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Fostering Community Through Creative Placemaking

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FOSTERING COMMUNITY THROUGH CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

by

Amber Richardson

MA, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2015

MAJOR RESEARCH PROJECT

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Master of Arts, Social Justice and Community Engagement

Wilfrid Laurier University

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ABSTRACT

This project involved a creative placemaking event hosted on the Laurier Brantford campus in Brantford, ON. The purpose of the event was to engage students and residents in the creative placemaking process, and measure how this engagement could lead to an increased sense of community and belonging. Data collection for this project included participant observation, surveys, photos, and the signs created by participants. Through the data collected at the event, it was concluded that engaging in creative placemaking did increase sense of belonging among participants, and respondents cited mental health benefits as well.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“...in real life only diverse surroundings have the practical power of inducing a natural, continuing flow of life and use.”

Jane Jacobs

Place is a concept that has been explored across disciplines, and is generally agreed upon as existing both geographically and socially (Relph, Tuan and Buttner, 1997; Casey, 2001; Diaz Moore, 2011). This project will explore how place is both geographical and social, and how a social existence of place requires it to be created by agents within that space (Diaz Moore 2011). This process of creating a place, whether physical or social, is referred to as *placemaking* (Aravot, 2002). It is assumed within this paper that places can, in fact, be created by the humans existing within them, and that the social connotations of the particular places are just as essential as their physical boundaries (Diaz Moore, 2011; Main and Sandoval, 2015). This project uses a branch of placemaking called *creative* placemaking, which highlights the importance of arts and culture in the community (Markusen and Gadwa Nicodemus, 2010). It is my intention to uncover how partaking in creative placemaking, and creatively manufacturing or enhancing a place—in this case,

the Brantford Arts Block—can aid in a sense of belonging for community members.

This project aims to engage community members in the creative placemaking process by creating signs for the Brantford Arts Block, a community arts organization in Brantford, ON. To further explore this phenomenon, I will conduct to uncover the many facets of creative placemaking before conducting any original research. I will review the concept of place through various disciplines, such as geography, philosophy and environmental psychology, prior to reaching an interdisciplinary definition that encompasses the essence of the Brantford Arts Block—the particular site affected by this instance of creative placemaking. Defining the Brantford Arts Block as a place will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how to approach the process of placemaking.

This project will explore the creative placemaking process in Brantford, ON, by engaging community members in an artistic event that will result in a semi-permanent fixture for the community. The concept of “creative placemaking” is virtually unexplored outside the discipline of urban planning, so this project aims to extend its scope and explore how it specifically affects the community members participating, rather than the community itself. Typically, placemaking (and creative placemaking) is used as a term to refer to a process that benefits a community aesthetically and economically, as well as potentially increasing a sense of belonging among community members (Ouf 2001, Aravot, 2002). Since most of the literature on creative placemaking comes

out of the urban planning discipline (Markusen and Gadwa Nicodemus, 2010; Gadwa Nicodemus 2012; Gadwa Nicodemus, 2013; Markusen, 2014), it is often studied in terms of its efficacy in promoting economic growth, tourism, and revitalization in communities. My approach falls more within the realm of humanist geography and sociology, and aims to determine if people feel more connected to their community after aiding in the creation of a community place. I believe that all facets of creative placemaking are beneficial to study and they will be explored briefly in the review of literature. However, the research conducted for this project is only intended to uncover how the process of creative placemaking contributes to a sense of belonging in the Brantford community.

Since this project is being completed as a requirement of the Social Justice and Community Engagement program, it is essential to highlight how it fits within these contexts. Since Laurier came to Brantford, the downtown has been slowly gentrified to cater to the increasing needs of the university population. As a result of this gentrification and expansion of the school, many Brantford residents are being pushed to the physical and social margins of society (Brantford Environmental Scan, 2011). The university, in this case, is what Jane Jacobs (1961) calls a “single use” in the city. It is intended to serve its staff and students, and there is little regard for the residents that existed in the space before. Jacobs states, “Massive single uses in cities have a quality in common with each other. They form borders and borders in cities usually make destructive neighbourhoods” (257). These orders not only exist geographically,

but temporally. Place alienation is evident in Downtown Brantford through observing how the space is used throughout the day. During the day, students and faculty are the dominant population. Conversely, after dark the residents of downtown become much more visible, and students are seen walking in pairs, with foot patrol, or with their heads down. During the day students do not appear to waver in their confidence when walking down the street—the same cannot be said for when they are walking at night. This shows that while both populations are using the space, it appears that both populations are not using it *simultaneously*. This results in place alienation during the day, for residents, and place alienation during the night, for students.

Through an understanding that was derived from my own conversations with place-alienated residents in Brantford, it became apparent that they were feeling less connected to their community because it was being transformed exclusively for the university. So, as I completed the Social Justice and Community Engagement program, I started to recognize the injustice done to those who no longer feel welcome in their space, and whose engagement with their community has significantly dwindled due to Laurier expansion. I also started to become acutely aware of the place-alienation felt by students, by conversing with some of my peers after their recent moves to Brantford (many of them expressing fear about walking at night). This project aims to examine how creative placemaking can begin to repair the alienation caused by the university, both for university affiliated participants and resident participants.

This process of integration began by collaborating with a community organization for both the planning and execution of this project.

This project was completed in collaboration with Arts After School Kids (AASK), a community arts organization for youth in Brantford. This organization provides free art programming for vulnerable youth in Brantford, making the arts accessible where it otherwise might not be. From January to July 2015, I completed a community placement with this organization, and it was through this affiliation that I became aware of a need for signage at the Brantford Art's Block. Upon becoming aware of the Arts Block's need and the emerging concept of creative placemaking, I decided that it would be appropriate to engage in a partnership with AASK to host this event and create this public art. It was through this collaboration that we decided the materials for the signs, and they assisted greatly with informing community members about the event. It is my hope that through community partnerships and creative placemaking events, creative placemaking will continue to expand as a concept.

As a participant observer, it is essential to locate my position within the institution and community. For my first five years in Brantford, I identified solely as an undergraduate student. I did not engage with the greater Brantford community other than what was required of me during my years with *The Sputnik*, Laurier Brantford's newspaper. It is my sense that this is very typical of the Laurier Brantford student population, as many students I have discussed this particular issue with seem to agree that students generally stay within the

perceived boundaries of the institution. Over the past year, however, I have lived in Brantford through the summer (when the student population has significantly dwindled), and taken up employment with various community organizations. As my experiences started breaching the university's limits, I found myself feeling as though I was in a liminal position between being a Brantford resident (which I am) as well as a Laurier student (which I also am). These simultaneous identities have allowed me to experience the city in a way that was not possible when I belonged solely to the student group—and how I imagine is not possible for those solely belonging to the resident group. This recognition of these two seemingly homogenous groups existing together, but separately, within the same city prompted me to uncover a “neutral” identity or community to which both of these primary groups could belong. Upon discovering Brantford's arts community, I felt as though both students and residents could coexist in this sort of sub-community without the restrictive binaries of “local” and “student”. In this community, it does not matter if you were born in Brantford or are only a temporary resident for school; art can generate common ground for those involved, when they are able to freely express themselves. Art, in this case, allows for people to express various identities in a celebrated manner. As I began to find my own niche, I felt it would be beneficial for all residents, students, faculty, and artists to engage with each other to create a shared community place where any identity other than “creator” was secondary.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This project examines existing literature on place, placemaking, and creative placemaking, as well as empirical and collected data to answer one salient question: Can engaging in creative placemaking in Brantford foster a sense of belonging and community among residents and students? I developed this question, with the help of my supervisor, after I realized that my preliminary research questions all had existing assumptions. For example, the research question that preceded the final question was “How can engaging in creative placemaking foster a sense of belonging among residents and students?” Since this question assumed that it *could* foster a sense of belonging, when no such research currently exists, it was required to create a neutral question that aimed to discover if this phenomena was even being experienced. Self-selecting participants will attend the event, which is aimed at creatively enhancing the Brantford Arts Block by simultaneously placemaking at the university, and will then reflect on the creative placemaking experience by completing surveys at the event. This study loosely follows a phenomenological research design, with provisions made due to time constraints (such as surveys instead of interviews). I hope that this research will enhance the preexisting literature on creative placemaking, by creating an understanding of how community members are affected by the creative placemaking process.

OBJECTIVES

- (1) Determine how participatory creative placemaking can increase sense of community and belonging among students and residents in Brantford.
- (2) Implement a project that allows various community members to engage in creative placemaking.
- (3) Determine if there are individual benefits of engaging in the creative placemaking process.
- (4) Allow community stakeholders to engage with each other through a partaking in a shared activity.

SCOPE

The scope of my research is not to uncover whether or not creative placemaking is beneficial at the economic or municipal level, which is how it has been studied thus far (Markusen and Gadwa Nicodemus, 2010; Gadwa Nicodemus 2012; Gadwa Nicodemus 2013; Markusen, 2014). Rather, my research aims to begin to fill a gap in understanding how creative placemaking may be perceived as beneficial at an individual level, by studying those who are involved in the creative placemaking process, and who also belong to the community in which the process is taking place, at least in some capacity. While looking at individuals may seemingly negate the concept of community, it is essential to point out that the community is merely the sum of individual parts. I believe that to have a healthy community, individuals must feel like they belong.

This qualitative study was conducted in Brantford, ON, and does not intend to claim that the results of this study are universal, though the phenomenological approach does assert that a universal essence may be uncovered. The approach taken values subjective knowledge and experiences, and thus, the empirical data collected is unique to this study. It is assumed, however, that many of these results would be similar if the study was replicated in similar cities where community members may be facing place alienation. More research on the individual benefits of creative placemaking need to be conducted, and a longitudinal study may also be beneficial to understand how creative placemaking impacts community members long-term.

