Notwithstanding the growing interest of scholars in the artistic practices of older people, and even though previous research offers valuable evidence of the relationship between life course transitions and artistic trajectories, there are some gaps that need to be explored to understand this connexion more comprehensively.

First, studies on the topic have mostly focused on a single transition or life-stage rather than reviewing how these life course transitions change over the entire lifecycle. Indeed, most research is centred on life course transitions in early or central periods of the life course with samples of young people (e.g. Hennekam & Bennett, 2016), and less presence of studies among older persons. The study of this subject in the older population is interesting, since having greater life experience may provide opportunities to experiment with a wider variety of life course transitions. Research including broader age ranges and older age could support the construction of a more comprehensive, realistic vision of life course transitions and the artistic trajectory.

Second, life course transitions could have varying effects and be understood differently depending on the artistic discipline that is practiced. One paradigmatic example is retirement. For professional dancers, retirement from dance activity, which often occurs at young ages, was defined more as a “transition” from dance than real retirement. In fact, retirement was considered by many dancers as an experience in which they had remained within the dance field (without abandoning it completely); as an intersection between dance and learning or seeking new vocational opportunities; or as a time when they stopped dance activity but continued using those skills (Harrison & Ruddock-Hudson, 2017). In contrast, for visual artists (e.g. painters or photographers), retirement was seen in a different way. In their study about ageing visual artists, Jeffri, Heckathorn and Spiller (2011) found that most older visual artists

in their sample were simply not retired. Of these, the vast majority stated that they would never retire from their art. In their research, a novel concept for ageing visual artists is “self-defined retirement”, which means that workers may truly be retired from their non-artistic job but still working at their art. This situation was not unusual in the sample. Therefore, it could be an interesting area to study, as visual artists, craftsmen and craftswomen tend to have broad, extensive artistic trajectories, which could lead to a richer, more complex career to explore, involving numerous life course transitions.

Third, the exploration of differences between men and women is barely addressed in previous research, although this feature plays a substantial role in determining artistic trajectories. In the preceding sections, the literature on life course transitions influencing male and female artistic practices has been described. Although these findings are interesting, very few studies have been carried out with older female artists. As far as we know, women artists’ perceptions are underrepresented in the research on creative occupations. Therefore, more empirical attention to women artists and their life course transitions is needed.

For the reasons presented above, the current study sought to explore how life course transitions affect the artistic practice of older artists across the lifecycle, and to examine whether the effects of life course transitions on artistic trajectories differed according to sex in the case of male and female older artists.

## **Material and methods**

### *Participants*

The sample comprised 30 visual artists, craftsmen and craftswomen living in Catalonia (Spain). Sixteen of them were women and 14 were men, with a mean age of 68.63 (SD = 5.3; range = 60–79). All of them actively carried out a visual arts or crafts practice, including sculpture, painting, drawing, embroidery, jewellery, photography, enamelling, textile art, basketry,



ceramics, collage, woodcraft, recycled art, engraving and illustration. Twenty participants described themselves as professional and ten as non-professional artists. Other sociodemographic characteristics of the sample are described in the table below (see Table 1). Participants had to meet three main criteria: (a) they were aged 60 or over, (b) they carried out an artistic activity and (c) the artistic practice was considered valuable or significant by the participant. Artistic activity was understood as active, voluntary artistic practice, whether professional or non-professional.

The sampling technique was intentionally kept broad, since the aim of the study was not to analyse certain groups of artists (professional or non-professional), but to explore the perception and meanings of the artistic practices as valuable for the participants. Using a more specific sampling strategy carries the risk of reducing the sample to older people with a legitimate position in their artistic fields (Gallistl, 2018). The disciplines included in this study were visual arts and crafts, practices that aim to produce tangible items regardless of the level of expertise (Reynolds & Lim, 2007). Activities in an intervention context, therapeutic programmes or training courses were not included, because these formats could limit or affect the condition of voluntary and valuable activities.