METHODOLOGY

This research used a phenomenological and humanistic approach, which asserts that lived experiences are valid forms of data. A qualitative approach was taken, and data was extracted through examining surveys administered at the event, photographs of the event and the finished signs, as well as field notes taken throughout the event. This research design was used largely because of the time constraints imposed on this project. A phenomenology-inspired approach was preferred because it aimed to determine whether or not a phenomenon is occurring, which falls in line with the research question. The methodologies chosen allowed for a large amount of data to be collected over a short period of time. The surveys administered do not typically fall in line with the phenomenological approach, however, participant observation does

(Groenewald, 2004). As a participant observer, I was able to extract very valuable data through conversations with participants (not used in this paper without verbal consent) and through observations of the phenomenon occurring.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

In order to determine if creative placemaking contributes to sense of belonging in the community, various literature must be examined in regard to the broader themes of place, place identity, and placemaking. First, place theory will be analyzed within geography, philosophy and environmental psychology frameworks to determine how place is defined and how it fits within placemaking theories. Each of these frameworks offers a unique perspective on the concept of place, and contemporary theorists in urban planning and ecology have blended traditional definitions of place to create a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary, socio-cultural definition of the term (Diaz Moore, 2014; Main and Sandoval, 2015; Dempsey and Burton, 2012). This is useful for understanding how place is understood and experienced, and thus how it can be created.

I will also review the concept of placemaking, in regards to place and place identity, to further understand how creative placemaking might occur. Through the literature examined, placemaking is seen as a deliberate practice, during which humans exercise agency to create places and spaces (Jivén and Larkham, 2003). Many of these practices are undertaken by urban planners, so state-mandated and funded placemaking will be examined before assessing the

role of residents in creating their own places. The work of Jane Jacobs (1961) will also be explored, as she has made significant contributions to the field of urban planning in regards to placemaking, despite her work being written outside of academia. In addition to placemaking, the benefit of participating in art creation will be explored, to determine if art and “creative placemaking” are significant to the overall placemaking process. Very few peer-reviewed articles exist on the topic of creative placemaking (Gadwa Nicodemus, 2013; Markusen, 2013; Markusen, 2014), so various works on public art (Visconti et al, 2010; Grodach, Foster and Murdoch, 2014) and placemaking will also be used to further validate the concept within the realm of academia. Various themes in regards to place and placemaking will be explored, including human agency, social interaction, place identity, and sense of belonging.

CONCEPTS OF PLACE

Since placemaking falls within the boundaries of place theory, it is necessary to review formal definitions of the concept of place. Place has been studied across a wide variety of disciplines, including, geography, philosophy, environmental psychology, and most recently, urban planning. Each of these disciplines will be broadly swept to uncover their contributions to place theory.

In geography, place is described as a physical setting that is often confined to a limited space (Casey, 2001). Diaz Moore (2014, p. 187) states, “Given the nature of place, the physical setting is viewed as an essential part of the concept.” Researchers highlight many forms of place, including parks (Main

and Sandoval, 2015), residential neighbourhoods (Diaz Moore, 2014) and other physical locations that can be either publicly or privately owned (Dempsey and Burton, 2012). The implication here is that place exists outside of the social realm, and that place is not contingent on human occupation. Humanist geography, however, seeks to identify human purpose and interaction within the sphere of geography, but only through a limited geographical lens (Relph, Tuan and Buttimer, 1977, p. 179). Tuan articulates this point further, by asserting that humanism and phenomenology are useful within geography because the variety of lived experiences and articulation of self-knowledge by citizens helps geographers to understand particular geographical concerns (Relph, Tuan and Buttimer, 1997, p. 179). According to humanist geography, self-knowledge, lived experience and the social sphere is seen as adjunct to the physical geographical realm—as existing only to better the *physical*, rather than the social (Relph, Tuan and Buttimer, 1997, p. 178). Since this view neglects to incorporate important aspects of community and social interaction as essential components of human place, other disciplines within the social sciences, such as philosophy and environmental psychology, attempt to define place with a level of social consciousness (Casey, 1993; Casey, 2001; Diaz Moore, 2011).

Casey (2001) highlights the merging of philosophy and geography to redefine the concept of place, allowing for humans to be seen as an integral component for creating and maintaining it. He describes place as, “...an arena of action that is at once physical and historical, social and cultural” (Casey, 2001, p. 683). This definition of place regards it as both a physical location, but

also a space where social and cultural practices can occur. In order for social interaction to occur in a place, it is important to note that within a philosophical and framework, the human body itself is also considered a place, which is not only influenced by external places, but also has the potential to shape those places as well (Addyman, 2010, p. 112). This claim is essential as one moves to explore place as a social entity, because it then becomes understood as a venue for which spatial location, human interaction, agency, and community can be further explored as symbiotically existing in society. There is a significance in the shift away from a physical approach to the phenomenological approach that is being taken to understand place, because it assumes that—at least to some degree—place exists within individuals' experiences and social contexts. This assertion is fundamental to this project, as it explores varied subjective responses to place and community and values these empirical accounts on the process of creating place.

The last approach that is critical to examine in regards to place is the ecological/ environmental psychological approach, which further highlights the individual as an important actor in the creation and maintenance of place, as well as the importance of place as an agent of identity creation in people using public places. In what Keith Diaz Moore labels the “Ecological Framework of Place”, he highlights four main components of place: people, physical setting, program, and activity catalysts (Diaz Moore 2011, pp. 184-186). First, Diaz Moore highlights the necessity of people (or what he calls “place participants”) in a particular place (2001, p. 185). He states that people are essential to the

understanding of place, because place exists within a social context (p. 184). Within this framework, a place is not seen as a social location without these so-called place participants. This assertion will be carried out throughout the project, as this project aims to enhance a place for community members in Brantford, and for that to occur, there must be members occupying the space.

The next component outlined is the physical setting of the place, which simply refers to the “...objective sensory and spatial properties” (Diaz Moore 2001, p. 185). As previously mentioned, a physical setting is mandatory in order for place to be produced or maintained. Without this physical setting, the place can be understood more abstractly as space—where one might have a shared meaning or experience with others, without sharing the same physical boundaries. While the social and physical aspects of space are not unique to Diaz Moore’s ecological framework, his outline of programs and activities as catalysts in place make this approach more comprehensive than others.

Beyond acknowledging that place is both socio-cultural and physical, Diaz Moore (2011) highlights that “program” and “activities as catalysts” are both integral parts of the creation and maintenance of a place in society. Program refers to both “place rules” and “place roles”; how people conduct themselves within the space, and how the space conducts itself for the people (Diaz Moore, 2011, p. 186). While there are certainly rules at the Brantford Arts Block, the limited scope of this paper renders the place rules irrelevant. However, it is important to highlight the *role* of the organization, as it provides a venue for artistic engagement in Brantford. To understand this phenomenon pertaining to

place, activities as catalyst must also be understood. This term simply refers to how place is created once there is a need for it, i.e. people need a place in which to participate in a specific activity. The Brantford Arts Block serves as a place in the community where people can participate in artistic activities.

For this project, place is understood as existing physically, socially and culturally. The physical place being examined in this project is the Brantford Arts Block building on Sherwood Dr. in Brantford. The Arts Block hosts events around the city, which create abstract “spaces”, but only the physical location will be referred to in this paper. This place, while existing spatially and geographically, also exists socially and culturally. The arts community in Brantford (and even those who don't identify as part of the arts community) have collective experiences and understanding of the Arts Block, which makes this place socially significant. Referring back to the humanist geographical approach, it is the phenomenological experiences that occur within this place that help to inform its utility and growth as a physical and social place. It is essential to highlight that places and people exist symbiotically, that is, they inform, shape and change each other. In looking at the Brantford Arts Block, it can be said that this place not only influences the community members that engage with the space, but it is also shaped by the individual bodies that exist and interact with it.

PLACEMAKING IN URBAN PRACTICE

Placemaking, as a concept, emerged academically in the field of urban planning/design in the 1970's, and existed as a method to arrange "physical objects and human activities" (Royal Institute of British Architects, as cited in Aravot, 2002, p. 201). Prior to any academic mention of "placemaking", Jane Jacobs (1961), an American born author, journalist and activist, asserted that, "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody" (1961, p. 238). This notion that places *provide* for people is important, but most essential is the idea that these places must also be created by the people in order to effectively serve them. I regard this idea as critical for understanding the purpose of this participatory project, as it allows participants the opportunity to *create* a place within their community, which may positively influence their sense of community.

Placemaking can be viewed as a reactionary process. Aravot (2002) mentions that placemaking was a direct response to the placelessness experienced as a result of modern urbanism and that,

Sense of place, which is the desired result of placemaking, [is] regarded as a human need, essential for the wellbeing and safety, security, and orientation, and a remedy against alienation and estrangement" (p. 201-202).

Placemaking, in this regard, is viewed as a process that aims to build and repair communities that have been affected by placelessness, whatever its cause. It is essential to highlight that placemaking in communities aims to create and/or transform public spaces for use by the community, with the intention of

fostering an increased sense of place and belonging among community members. While placemaking can be done (and is most often done) by urban planners and designers, it is being observed as a community practice in this particular project.

Since sense of place and belonging is a salient goal of placemaking, it is assumed that this sense of place is increased as participants' agency to create the place is also increased. Placemaking is an inherently democratic practice when it is executed for the community, and by the community. Bonner (2002) highlights the "different voices" that pertain to placemaking, including, "The resident, the neighbourhood, the municipal politician, the corporate strategist, the architect, and so on..." (p. 2). It is imperative to draw attention to the number of parties that can be potentially involved with the placemaking process. Often, and unfortunately, it seems evident that municipal politicians, corporations, and urban designers are the primary agents for change and placemaking within a community (Aravot, 2002, p. 207). In a piece by Heller and Adams (2009) on socially sustainable placemaking, it is asserted that people should be acting in a participative democracy to determine how their community develops (p. 18). Some research finds that when community members have the opportunity to engage in the placemaking process, they experience an increased sense of belonging and wellbeing (Heller and Adams, 2009; Dempsey and Burton, 2012). Studies have also been done to show that residents who have an increased sense of belonging in their community enjoy

the benefits of increased mental health as well (Kitchen, Williams and Chowhan, 2011).

Typically, placemaking by the community takes form in areas in which community members can engage in recreational activities (Foo et al., 2013; Main and Sandoval, 2015.) This could be through occupying a local park, and creating a place through mere presence (Main and Sandoval, 2015) or even engaging in creating and maintaining a community garden (Foo et al. 2013). The main consideration that one must take when engaging in an efficacious placemaking process is to ensure that authenticity is maintained (or created) in the place. Typically, the term 'authentic' refers to some artifact, building, or other landmark that is historically significant in the community (Ouf, 2001). It is my contention that authenticity can be manufactured, especially when the community's members are engaging in the placemaking process. Ouf (2001) discusses authenticity in terms of historical restoration, but asserts that authentic restoration of urban places do not necessarily conform with the populace's urban experience, and may not contribute to a sense of place (pp. 73-74). Even with this recognition, Ouf is concerned with fostering a sense of place while maintaining the authenticity of a community in regards to urban design. However, it is my belief that authenticity is an inherent result when community members themselves are agents in the placemaking process. Drawing from Jacobs's (1961) assertion that cities are inclusive and provide for all when created by all, it is understood that this authenticity can be derived through the participatory creation of a place. Hou and Rios (2003) assert that

this method is community-driven, and has the potential to mobilize “a wide range of actors across public, non-profit, and private sectors...” (p. 19).

CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

While creative placemaking as a term is relatively new, the practice of integrating art into urban spaces has been around for decades (Gadwa Nicodemus, 2012, p. 2). In a report for The Mayors Institute on City Design, Markusen and Gadwa Nicodemus (2010) define creative placemaking and state:

In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighbourhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired" (p. 3).

While Markusen and Gadwa (2010; 2012; 2013; 2013; 2014) account for most of the creative placemaking literature, it is a concept that remains relatively underexplored in academia. In lieu of articles that specifically reference “creative placemaking”, I will analyze articles on placemaking through artistic practice as synonymous bodies of work. Creative placemaking is a fairly new practice involving the revitalization of communities through artistic and cultural engagement, and almost all researchers on the topic cite community development and sense of place and/or belonging as a salient objective of creative placemaking (or public art experiences) (Arnold, 1994; Villeneuve and Sheppard, 2009; Visconti et al. 2010; Gadwa Nicodemus, 2013; Thomas, Pate

and Ranson, 2014; Markusen, 2014; Redaelli, 2014), which will be used as an argument for the implementation of more creative placemaking practices in the community.

It is imperative to underscore the importance of art and creativity in regards to placemaking, to understand how the process might benefit a community. Art and creativity are cultural assets, and thus we should incorporate them through cultural planning (Redaelli 2014, p. 34) and creative placemaking. To value the process of creative placemaking, one must first find value in art and creativity as possible agents for change, betterment, and revitalization of a community (Markusen, 2013; Markusen, 2014; Grodach, Foster and Murdoch, 2014). On this point, Markusen (2014) states that artists can act as agents for urban change, and creative places “enable interaction among art-makers, permit socializing, and encourage conversation about the cultural experience” (p. 567). This is an absolutely imperative point to make in the case for creative placemaking: it acts not only as a method for creating change in a community, but it also promotes and encourages shared cultural experiences.

In a community with at least two defined (and often exclusive) groups (university students and residents), a creative placemaking event can be viewed as a method to bridge the social gap among these groups. Thomas, Pate and Ranson (2014) state, “Bridging social capital among exclusive and homogenous groups has been linked to creativity” (p. 75). Allowing these groups to co-create a public place may actually contribute positively to both groups’ sense of place

and belonging within the community (Arnold, 1994). As fostering a sense of place and belonging is the primary objective of this project, it is essential to examine the ways in which creative placemaking can achieve this.

As previously highlighted, creative placemaking encourages socialization among participants (Markusen, 2014). It also acts to “increase understanding and collaboration among distinctive groups” (Markusen, 2014, p. 569; Nicodemus, 2013), add community value to non-arts stakeholders (Nicodemus, 2013), provide a sense of unity and belonging (Arnold, 1994), and contribute to overall social well being (Villeneuve and Sheppard, 2009). Since this practice is largely unexplored at a participatory and micro/individual level, this project aims to understand if/how creative placemaking for community members *by* community members helps to create that sense of belonging in Brantford.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

It is important to note that this project took place in a “university town” in Southwestern Ontario, where the researcher has been a student for six years. There appears to be animosity between students and residents on campus, which is demonstrated through the *Brantford Community Safety and Crime Prevention Task Force Environmental Scan* (2011). The document, in a list of challenges the Brantford community faces with Laurier Brantford, states:

Laurier Brantford is a ‘double-edged’ sword’; change has resulted in the displacement of vulnerable individuals and families from the area to the outer edges...” also, “Laurier has not become a community of inclusion yet—not yet had the opportunity to become a good neighbour (p. 20, para. 1).

I hypothesize that this lack of community inclusion is due to the fact that there aren’t any spaces or places in the community that are equally shared by both students and residents. By having these two groups take part in a collaborative art piece for the Brantford Arts Block, that space is now hopefully regarded as a shared space where both students and residents feel a sense of community. Since the creative placemaking event was hosted at the university, a typically exclusive institution, I hope that residents and others not affiliated with Laurier were able to experience a sense of belonging. I am optimistic that this occurred

as a result of the shared experience of creative placemaking within and for the community.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This project utilized a multiplicity of theoretical approaches, due to the interdisciplinary nature of creative placemaking. First and foremost, this research operated using place theory, which asserts that place exists and it can be experienced and shaped by its inhabiting human agents (Casey, 1993; Casey, 2001; Diaz Moore, 2011). While the cultural influence and experience is the primary subject of this research, it must not be extracted entirely from the physical geography of the venue, because location has the potential to inform the experience. While utilizing place theory, Dempsey and Burton (2012) suggest that through participating in placemaking, community members (both students and residents) may experience an enhanced sense of belonging, wellbeing, and quality of life. Through examining other place-based studies, I determined that a phenomenological approach would be useful in determining the subjective experiences of the participants.

A phenomenology-inspired approach was used in this project because of the centrality of personal experience in the data (Relph, Tuan and Buttimer, 1997; Aravot, 2002; Addyman, 2010). Cresswell (2004) states, "...a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 57). In this research, the conceptual phenomenon is creative placemaking, and this study aims to explore

how various individuals experience it. While it was unknown if there would be a universal “essence” derived from participation in creative placemaking, the phenomenological approach was still preferred because it would be useful in discovering the foundations of this phenomenon (and how it pertains to the individuals experiencing it). Phenomenological approaches were used to shape the sampling and analysis, which will be discussed in the appropriate sections. The phenomenological method of in-depth interviews (Smith and Osborn, 2007) was not used due to time constraints. I chose, instead, to utilize elements of phenomenology and then focused on conducting an analysis inspired by interpretive phenomenological analysis as laid out by Kleinman (2004) and Smith and Osborn (2007).

This research ignored many tenets of positivism and prefers a qualitative approach, as this project cannot be replicated exactly and data cannot necessarily be reproduced, yet the knowledge produced is still understood as valid (Avis, 2003). The purpose of this research was to uncover the very subjective experiences of participants engaging in creative placemaking, providing a case study for future research on the subject. In looking at the event as an act of placemaking, I assume that the product will have “inter-subjective meanings” evoked by a variety of experiences within one’s own culture and community (Aravot, 2002, p. 209). For this reason, I decided that merging the phenomenological approach with brief textual and contextual discourse analyses of the participants’ surveys would allow for a more multifaceted understanding of the experience. Textual analysis of surveys

allowed for me to observe patterns based on *what* participants were saying, whereas contextual analysis allowed me to focus on *how* it was being said, and if there were inter-subjective meanings (Ruiz, 2009).

According to Martinez-Avila and Smiraglia (2013), phenomenology is considered a method of understanding, while discourse analysis is understood as a deconstruction method (3).

They state:

...neither the understanding interest or phenomenology imply a unique and universal truth to be known by all, but a personal truth and organization of knowledge that is acquired by an individual according to lived experience. In this vein, the combination of the understanding and deconstructive interests, and more specifically of phenomenology and discourse analysis, would not be a contradiction but indeed a desirable complement in which deconstruction gains effectiveness by understanding, and individual understanding is better studied by the deconstruction of universal assumptions (p. 3).

I agree with the idea that the phenomenological data alone provides rich understanding of the lived experience of respondents. However, since I did not use the preferred phenomenological method of in-depth interviews, I found it was important to analyze the discourse of the surveys in order to “...view the world of individuals or groups as they themselves see it, and to draw connections to the experiences of others” (Baxter and Eyles, 1997, p. 506). This approach falls within the interpretive interactionism framework, as “interpretive interactionism attempts to make the world of lived experience visible to the reader” (Denzin, 2001, p. 34). I believe that by utilizing an

interpretive interactionist approach to phenomenology and discourse analysis, analyzed data has the potential to provide rich insight into the individual experience of creative placemaking. As a participant, I value my own insight into the process as well, and I assert that this approach ensure comprehensive coverage of not only my own experience, but the experiences of others as well.