**Table 1:** Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample (in Frequencies and Percentages)  
(N = 30)

<b>Sociodemographic characteristic</b>	<b>Participants</b>	
	n	(%)
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	20	(66.7)
Divorced	7	(23.3)
Widowed	2	(6.7)
Single	1	(3.3)
<b>Educational level</b>		
Primary studies	2	(6.7)
Secondary studies	16	(53.3)
University studies	12	(40)
<b>Living arrangement</b>		
Living alone	7	(23.3)
Living with partner	20	(66.7)
Living with partner and children	2	(6.7)
Living with other relatives	1	(3.3)

### *Instruments*

A semi-structured interview with open questions was specially designed by the authors of the study. The individual interview was considered optimal since the study aimed to capture the life experiences and individual processes associated with the artistic trajectory of the participants. The main themes covered by the interview were: meanings of the artistic activity and the ageing process, the influence of life domains and life course transitions on the artistic trajectory, and the influence of the artistic trajectory on other life domains and the community. Among the questions included in the interview script were the following: 1) Has there been a moment in your artistic trajectory in which it experienced a significant change? Can you describe it in detail? 2) Has there been a moment in your artistic trajectory when it was reduced or stopped for any period? What was the reason? 3) How have experiences related to other areas of your life influenced your artistic trajectory? For instance, how have experiences in

your partnering domain affected your artistic trajectory? 4) How have your experiences in the family domain affected your artistic trajectory? 5) Focusing now on the work domain, specifically on your “non-artistic work”, how have experiences related to your non-artistic work affected your artistic trajectory? 6) Have any domains other than those we have recently discussed influenced your artistic trajectory? If yes, in what way?

We analysed responses to questions about life course transitions, and content related to life course transitions that was spontaneously mentioned by some participants at other points in the interview.

### *Procedure*

Participants were contacted in two ways. The first was through formal contact by e-mail with several institutions and associations linked to arts and crafts in Catalonia. A brief written summary of the research project was presented, requesting collaboration through dissemination to the institution’s members, to facilitate contact with older artists. Three institutions agreed to collaborate. The manager of each institution disseminated the information about the project and invited those interested to contact the researcher by phone or email. Twelve participants were recruited in this way. The second way was through informal contact with artists in Catalonia by means of the researchers’ networks or through new contacts given by the interviewees. In this case, the person who offered the contact briefly explained the project to the potential participant. If the latter were interested in participating, their contact data was requested so that they could be contacted by phone by the researcher. Eighteen participants were recruited through the second way.

The interview was tested by Author 1 applying the instrument to a person who met all the inclusion criteria. This interview was transcribed verbatim and revised by the authors to determine whether it met the objectives of the study. However, no changes were necessary to

the interview script. This interview was not included in the final sample. Twenty-nine interviews were conducted face-to-face and one via video call, due to the participant's personal preference. To create security and trust, the participants chose the setting for the interview, which was most often the artist's residence or studio, a coffeeshop or a park. Author 1 who has previous experience in qualitative research conducted all the interviews between February and April 2021.

The Ethics Committee of the University of Barcelona (IRB00003099) approved the study. All participants received and signed a written formal consent form that contained exhaustive information on the aims of the study, data collection techniques, issues of confidentiality and anonymity, and the right to refuse to answer any of the questions and to abandon the study at any moment. In the case of the video call interview, the project information document was sent via email and informed consent was given verbally and recorded. The image of this interview was not recorded. All participants agreed to take part of the study and completed it. To maintain participants' anonymity, we pseudonymised data before analysis and use pseudonyms to quote interviews in this paper.

### *Data analysis*

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically with the help of Atlas.ti software. The length of the interviews was between 46 and 170 min. For the analysis of the transcripts, we followed the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006) in an inductive process that allows data coding without trying to incorporate it into a pre-existing coding framework. This process included six phases of analysis. Firstly, we became familiar with the data by reading and re-reading it, and noted our preliminary ideas. Secondly, we produced the initial codes from the data. Thirdly, we organised the codes into potential themes and collated all important data to each potential theme. Fourthly, we reviewed all the themes

by evaluating their connection with the coded extracts and with the entire data set. Fifthly, we clearly defined and named the themes, by analysing them to refine the details of each one, and the overall narration that the analysis expresses. Finally, we reviewed all the themes by selecting and analysing examples and relating the analysis to the research objectives and the literature on the topic. All three authors participated in the data analysis.

## **Findings**

We identified eight life course transitions in the participants' narratives. Five life course transitions were linked to the family domain (partnering, parenthood, taking care of relatives, divorce, and relative's death) and three to the work domain (entering the labour market, changes in job role and retirement). Notably, all participants mentioned at least one life course transition that influenced their artistic trajectory, and most of them revealed two or more life course transitions. Most life course transitions showed major differences between male and female artists.