I chose to do this project for (and with) the arts community (with all community members welcome), because it transcends the common binaries of “student” or “resident” present in the Brantford society. The arts community, in this case, is seen as neutral, and a possible avenue to promote interaction amongst students and residents. Anyone can exist as a member within the arts community, due to shared interest (Driskell and Lyon, 2002). Since places are said to have shared meanings (Driskell and Lyon, 2002; Hollands and Vail, 2015), it is important to note that the city itself inherently cannot have a shared meaning to these two separate populations (especially between those who have lived in the community since birth or childhood, and those who transplanted to Brantford for post-secondary education). This event is being held to promote a sense of belonging in the community among these two groups, through the shared creation of signs for the arts community. I believe that the concepts of “community” and “belonging” possess a universal essence, which is why I chose a phenomenology-inspired approach. While the concept being studied is creative placemaking, it is also an aim of this research to uncover how (if at all) it aids in the production or maintenance of these particular qualities.

DESCRIPTION OF EVENT

On April 2, 2015, the “Create Your Community” art event was held at the Laurier Brantford campus in Brantford, Ontario. This event ran from 11:00 to 23:00, a full twelve hours of artistic engagement, to allow for maximum participation and minimal scheduling conflicts. The event invited students and residents from Brantford to create both individual and collaborative pieces of art, with the primary goal being the completion of two large signs for the Brantford Arts Block.

Rationale

Jacobs (1961) asserted that:

...a successful city neighbourhood is a place that keeps sufficiently abreast of its problems so it is not destroyed by them. An unsuccessful neighbourhood is a place that is overwhelmed by its defects and problems, and it progressively more helpless before them (p. 112).

This event was held in hopes of combatting the perceived placelessness or lack of sense of community and belonging both experienced by students outside of the university, and by residents while within the institution. Having students collaborate with residents at the university, for a community organization, hopefully lead to students finding a sense of place and belonging outside of Laurier Brantford, particularly at the Brantford Arts Block. Similarly, I hope that by having residents attend the event at the university, it prompted a positive response in terms of increased sense of place and belonging at the university,

which does not typically host community events. I do not believe we (as a Brantford collective) are helpless to the place alienation, but I believe that its effects will become more engrained in our community if we do not try to combat it. This event was held as a method of community building and bridging gaps, as well as providing an understanding on how community building can take place in the future.

In regards to sign creation for the Brantford Arts Block, creative placemaking is necessary to encapsulate the essence of the organization. While this place was not suffering from “placelessness” per se, it still possessed many of the attributes of the old rope factory that used to be housed within its walls, which hindered its visibility as an arts organization. This project does not aim to change the façade of the building, however, it aims to transform the space around it so that its intended purpose as an art place is reflected.

Event Title

The name of the event, “Create Your Community,” was chosen to inform participants about the participatory nature of the event. The purpose of the event was, in fact, to create art for and enhance the community (at least at the Brantford Arts Block) and I wanted participants to come with that purpose in mind. This name was chosen as a deliberate way to inform participants that their artwork would be showcased in the community (for ethical purposes), but also so that participants might feel a sense of community and belonging by

being asked to participate in an event that gave them the agency to transform a place.

Promotional Materials

A variety of promotional materials were created to advertise the event. Posters were distributed around town prior to the event, both on and off campus. Off campus posters were hung where it was assumed there would be high traffic and visibility (e.g. street posts, Starbucks, etc.), in order to encourage participation from Brantford residents. On the day of the event, posters were hung generously around the Student Centre at 103 Darling St., with hopes that increased visibility would also lead to increased participation from anyone walking by. In addition to physical posters and signs, I created and circulated digital promotional materials. A Facebook event page was created for students and residents, which allowed for posts, reminders, and a rough estimate of participant numbers. I also created a Laurier Brantford Television ad, which was displayed on the closed circuit televisions around campus.

Event Space

The event was held in a non-neutral location—the Laurier Brantford Student Centre—as there are not many appropriate neutral locations in the city that would not require some sort of transportation or additional planning. I chose the university as the venue for the event because of its availability, centrality in the downtown core of Brantford, and because of the likelihood of increased

participation by students. While the signs were being created for the Brantford Arts Block, I did not find it to be a suitable location to host this event because of its ambiguity in terms of location and purpose. Many people do not know about the Arts Block, in terms of where it is and how exactly it serves the community. This event was held downtown in hopes of attracting downtown residents and students, and it is very likely that if this event were held in another part of town (West Brant) and off-campus, it would not have garnered the same participants (or numbers) that it did. The university, while non-neutral, is also a known place to residents, so I felt that there would be increased participation if the event were held in a well-known location.

The event was hosted in the basement of the Student Centre, which was set up with an array of tables and activities for participants to engage in. To promote maximum creativity, film and music were also incorporated into the event. For a large portion of the day, approximately eight hours, artistic films were played on a large projector. This was partly to fill space in a very large room, but also to allow visual stimulation and inspiration from something other than the materials and others' work. A variety of music genres were also played throughout the day to account for the varied tastes of participants, and at approximately 19:00, people started to perform live music. There were no schedules for performances, so people just picked up whatever instruments were available and serenaded other participants.

Individual Art Projects

In addition to the collaborative project, I felt it necessary to include projects that individuals could work on that encapsulated what I felt the Arts Block is all about: engaging with one's creative self. Tables were set up with supplies for collaging, painting, frame decorating and a nook for live music including guitars, keyboard, tambourine, drums, and other instruments. Participants were verbally invited to engage with any of the materials available.

Collaborative Project

The collaborative project was the main focus of this event, and everyone who came was invited to contribute to the signs that will be hung at the Brantford Arts Block. The signs were created on two recycled doors, both for aesthetic and sustainability purposes. The Brantford Arts Block exists in an old factory, so creating the signs out of new material did not feel appropriate or environmentally responsible. The doors were sectioned off by pencil into individual squares for people to fill in however they pleased. The individual squares functioned twofold. First, they ensured that no one's artwork would be covered by anyone else's; second, they allowed for the creation of a beautiful "quilt" of images, each square representing the individual who created it.

It was my intention that the signs themselves would also serve a dual purpose in the community. Firstly, they would beautify an industrial looking area. Second, they would hopefully increase traffic to the Brantford Arts Block by increasing visibility.

SAMPLING

I initially used purposive sampling to invite artistic students and members of the Brantford art community to the event, via Facebook. This was done in order to ensure those who were interested in art became aware of the event, as I assumed they were more likely to attend than those with little or no artistic interest. All participants for this research, however, were self-selecting once they became aware of the event. I recognize that this method of sampling may result in bias, but I felt that it was the least intimidating way to get people to participate. Snowball sampling also occurred, though unintended. Participants brought friends and family who had not initially wanted to participate, and this created a richer sampling pool by ensuring various populations were reached. I wanted the event to be open to everyone, and I wanted to encourage participation, regardless of whether data was collected from a participant or not. The event was open to anyone who wanted to participate, and participants were recruited through a poster (Appendix E), Facebook event page (Appendix F), and a Laurier Brantford Television (LBTv) ad (Appendix G). Participants were both male and female, between the ages of 18-65. I anticipated most participants would be students on the Laurier Brantford campus, though community members and faculty were also welcome. Due to the nature of the event, participants were likely those interested in art and/or community development.

METHODS

An all-day art event was held on the Laurier Brantford campus to promote and encourage creativity and community participation in the process of placemaking. This event was held at the university, rather than the Brantford Arts Block, because I felt that it was a good opportunity to open up the campus to outside community members who may feel ostracized by it. By engaging in collaborative art, students and residents created signage for the Brantford Arts Block through a creative placemaking approach. Though fostering a sense of belonging through collaborative art efforts was the primary goal of the event, salient objectives included placemaking in the greater community and getting community stakeholders engaged with each other in a shared activity. To bridge the gap between Laurier Brantford and the greater community, I think a collaborative project for a community organization is a positive step. Through creating these signs, it is my hope that Laurier Brantford students can engage in the creative placemaking process, which will hopefully lead to an enhanced sense of belonging within the community.

This project took a qualitative approach using surveys and participant observation to uncover data pertaining to creative placemaking, sense of community and sense of belonging. The qualitative approach was preferred in this instance because of how little is documented about the creative placemaking process, and because of the personal nature of the experience. As there is little data, and an almost non-existent pool of pre-existing literature, the qualitative approach allowed the researcher and participants to elaborate

on their experience participating in this creative placemaking event. I chose these methods by examining other community studies and found that a variety of methods were used such as participant and site observation (Main and Sandoval, 2015), surveys (Kitchen, William and Chowhan, 2011; Main and Sandoval, 2015), and focus groups (Foo, 2013). I found that this project would benefit most from surveys and participant observation, mostly due to time constraints.

As stated by Mason, “...qualitative research operates from the perspective that knowledge is situated and contextual...” (2002, p. 62). With this understanding, I view the empirical data collected as highly valuable to understanding how participants perceived their experiences. As this event attracted both residents and students, qualitative data allows insight into how participants identify differently or similarly within the community and in regards to the creation of place. Qualitative research asserts that knowledge is situated within the limitations of our experiences. Therefore, it was interesting to examine how the various participants contextualized their experiences through a variety of methods including surveys, participant observation, and photographs.

Surveys

Surveys were the primary method of data collection for this project, as they allowed for participants to speak freely about their experiences. While surveys are not typical of the phenomenological approach, they were used in

order to get descriptions of participants' experience of the phenomenon because of their efficiency. Time constraints did not allow for in-depth interviews, though interviews would be useful in future projects. Surveys were left at a table at the event, and all participants were self-selecting (though everyone at the event was told about the surveys and data collection). The survey asks for demographic information, as well as comments on their experience at the event and their overall connectedness to the community. In a study conducted by Woods et al (2015), they stated, "...to elicit phenomenologically rich data, we designed a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions" (323). This assumption was guiding my assertion that collected survey data could still be phenomenological, though not conventional for that type of research.

Demographic information was pertinent in these surveys, as the data assisted in determining the level of involvement in the collaborative project from both students and non-students. Insight about participants' experience at the event, as well as perceptions of community and placemaking was also beneficial in uncovering various meanings of community, and helps to further understand the process of creative placemaking.

The survey questions were structured around providing participants with some context for the event, while simultaneously trying to avoid leading questions. Questions 1-3 on the survey (Appendix D) asked the participants to provide demographic information. Answers pertaining to demographics were particularly useful for determining who attended the event, and how their

social location in Brantford may have impacted their experience at the event. One question specifically asked participants if they were Laurier students, because I assumed this would be the largest population at the event. Participants were then asked what their connection to the community was, where they were able to articulate their position in the community if they weren't a Laurier student.

Questions (4) and (5) of the survey (Appendix D) were constructed in order to gauge the efficacy of this event's enjoyability. If, for example, most respondents did not have a positive experience, then the event could not be viewed as a success, regardless of the final product. Questions (6) through (8) asked participants to reflect on their connectedness to community and the role of art in the community. These questions were aimed at answering the research question and uncovering whether or not the event was successful in promoting a sense of belonging and community through creative placemaking. While this project intended to uncover whether or not creative placemaking contributes to sense of belonging, "sense of belonging" was not included explicitly in the questions because of a possible variance on interpreted meaning, and because the concept of community seems to be more universally understood.

Participant Observation

In addition to the survey, field notes and personal anecdotes were taken during the event. I documented my own experience and jotted my own interpretations on the perceived experiences of others. A phenomenological

interpretive interactionist approach was taken to assess subjective experiences at the event, such as perceived level of engagement, enthusiasm, and conversations with participants. This approach suggests that, "...meaningful interpretations of human experience can only come from those persons who have thoroughly immersed themselves in the phenomena they wish to interpret and understand" (Denzin, 2001, 46). It was important to engage with the activity as the researcher, so that I had my own frame of reference when reading and analyzing participants' experiences. I collected literal data as well as interpretive data, including the time, number of participants, and activities participants were partaking in. This allowed me to cross-sectionally analyze and compare field notes with photographs and surveys, in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of community at the event.

Photographs

I took approximately 60 photographs at the event, which are considered to be fruitful and rich pieces of data. Photographs provide a literal view of what was occurring during the project's completion, and therefore are seen as an excellent compliment to the subjective field notes and participant surveys. I took pictures of the set-up of the event, participants performing music, sign creation, and various pieces of artwork. All participants verbally consented to having their photographs taken (as well as photographs of their work), but no identifying photographs were used in this project. This literal representation of

the artwork is also beneficial, as the contributions to the collaborative piece can be analyzed both individually and collectively.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Smith and Osborn (2007) outline a process for phenomenological data analysis that I found particularly useful during the analysis of participant surveys, even though their process focuses specifically on interviews. The processes outlined by these researchers involved reading the data one or two times, noting emergent themes, and then tabling the themes with examples from the data (Smith and Osborn, 2007, pp. 66-75). This was done with the participant surveys, with the exception that I started analysis with preliminary categories, which were then discarded as more prominent themes emerged. Not akin to phenomenology, I used these pre-themes and categories for data analysis to help guide myself through the data with the research question in mind. While these categories were useful in the preliminary stages of analysis, the emergent themes were most useful in uncovering the “essence” of participants’ experiences.

I acknowledge Mason’s assertion that a literal interpretation of data is difficult in our highly subjective social realm (2002, 149). For that reason, survey answers were read literally only if they were pertaining to demographics or if they were “yes” or “no” answers. Answers beyond a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ would require the researcher to subjectively interpret the data. Interpretation of data is essential in this case to further understand the perceived level of

connectedness to community or the efficacy of the event, and this was done through conducting brief textual analyses of the surveys. As not all participants responded the same, it was necessary for the researcher to interpret the data to find common themes and points of departure. Furthermore, participants' responses were coded, which allowed the researcher to cross-sectionally index the data (Mason, 2002, 152). All data was collected at the time of the event, either in the form of field notes, photographs, or surveys. This was done to ensure triangulation of data, which would allow the researcher to assess the validity of the accrued data. Throughout analysis, field notes, surveys, and photographs were constantly being compared for likeness, to ensure that the interpretation was aligned with the literal representations.

Two separate documents were created when digitizing the surveys: one had demographic data while the other included all participant responses for the following questions:

- (1) *Please describe your experience at this event today.*
- (2) *Do you feel more connected to the Brantford and/or Laurier community after participating in this event?*
- (3) *What was your favourite part of this event?*
- (4) *In your opinion, what role (if any) does art play in the community?
Please explain.*

I gave all surveys a number, so that all subjective answers could be referenced back to demographic data once this information was printed and separated.

These questions were chosen for analysis because it was felt that the responses would provide the most insight into the process, and could best answer the research question. No software was used in data analysis, as a more tactile approach was preferred. After all responses were printed, they were separated and placed into piles with other responses to the same question. The answers, after being read many times, were then colour coded and themed, and placed into sub-categories for further analysis. Preliminary categories included sense of community, and overall experience at the event. Subsequent categories included mental health, expression/ identity, and creativity.

Field notes and photographs were used as supplementary forms of data, meant to provide confirmation for the data gathered through surveys. Once all survey data was analyzed, field notes were combed through to try to find (in)consistencies. I did this by locating keywords like 'community' in my notes, to determine where I believed to be seeing examples of this as a participant. I also looked at all notes describing how I perceived others' experiences, and compared them to how participants cited their own experiences.

ETHICS

There were some ethical concerns for this project, however, I took measures to ensure that these were addressed and minimized by considering ethical implications for public art and ensuring confidentiality and informed consent. As the Research Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier University highlights,

Creative practice activities, in and of themselves do not require REB review (e.g., an artist makes or interprets a work of art). However, a creative practice that seeks responses from participants whose responses will be analyzed to answer a research question is subject to REB review (TCPS 2)

While public art projects do not require a formal ethics review to be conducted by the institution's Research Ethics Board, some ethical consideration must still be given to the public display of participant's art. During this project, participants collaborated to create a sign for the Brantford Arts Block, a prominent community organization. Since the sign (and the participants' artwork) are displayed publicly, I felt it was necessary to inform participants that their art will be displayed in the community. Even if participants chose to decline the survey and fill out a consent form, they were verbally informed of the intention to hang these signs publicly. While there are no formal ethical implications for public art, I view art as very intimate, and did not want to proceed with displaying it unless all participants were informed of its purpose.

All participants who completed a survey provided informed consent (Appendix C), and the project was verbally described in detail to everyone who participated. Participants also verbally consented to having their photographs taken at the event. Since this project required informed consent, I would only accept surveys submitted by people aged 18 and up. If anyone under the age of 18 had completed a survey, the data would not be used. For future projects, it might be beneficial to include a line for parental consent on the form.

Photographs of minors would also require parental consent, so if anyone under 18 had shown up, their photograph would not be taken.

This project received ethics clearance from the REB at Wilfrid Laurier University, and was conducted under REB #4424.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

“Some people look for a beautiful place,
others make a place beautiful.”

Hazrat Inayat Khan

INTRODUCTION

In order to advance the concept of creative placemaking, results on both engagement and practice must be studied. There were significant findings in regard to the demographics of participants at the event (including those who declined to complete a survey), as well as participants' perception of the event and participatory creative placemaking process as a whole. About three quarters of the people who attended the event completed a survey, which provided ample data to judge the efficacy of the project in regards to creative placemaking in the community (shifting away from abstract space to localized place) and perceived sense of belonging (within the arts community and the greater Brantford community). While this was largely a qualitative study, it was found that many of the results could be quantified due to major similarities in responses. Through conducting textual and contextual analyses on surveys, I found that participants cited an increased sense of community, and themes of identity, creativity, and mental health emerged.

THEMES

Using the themes of individual experience and sense of community as a point of departure, several emergent themes became apparent during data analysis. Themes of identity, creativity and mental health surfaced frequently in survey responses. I also observed that each of these themes was discussed in a multifaceted manner throughout the data, both in relation to community and the individual.