### *Life course transitions in the family domain*

#### *Partnering*

Partnering appeared slightly more often in the women's narratives. Ten women and eight men alluded to partnering as a transition that impacted the artistic domain. The findings show that the effect of partnering on a professional and non-professional artistic career can be favourable or adverse. A professional craftsman described his difficult early stages in the world of basket weaving at a time when this craft was practiced increasingly infrequently in the country. He examined how his wife played a key role in supporting his decision to pursue a craft career:

“I started in basketry when almost everyone was leaving it. Because all the oil-derived products arrived, 40 years ago (...) objects at very reasonable prices made

of rubber and plastic and polyester... and basketry, which had been used a lot in the industry, was starting to decrease (...) My partner, when I started (...) no one believed that this was possible. She believed in it if I believed it was possible. She gave me my first tools, for example". (Man, 64 years old)

However, partnering could also have a negative impact on the artistic trajectory, a situation that was only revealed by women. In fact, various female artists who mentioned this transition described that the sphere of the couple had a negative effect on their artistic career. A professional painter explained how being married to a male painter led to difficulties in her artistic development:

"I married a painter, and this had a tremendous effect... he thought it was very good if I did theatre, but he didn't like me to paint (...) This was a tough moment, when I realised that he was not receptive to this theme". (Woman, 76 years old).

Our findings related to partnering (as a factor that either enhances or hampers artistic practice) extend the results of previous research that highlighted the role of the partner as a promoter of artistic practice (Reynolds, 2009).

### Parenthood

Having children was a life course transition that appeared in men's and women's narratives, although in greater quantity in the latter (in nine women's and six men's stories). However, the way in which parenthood was reflected was very different. Generally, for women, dedication to family responsibilities reduced the time available for artistic practice. This struggle between family and artistic practice corroborates previous findings (Frym, 1979), which show that women, in particular, experience conflicts regarding devoting time to their children and to their art. In this regard, the narrative of a non-professional painter illustrated the difficulty in keeping a balance between work, family and artistic activity: "[My artistic career] was almost stopped,

because working in a multinational company, for many hours a day, having a large family of three children, the truth is that it is very difficult”. (Woman, 63 years old)

For men, having children increased the amount of (artistic or non-artistic) work required to support the family economically. Thus, men with non-artistic jobs decreased their artistic practice, while men working in artistic jobs augmented their creative activity. A professional basket-maker explained the latter issue:

“When I had my two daughters (...) I couldn’t stop [working] either, because these handicrafts aren’t very well paid, so you have to dedicate a lot of time to them. So, I didn’t dedicate fewer hours, but my day was longer, and I worked on the weekends”. (Man, 64 years old)

In certain cases, having children could generate a change in the artistic discipline as a way of reconciling parenthood with creative practice. A professional painter described the change from painting to photography as a more feasible practice to carry out while their children were young: “When my children were young, logically I had to dedicate myself to other things such as photography, it is easier to do (...) you could have a small studio that practically didn’t take up space”. (Man, 71 years old)

Parenthood could affect not only the artistic discipline, but also the art oeuvres themselves, as explained by a professional sculptress and ceramist:

“A psychologist friend of mine told me, ‘Do you realize that you are doing maternities?’ (...) My previous work were pieces of a traditional character and instead, at a certain moment when this happened [birth of her child] I began to split them and from its interior, another shape came out”. (Woman, 77 years old)

Interestingly, our study shows that having children does not necessarily obstruct the artistic practice; it may even enhance it. To our knowledge, factors such as these have not been widely studied to date.

### Taking care of relatives

Taking care of relatives appeared in six of the sixteen interviews with women and in only one male interview. These narratives coincide with studies of caregiving and gender, since informal care responsibilities are more commonly assumed by women (Bertogg & Strauss, 2020) and women suffer a greater overload due to this role (Barusch & Spaid, 1989). It is remarkable that the role of female caregivers took place over very long periods. Usually the consequence was a considerable reduction or complete cessation of artistic engagement. The following description by a professional enameller and illustrator highlights the above aspects:

“[Artistic activity was stopped] due to my husband’s illness. For many years. What happens is that you never leave it completely... but there were the central years... because it was dementia, Alzheimer (...) What happened is that in the end he was very ill for over 10 years”. (Woman, 77 years old)

Only one male artist mentioned taking care of relatives as a transition. Because of looking after his grandchildren, he would pause his artistic activity. However, compared with the women artists’ stories, this pause was portrayed as temporary, and the painter expressed his intention of returning to his artistic work after finishing his caregiving duties: “My daughter is going to have her second child (...) and how much longer will I be in France, well, I don’t know, it could be a month, two or three (...) but I will be able to return to it again”. (Man, 69 years old)

As far as we know, taking care of grandchildren is a life course transition which has not previously been explored.