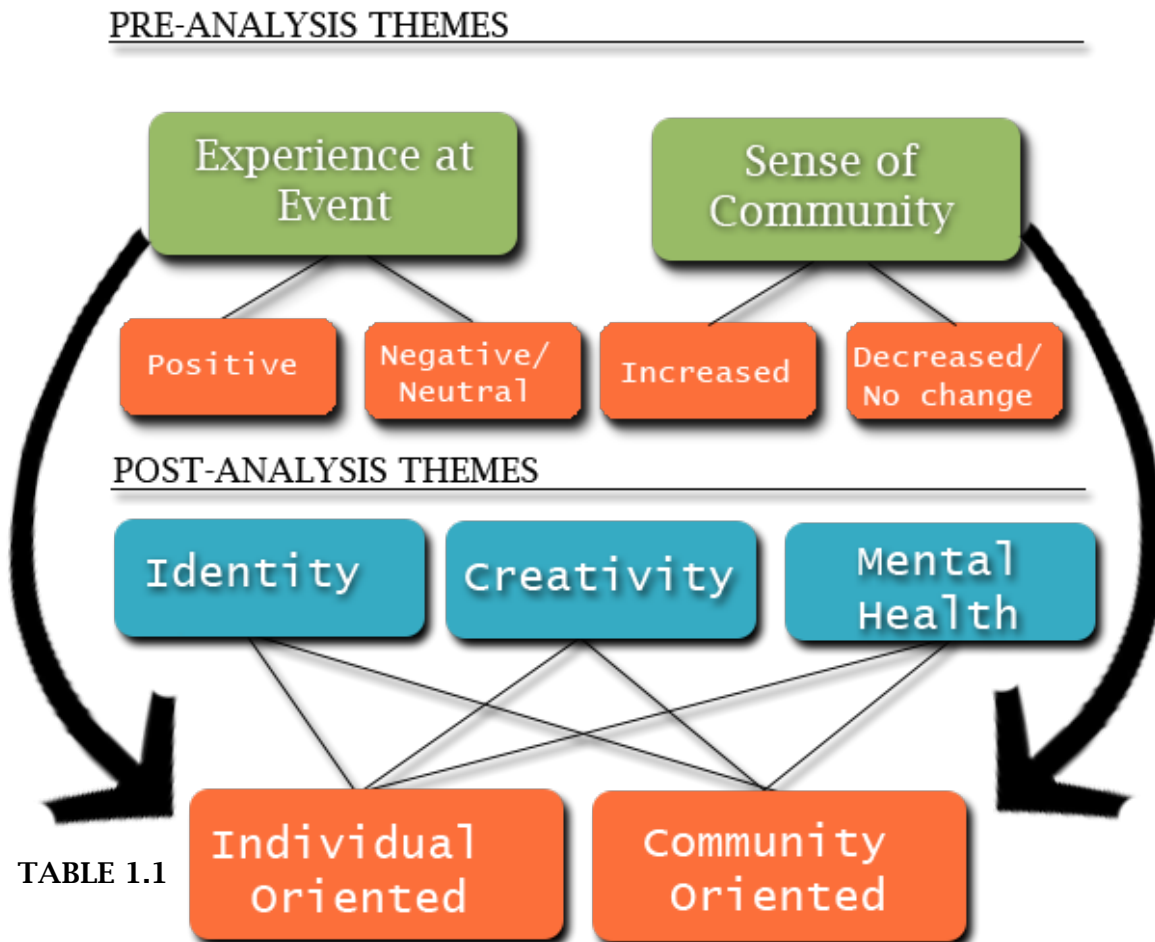


Table 1.1 demonstrates how themes emerged during data analysis, and how they pertain to the individual and the community. Prior to analysis, I

assumed I would code data and sort survey responses into two categories: *experience at event* and *sense of community*. I commenced data analysis using these themes to determine if a) participants enjoyed the creative placemaking experience, and b) if engaging in creative placemaking contributed to a sense of community and belonging.

Throughout analysis, themes of identity, creativity, and mental health emerged and the preliminary themes were no longer salient. However, they were subsequently used to sort the emergent themes into *individual oriented* and *community-oriented* responses. I found that any individual-oriented answers, regardless of which primary theme they corresponded to (identity, creativity, mental health), generally informed me about the participants' experience at the event. Conversely, any community-oriented answers given by participants typically provided information regarding sense of community. These themes were useful in understanding how participants perceived their own experience and the creative placemaking process.

PARTICIPANTS

Before revealing the qualitative findings gathered through field notes, photographs and participant surveys, it is important to share the demographical information gathered by participants. The event hosted approximately 40-45 people, however, the demographics charted in this paper are only provided for the participants who filled out a survey and consent form.

A total of 31 self-selecting participants completed a consent form and survey at the *Create Your Community* event. While most of the participants were students, it is essential to note that many of those who chose to decline a survey were not students (this will be discussed further in the limitations).

While gender remains relatively insignificant for determining the overall efficacy of the project, participants were asked to provide their gender, so it could be determined if individuals responded differently based on their gender identity and to adequately describe the sample. Survey respondents were primarily female, providing almost two-thirds of responses. Male respondents accounted for exactly one third of responses, and two surveys were completed by individuals who chose not to specify a gender. For this project, gender seemed to have no bearing on how participants responded to the questions in the survey, or how they interacted with others at the event.

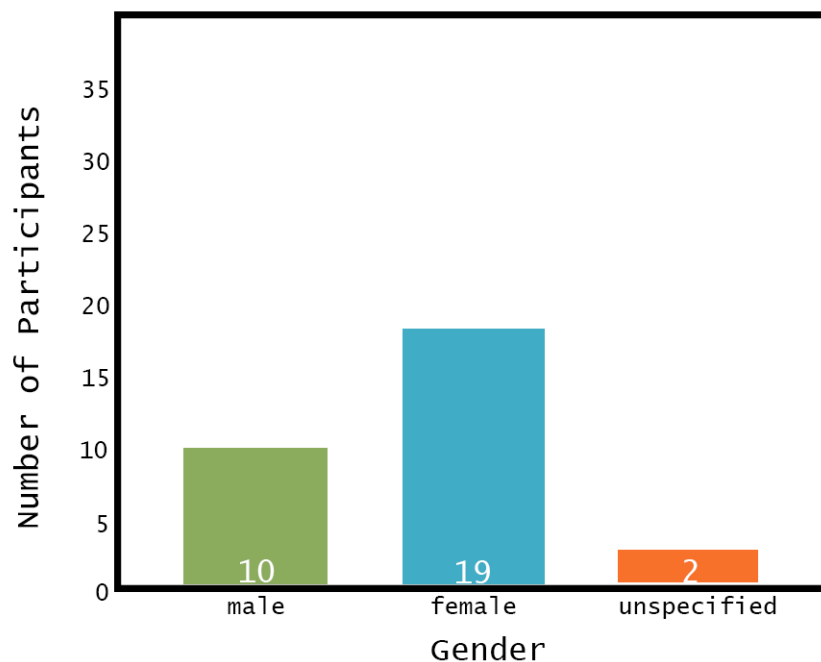


TABLE 2.1

Initially, it was assumed that only students (or others affiliated with the university) and residents would attend the event. However, the data collection shows that while these two groups comprised the largest populations of the event, there were also participants who did not live in Brantford and who had no personal affiliation to Laurier Brantford. This population (consisting of family and friends) was valuable at the event, because they cited having no connection to either Brantford or Laurier, which would give me valuable insight into how they perceived their connection to these communities after participating in the event.

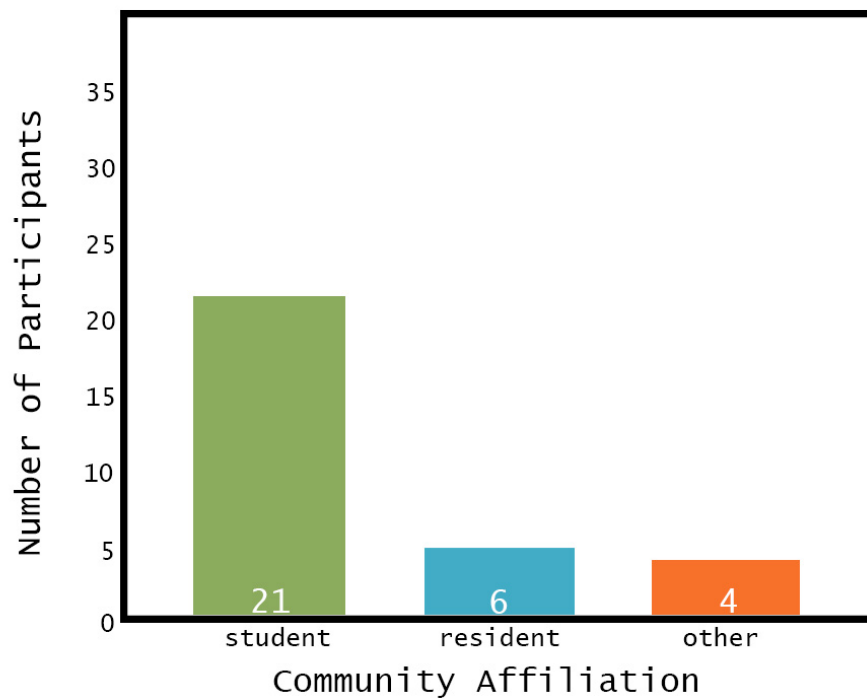


TABLE 2.2

CONNECTEDNESS TO COMMUNITY

The first, and most salient finding in this research provides a clear answer to the research question: Does engaging in creative placemaking aid in a

sense of belonging/community among participants? According to survey answers and observations, the answer is an astounding yes. The data revealed that those who engaged in this process left with an increased connectedness to the community.

The purpose of this event was to gauge whether or not partaking in creative placemaking enhanced participants' sense of belonging and/or community. Participants were asked if this event made them feel more connected to the Brantford community, the Laurier community, or both, and the surveys yielded positive results. Of the 31 participants who chose to complete a survey, 28 cited that they felt more connected to r the Brantford and/or Laurier community. Three respondents stated that the event did not contribute to an increased connectedness to the community. Of the 28 respondents who did feel more connected, nine responded with capital letters or exclamation marks, and two responded with stipulations, such as, "The Laurier community, yes" (16). The two participants who stated they felt more connected to Laurier were students, but it is unknown if community members were at the event at the same time as them. It is also essential to state that these participants stated that their favourite part was working on the individual projects, which might suggest they weren't interacting with others as much as other participants. All other responses were general and did not specify which community respondents felt more connected to. This is recognized as a limitation of this project, and will be discussed further in the limitations section.