### Divorce



Divorce or the breakup of a sentimental relationship was a transition mentioned only by three women. This life course transition, to our knowledge, has not been previously examined; in our study it was only present in professional female artists' narratives, and showed a significant influence on their artistic trajectory. On some occasions the breakup modified the way the artistic discipline was developed, as was the case of a costume designer dedicated to haute couture, who left this setting after the divorce: "(...) Once divorced I was able to start doing things, but in a different way, now with shops and fashion-making..." (Woman, 72 years old) For another participant, the sentimental breakup was experienced as the starting point of a new creative stage. The narrative of a professional textile artist reflected this topic, since she moved to a new city and started a different artistic project: "A very painful broken relationship led me to something very positive (...) I dedicated time... to do a [fashion] parade, I got into a tremendous sense of adventure out of doing something, that now when I see what I did, it seems impossible to me". (Woman, 73 years old)

### Relative's death

The death of relatives was a life course transition that was mentioned less frequently, although it appeared similarly in the narratives of women and men. One woman and two men talked about this topic in their interviews. We found that the death of close relatives could impact the artistic trajectory in different ways. For some artists, it led to cessation or a decrease in creative activity. As a professional jeweller explained, the death of a close relative brought about a pause in his crafts career: "I remember the death of my mother... at Christmas, so we had a lot of work and we had to stop it... and the death of my mother affected us very much". (Man, 60 years old)

However, for other artists, the death of a close relative led to an expression of this loss by means of the artwork. A professional sculptress explained how the death of her father meant a change in her ceramic pieces:

“My father was a very important person in my life and... so, I did a tribute to my father, an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Madrid, and these pieces were flattened, flattened and lengthened and they became funeral stelae”. (Woman, 77 years old)

These findings add interesting and new elements to the relationship between the death of a relative and artistic practices, since previous research has focused mainly on the study of artistic practice as a way of coping with the loss of a loved one (e.g., Schofield-Tomschin & Littrell, 2001).

### *Life course transitions in the work domain*

#### *Entering the labour market*

Entering the labour market was described slightly more often in male artists' narratives (three men and two women mentioned this transition). Generally, stories were associated with the beginning of working life at a very young age. A professional artist (sculptor, painter and jeweller) referred to how his first job at the age of 14 represented a crucial moment and the beginning of his artistic career:

“I started by chance, I started in a diamond-cutting factory, I became interested in the topic, I went to look for a job in a jewellery store, they taught me to make jewellery, but at one point I wanted to draw my own jewellery. I had a teacher who taught me to draw (...) we went to a painting competition, and I won the prize”. (Man, 72 years old)

Most narratives about entering the labour market described an immersion (and continuous development) in the artistic field. These findings complement previous studies that have focused more on family factors as agents that can promote artistic initiation (e.g., Manturzevska 1990). However, for one non-professional painter, starting to work meant total interruption of the artistic activity: “I studied different [artistic] subjects, but well... I had to start working and it was a discipline that I had to abandon”.

(Woman, 68 years old)

### Changes in job role

Changes in job role appeared repeatedly in artists’ stories and was mentioned slightly more frequently by women than men (eleven women and eight men referred to aspects of this life course transition in their narrations). This life course transition could be expressed in different ways, such as increasing the amount of work, a topic that was widely mentioned by the interviewees. On numerous occasions, the large amount of work made it almost impossible to continue with the artistic activity, particularly when the main (and remunerated) work was non-artistic. A non-professional sculptress, who worked in a managerial position explained this conflict: “At one point in the work that I was doing, it took a lot of time and it really... reduced my creativity to almost 0%. It absorbed me so much, that I couldn’t create”. (Woman, 62 years old)

In contrast, for other participants, the workspace offered an opportunity for artistic development, through the inclusion of artistic practice in the work domain. A non-professional photographer and painter explained this in his own words: “In the company where I worked, I had contact with various people with the same hobbies, especially in photography. And even in the company, through our suggestion, a photography competition was organised”. (Man, 70 years old)

In this regard, the current study adds to previous reports that working in non-artistic jobs does not always entail a reduction or decline in artistic practice (e.g., Hennekam & Bennett, 2016). Indeed, in some cases, these situations open up new opportunities for artistic expression, by offering new spaces for exhibitions or artistic creations.

Some artists revealed that they could combine their physical workspace with artistic practice, specifically with the exhibition of their artworks. A non-professional painter and craftsman, owner and designer in a furniture store, described how this place facilitated his artistic diffusion: “When I had the furniture store, the paintings were mine, I sold them there (...) I was very lucky to have furniture stores and a free showroom”. (Man, 71 years)

Occasionally, job difficulties resulted in a benefit. A professional painter who combined creative activity with university teaching revealed that her artistic practice was not well considered by colleagues in the department, since the implicit rule was that they should focus on teaching. However, due to the differences suffered in her work, she gained in terms of time for artistic practice:

“Thanks to always being in the minority, I was able to save a lot of time. Because of course, I was never rewarded with an academic assignment (...) but thanks to this, which seems horrible to me... we had time [for the artistic practice]”.

(Woman, 76 years old)

Although life course transitions linked to changes in job role were present in women’s and men’s narratives, they differed according to sex. Women’s narratives showed the multiple roles that were culturally assigned to them. The reflections of a professional illustrator and engraver who also worked as a university teacher reveal the complexity of the balance between numerous responsibilities:

“[The artistic practice was reduced] when times were more difficult, or when you had children or... when there was more work at the university (...) And when I had

retired, sometimes things happened at family level, and you had to stop for a month... You stop physically, but... your head never stops (...) The family is... that... and... you prepare the food and everything, you organise the home (...) You take on everything”. (Woman, 79 years old)

### Retirement

Retirement was described as a life course transition by five female and three male artists. Retirement has previously been studied as an opportunity that increases the time available for personal use, which may well promote creative expression among many older adults (Cohen, 2009). Indeed, in our study it was considered a stage with more available time that could provide an opportunity to incorporate a valuable creative activity. In some cases, retirement allowed the interviewees to recover their artistic practice, which was initiated in early stages but interrupted by other relevant life course transitions. For other artists, retirement was the starting point of their artistic trajectories. This latter situation was explained by a non-professional jeweller who retired from an administration position: “When I retired at 60 years old, I decided to start a different activity from the one I had done, and I started studying jewellery in a studio”. (Woman, 71 years old)

Besides more available time, other benefits arrived after retirement. Transformations could take place in the means of expression or formats, so that new creative challenges appeared in later life. The narrative of a professional textile artist showed how retirement was not a conclusion of the artistic practice, but rather implied a change in the art expression:

“When I closed the [textile art] studio in 2015, I thought that I was also going to stop painting (...) But, curiously, once again, luck changed all my decisions, and... I was asked to create a book (...) Thus, I painted some very tiny silks, to put inside the book”. (Woman, 73 years old)

## **Discussion**

This study aimed to examine the way in which life course transitions affect the artistic practice of older artists through the lifecycle, and to explore whether life course transitions connected with older artists' trajectories exerted different influences in men and women artists. Our purpose was to contribute to previous studies on life course elements and artistic participation (e.g. Lindauer, Orwoll & Kelley, 1997) through the use of retrospective narrative data. A general conclusion derived from the findings of the study is that artistic trajectories of professional and non-professional artists are significantly affected by life course transitions in the family domain and in the work domain.

In addition, this study shows that certain life course transitions such as having children or working in non-artistic jobs can act as facilitators or opportunities for improving artistic creation, or equally as barriers hampering artistic practices. As some scholars on life course theory stated (e.g. Hutchison, 2011), life events need adaptation, since making them can cause stress. Nevertheless, instruments for evaluating the level of stress linked to life events are not successful, because of their bias toward unwanted rather than desirable events, which induces the assumption that all life events cause negative life changes. In this way, qualitative research using retrospective narrative data among older adults can help to achieve a more realistic vision of the lifecycle.

This study also shed some light on the fact that life course transitions and their effect on artistic trajectories were experienced differently by professional and non-professional artists. For the latter, life course transitions related to working in a non-artistic job, such as changes in job roles or an increase in the amount of work, had a significant impact on artistic practice and fundamentally reduced it. Professional artists stated that the family domain produced constant modifications by enhancing or reducing artistic practice, or by changing the artwork's themes. Previous literature about older adults' artistic participation did not always distinguish between

professional and non-professional artistic levels (Chacur et al., 2022), despite the fact that individual and biographical aspects are greatly relevant, since artistic trajectories were always distinct. Therefore, it is essential to consider the life histories of professional and non-professional artists, since life course transitions are embedded in social trajectories, which could attach different meanings and forms to them (Elder, 1998).