The manner in which respondents answered this question is significant. While no further analysis can be done regarding the respondents who simply answered, “Yes,” those who provided a negative answer, more context, or punctuation denoting an enthusiastic tone can provide further insight. First, a significant limitation of the data collection is that surveys did not ask for participants to provide a time stamp. Knowing when the participants attended the event throughout the day could be an essential piece to understanding how they answered this question. Since the event was held over a long period, there were periods when the room was either very quiet or very busy. It is possible that those who did not feel particularly connected after the event may have attended at one of the quieter times.

Some participants provided assumedly enthusiastic responses such as,

“Definitely! I had the opportunity to meet tons of amazing people I otherwise might not have gotten the pleasure of knowing.” (5)

“YES!” (19)

“Heck Yeah!” (24)

Upon further analyzing the responses, many participants cite meeting and interacting with others as the reason they feel more connected, which could also hint at the co-mingling of students and residents. Many specifically included art creation with others as the reason. This is an integral finding, as it is assumed that engaging in the creative placemaking process is not the primary reason why people felt connected to the community after the event,

rather, it was engaging with others while also engaging in this project that allowed people to feel more connected.

This increased sense of community was evident in the interactions that were taking place at the event. Many students and residents were engaging with each other, and there was no evidence of segregation. Students and residents occupied the same space while working on the signs, as well as when working on their own individual projects. There were many tables set up at the event, and I observed that when participants engaged in the collaborative project first, they were more likely to stay longer, and sit at a table with people at it. Consequently, I found that the individuals who chose to work on an independent piece first, chose to do so in solitude, and spent less time at the event and interacting with others. This was recognized early, and subsequent participants were directed to the collaborative project before the individual ones. This finding shows that collaborative art has the potential to maximize community engagement and connectedness for participants.

While participants' responses regarding community connectedness mark the most significant form of data, the triangulation of different data sources corroborated the claims made in the surveys. Through comparison of field notes, surveys, photographs, and the art itself, findings were consistent and it seems that participating in creative placemaking for the community can lead to increased sense of connectedness within that community.

In order to probe further into the claims of community connectedness made by participants, answers to the question, "What was your favourite part of

this event?" were also analyzed. In observing the answers participants provided regarding their favourite part of the event, three major themes emerged. Responses typically cited expression/identity, creativity, and/or mental health benefits. Each of these themes have been further analyzed and categorized as either individual-oriented or community-oriented. Only two answers fell outside the margins of these themes, and are therefore seen as insignificant to the overall study. Thirteen respondents cited a community element as their favourite part of the event, and four participants cited both individual and community elements were their favourite. Since this question was assumed to receive answers based on what activity participants enjoyed most, it was surprising that only ten respondents stated that working on their individual projects or exercising individual creativity was their favourite part.

Other valuable data indicating a high level of community connectedness are the images painted on the signs themselves. All of the images painted, especially on the first sign created, were very positive and encouraging according to participants I spoke with at the event and my own analysis of the work. The images, representing peace, nature, and encouraging messages, are seen as reflective of the participants' general attitudes at the event. Their inclination to paint the signs with positive images and messaging is one result that was not at all intended or expected. It was assumed that participants would paint abstract designs, fill the blocks with colour, solitary images, or maybe even their names. However, the signs developed in a thematic manner, where all of the images seemed to be a small part of a very cohesive whole.

This can be observed by looking at the two signs separately. One sign is riddled with nature, peace signs, and motivational messages, while the other consists of predominantly geometrical abstract images. While participants were given complete freedom to paint whatever they wanted on the signs (minus degrading or offensive language or images), they generally tended to draw inspiration from others' work, creating images that complemented each other. This is significant because it can be assumed that one person/image/work of art can be a catalyst for placemaking, as other participants seemed to follow the lead and create similar images.

Understanding how this process aids in a sense of community and belonging is significant within the concept of creative placemaking, because no research that I have come across has studied the impact of creative placemaking on individuals in the community. By understanding how this process both influences the community *and* community members, future placemaking processes may become more participatory and symbiotic by ensuring the art created is done by and for the community. This participatory creative placemaking that has occurred likely contributes to sense of belonging and community because of its democratic and inclusive nature, where community members feel that their contributions are valuable to the community at large.

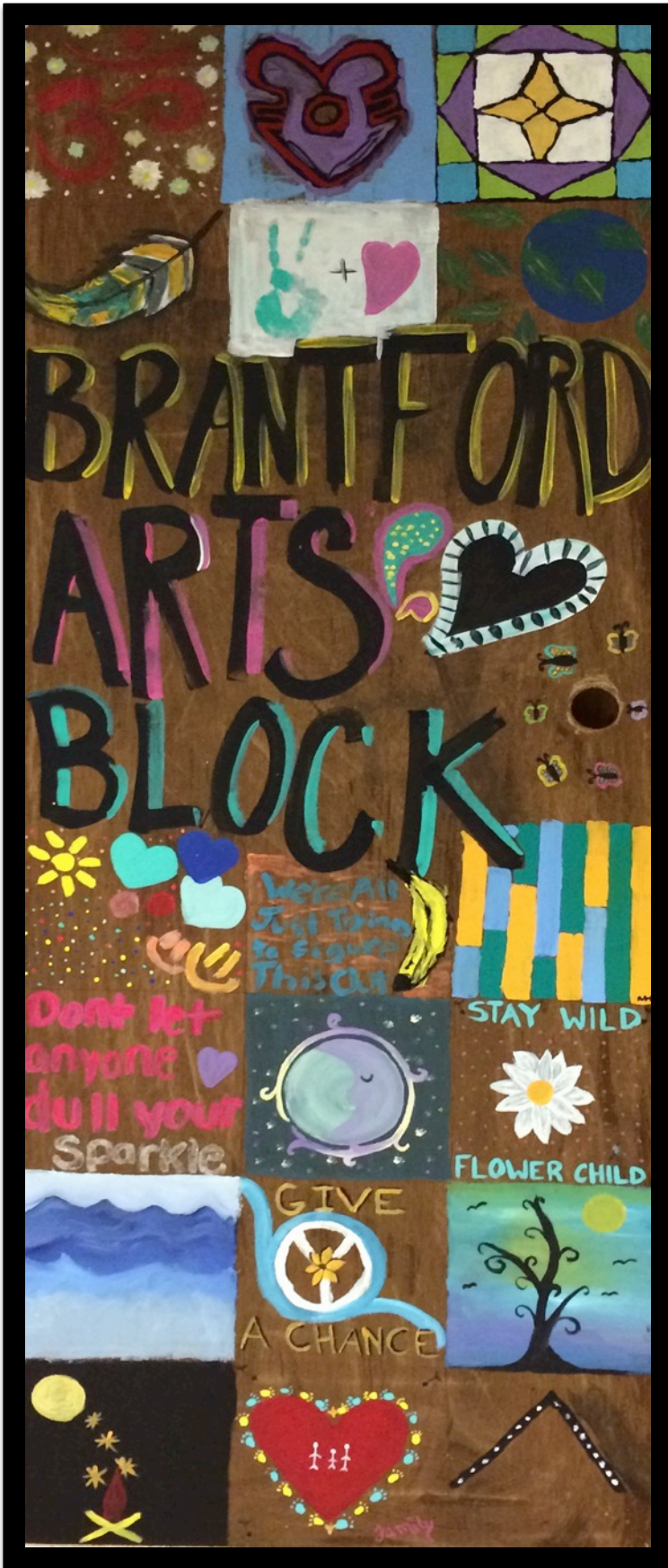


IMAGE 1.1

This sign is full of bright colours and positive images. Many of the participants stated that they were creating what they felt, which is reflected in the serene and joyful images represented.



IMAGE 1.2



IMAGE 1.3

This image is meant to be a peace sign, which the participant stated she accidentally drew wrong.

ROLE OF ART IN THE COMMUNITY

One survey question asked participants to reflect on what role art plays within the community. I found that participants at the event cited that art plays a large role in the community, both for the individuals within it and the community itself.

One answer fell directly in line with the research question and scope of the project, and stated,

Participatory art builds community at the creative level—not only is a closer sense of community created, but each participant experiences their personal creative faculties. To see, or hear as in music, the product of everyone’s efforts is an unbelievable feeling of accomplishment (31).

While this response answers the research question nicely, it is important to examine how others drew parallels between art, community, and the individual. Many other respondents cited explicit individual and community roles for art, such as:

I think art plays a large role in expression, which can help people be more vulnerable, and build better relationships. I think it also helps the community preserve their sense of identity as a group (21).

Art provides a representation of the local culture & spirit of the community. (12)

It’s an outlet that helps bring people together and form a sense of solidarity. (3)

Most answers were similar, focusing around themes of commonality, self-expression, cohesion, and “bring[ing] people together” (1, 2, 10, 13). Most of the answers provided by respondents focused on elements of identity, either of the individual or the community. Participant responses indicated that art helps to either express an individual identity, or create or portray a common identity in the community.

This finding is essential to understanding how creative placemaking can help foster a sense of belonging, and further explores exactly how the sense of belonging and community is achieved: through expression or representation of the community’s various identities. Through this project, it has been discovered that perhaps the most efficacious way to ensure that the “spirit of the community”, or the various identities of the community, are embodied, is to allow the community itself to create the art within it. This finding is also supported by Casey’s (1993) assertion that place and identity are intrinsically linked. As I previously mentioned, there is animosity among students and residents in Brantford, and the displacement of residents due to the flourishing of the university could be responsible for what calls “place-alienation” (1993, p. 307). He states, however, that, “When the resources of re-implacement and co-habitancy are drawn upon...we find ourselves back on the road to a resolute return to place” (1993, p. 310). While this project does not claim that re-implacement has occurred, it does intend to address some of the place-alienation experienced, and increase a sense of community and belonging

within the community. I believe that re-implacement can occur, however, as more initiatives are taken to address co-habitancy and foster community.