Moreover, the current study shows that differences between men and women are crucial to understanding the connection between life course transitions and artistic trajectories across the life course. The life course transitions experienced by our interviewees had a different influence on men's and women's artistic trajectories. For instance, only women mentioned adverse effects of their partner on artistic practice. In contrast, the men only mentioned a favourable influence of their partner on their artistic practice, for example, support in different ways (emotional, material or practical). Consequently, the modes in which relationships support and control a person's behaviour are particularly important (Hutchison, 2011). The men's stories tended to focus on the effects of their partner's support of their artistic work. Although some female narratives also addressed support from a partner, in other cases they revealed negative effects, which were often linked to control (e.g. non-approval of artistic work in the same field, jealousy of success in the artistic field).

Regarding the types of life course transitions, some appeared more frequently or even only in women's narratives. As a paradigmatic example, life transitions related to the care of relatives in women's stories inevitably led to a great reduction or even temporary cessation of artistic activity. The way the care of relatives influenced men and women was extremely different. For women, caregiving was a long-term, permanent role in their lives. In contrast, the care of relatives by a male artist was only an occasional role to be accomplished, coinciding with previous studies that have reported that women are more frequent caregivers (del-Pino-Casado et al., 2012).

Another relevant matter that was present in narratives was the difficulty in reconciling work and family, adding new knowledge to the field (e.g. Flisbäck & Lindström, 2014). In female narratives, the effort and consequences of being involved in multiple roles in different domains, for example, as artists, partners, mothers and caregivers, were very present as was the strain caused by these roles as a central theme. The multiplicity of women's roles may cause conflict and stress. However, according to different variables, it can either increase frustration and tension or foster growth (Spurlock, 1995). Thus, our data show that women faced numerous obstacles and deployed various mechanisms to endure the personal costs that artistic practice can entail. Consequently, the study of barriers throughout the life course of artists and the mechanisms displayed to deal (or negotiate) with them could be a central topic to explore.

In addition, this study contributes to the field by adding two life course transitions that, to our knowledge, had not been previously examined: divorce and the care of grandchildren. Therefore, this finding underscores the need to expand and diversify life transitions studied by scholars, and the relevance of examining beyond youth and adulthood transitions.

Besides, the impact of transitions in family and work domains on artistic practices among older people differs from the impact they exert on other active ageing activities. For instance, in the case of political participation, Serrat and Villar (2019) found that the workplace has a very relevant role as an agent of politicization. In contrast, in this study of artistic practice, we found that the workplace can act as a facilitator, but in some cases also as a barrier.

Another aspect that is considered as being closely related to artistic practice and not to other activities is the fact that life course transitions not only have effects on artistic trajectories in terms of the “quantity” of the artwork (e.g. Bernard et al., 2015), by increasing or decreasing the artistic activity, but also in terms of other subjective modifications in the artistic career. For instance, our interviewees revealed that certain transitions, such as having children or the death of a close relative, could produce changes in art themes or even in artistic disciplines. These



findings are in line with previous literature about life course theory and the concept of linked lives, which underlines the connection of lives, especially through kinship between generations (Bengtson, Elder, & Putney, 2005). Additionally, these findings are supported by previous studies addressing the influences of family role in artistic activities (e.g. Hunt et al., 2016). However, a deeper examination of the qualitative changes in artistic trajectories would help to understand these in a more comprehensive way.

This study has certain limitations that need to be considered when the findings are interpreted. The cross-sectional study was small, as only thirty Spanish older artists, craftsmen and craftswomen living in Catalonia were interviewed. This condition limits the generalisation of the findings to other geographical settings and other artistic disciplines. In addition, the sample of active artists restrict our conclusions, as we did not contemplate older artists who may have ended their artistic practice in earlier phases of the lifecycle. Thus, other life course transitions that could potentially culminate in a permanent end of artistic practice may have been excluded. Furthermore, this study has focused particularly on life course transitions related to family and work domains. The examination of other life course transitions (for example, with regard to aspects of education or health) is a field that merits further study.

Finally, the sample did not include LGBT+ participants. Their inclusion in future research might provide further insights in the research into artistic trajectories and gender-related aspects.

## **Conclusions**

Despite these limitations, our study broadens previous research on artistic participation with a life course approach, particularly when life course transitions are analysed by taking into account differences between men and women. Our study helps to understand that aspects of personal history, and the influence of different domains (especially family and work) are key

to understanding the ways in which artistic trajectories develop distinctively throughout the life course. A better understanding of artistic trajectories could contribute to society through the extensive experience from older artists, who have developed as trainees, mentors or master artists (Jeffri, 2011). Hence, exchange between visual artists, craftsmen and craftswomen and community may be an important vehicle for education and support.

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The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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