EXPERIENCE AT EVENT

While an increased sense of belonging and community was the primary goal of this event, it is assumed that the desired outcome would not be achieved if the participants did not have a generally positive experience at the event. As previously mentioned, the project—regardless of other results—would only be viewed as successful if participants cited an overall positive experience while participating in the project.

Participants were asked to describe their experience at the event, and minimal interpretive analysis was done in order to quantify this qualitative data. Out of 31 participants, 30 participants claimed to have a positive experience at the event, and one participant provided a neutral response, explaining what art they created at the event. These findings are consistent with field notes and photographs taken at the event, as everyone appeared to be having a good time throughout the day. This was corroborated through conversations held at the event, in which almost everyone approached me to say that they really enjoyed the event.

This is significant because even those who were not oriented towards art were able to enjoy themselves. While it was assumed that most people would come to the event because they enjoy art, a few people at the event stated that they were “dragged” to the event by a friend. I assumed that these people might

cite a mediocre or negative experience at the event, but upon checking in with these individuals, it was found that they were enjoying the opportunity to engage in artistic activity, regardless of intention or artistic experience. One respondent provided valuable insight into why those who are not oriented to art also enjoyed the event by stating that their favourite part of the event was,

Getting to create my own letter block I'm not usually involved in visual art (I'm not what many consider "talented" at drawing), so it was awesome to feel trusted to contribute to a project and get to be creative and let the art kind of form itself (16).

This concept of "trust" in community members to create the art is important. When communities are creating their own art, the process is just as essential as the finished product. It is now assumed that this agency and freedom to create without expectation or judgment was a significant factor in determining participants' experience at the event.

Along with other findings, this may show that engaging in an inherently democratic artistic practice is a generally enjoyable experience that transcends the arts community, and is accessible to the rest of the community as well. This kind of community-art-making event allows everyone the venue to be artistic and express themselves, regardless of skill level or previous art experience. This is an important finding in regards to creative placemaking, because it aims to expand opportunities for low-income communities and relies on cross-sector partnerships to occur within a community (Markusen and Gadwa Nicodemus, 2014, p. 41). Allowing these partnerships to form, and allowing community

members to exercise artistic license may lead to more creative placemaking ventures in the community in the future.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO MENTAL HEALTH

A pertinent and visceral finding in this research pertains to the citations of mental health benefits reaped by some participants. While those who study art engagement have long cited mental health benefits (e.g. Guetzkow, 2002; Heenan, 2006; Camic, 2008), this was an unintended result of this project. A number of participants stated that this experience positively contributed to their mental health, even though it was never explicitly (or implicitly, for that matter) asked or implied.

Some mental health citations came from the questions asking about participants' experience and their favourite part of the event, including:

Fun, relaxing, a great way to release stress (3).

The experience today allowed me to distress from work and exam time, show my creativity, and spend time doing art (11).

My favourite part was seeing everybody smile and come together. Art in all forms was celebrated and it was an awesome way to kick the stress of the end of the semester (13).

Other connections between art engagement and mental health were drawn when participants were asked to reflect on the role of art within the community. Respondents stated,

Art has an important role within communities. Not only is it a great avenue for mental well-being, but also a great way to connect with the community (3).

I believe that art serves as a form of therapy, while also being useful as a mode of non-verbal, emotional communication (14).

It's a good outlet for anxieties and a way to encourage creativity and fun (30).

While one response didn't explicitly cite *mental* health benefits, they stated,

Art is the literal expression of human emotion and an integral part of a healthy community. I feel it is necessary to enhance or create relationships with other community members for deeper cohesion (4).

This finding is significant, because participants explicitly connected their involvement in creative placemaking to contributing to their mental health, or the general health of the community. This could have implications for the future research of creative placemaking, as it not only connects members of the community, but apparently also fosters mental and emotional wellbeing within community participants. This finding seems to agree with hypothesis laid out by Kitchen, Williams and Chowhan which suggests, "Higher levels of self-perceived overall health (a), self-perceived mental health (b), and physical activity (c) will be associated with higher levels of sense of community belonging" (2011, p. 105). It also suggests that the mental health benefits enjoyed by participants are not only a result of the artistic engagement, rather a

benefit of increased sense of community. It is important to note that this event took place at the end of the academic semester, which could have impacted these findings on mental health benefits. It is likely that participants were experiencing higher stress levels than usual, which may have affected their perception of the mental health benefits of this event. While non-students cited mental health benefits as well, this finding was more frequent among student responses.

CONCLUSION

The data gathered during this project displays a connection between engaging in creative placemaking and connectedness to community and community members. Significantly, it also shows that participants believe that art either does, or should, play a large role within the community, and cited various reasons ranging from beautification to stress relief. This event was efficacious for participants because it had individual as well as community benefits, including expression of identity, creativity and mental wellbeing. It has been found that engaging in this artistic practice not only contributes to connectedness, but also significantly to the mental health of those who participated.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

“...great public space is a kind of magical good.
It never ceases to yield happiness.
Its almost happiness itself.”

Enrique Peñalosa

This project occurred as a way to help increase connection to the community, and aimed to answer the question, “Can engaging in creative placemaking in Brantford foster a sense of belonging and community among residents and students?” A qualitative study was conducted, and surveys, field notes, and photographs were analyzed and interpreted in order to form a comprehensive understanding of the findings.

It was found that those who participated in the event cited an increased connectedness to the community, which positively answers this localized research question. Participants also stated that they had a positive experience at the event, regardless of their previous involvement in artistic activities. Participants enjoyed creating art both individually and with others and cited mental health benefits achieved through their participation in the event.

The findings listed in this project are not necessarily reproducible, and are not comparable to other studies, because no other studies that examine the

impact of creative placemaking on individuals exist. This research fills a significant gap in the existing literature on creative placemaking, as it begins to examine how the individual, rather than the community as a whole or the economy, is affected by engaging in creative placemaking.

IMPLICATIONS

By understanding how the participatory creative placemaking process impacts individuals' sense of belonging and community, as well as mental health, future projects can take this into consideration when planning or conducting creative placemaking. Knowing the positive benefits of creative placemaking, for both the individual and the community is useful in understanding how this process can be democratic and symbiotic, and can aid in building healthy and creative communities. These findings could inform future policy and implementation of community projects, by providing an understanding of how participatory creative placemaking has the potential to affect community members. I argue that this project shows that community members, when thoughtfully engaged, value the experience of aiding in the creation of community space. This process may also be considered for other projects within the Brantford community as a method of reducing placelessness or place-alienation, as the university continues to expand and other residents may become displaced.

Although this research focused on Laurier students and the general Brantford population, I think it could be beneficial for other populations. Since

agency and expression emerged in the findings, as well as increased sense of community and positive contributions to mental health, this project may also prove to be valuable for vulnerable populations such as high-risk youth, people experiencing homelessness, immigrant families and/or others who may be experiencing forms of displacement or placelessness. These populations are typically marginalized in society and assumedly do not have many opportunities to exercise agency and expression, especially when it pertains to the creation of community spaces. It may be possible that by creating a community space, and by expressing their identity (rather than their stereotypes/ marginalized roles) they will begin to feel connected to the community and may develop a sense of place and belonging.

I hope that communities will take these findings into consideration, and implement their own participatory creative placemaking processes, instead of commissioning professionals for all creative ventures.

LIMITATIONS

While this project is viewed as successful and yielded positive results, it was not without its limitations. Limitations that may have impacted the research include survey structure, self-selection bias, neutrality, accessibility, and advertising. I conducted this project within a very short timeline, three weeks from conception to execution, and I recognize that many limitations could have been lessened with a larger planning frame and an unlimited budget. The timeline largely affected the methodology, which likely would have

been grounded theory, if time had permitted. However, there was not enough time to visit and revisit the field for data, and this will be considered for future projects.

Survey Structure

While the survey answers offer valuable insight and are a good point of departure for future research, one critical set back is that it didn't ask participants to specify *which* community they felt more connected to after participating in the event. While I hope that one day the binaries of the Laurier community and resident community no longer exist, separate questions would have provided a detailed look at how this event contributed to participants' sense of community. Since the event was held at the university, it would have been useful to see if residents felt more connected to the Laurier community, and if students felt more connected to the larger community after completing the art for a community organization.

Self-Selection Bias

Coller and Mahoney (1996) state that many qualitative researchers who do not care about generalization should be, "in principle", looking to make "larger comparisons" (p. 63). While I admit it is difficult to make larger comparisons and connections to pre-existing data and literature, I believe that self-selection was essential to understanding participants' experience at the

event. Participants were not given an honorarium, and everyone who attended did so on their own accord. For the concept of participatory creative placemaking, I think that self-selection is not only preferred, but also essential. It is possible that the event attracted people who already felt close to their community, or who were oriented towards the arts. However, this is not seen as a disqualifying feature for the data. It was my intention to host an event for people who wanted to create their community and who would enjoy participating in art. Without self-selection, it is possible that the data would be very different due to some participants not liking art or feeling irreparably disconnected from their community. In this instance, this project does not claim that creative placemaking will fix any and all issues arising from displacement, rather, that it could be used in conjunction with other communities tools and resources to help foster a sense of belonging.

I acknowledge that there was what Coller and Mahoney (1996) calls a “narrow range of variation” in the responses (p. 57), which likely occurred as a result of a disproportionate number of students (rather than residents) completing surveys at the event. I anticipated this might occur, which is why a phenomenological approach was preferred with the use of self-selection—as this framework values the subjective experiences of those who did participate. Merleau-Ponty (1945) states that phenomenology is, “a matter of describing, not of explaining or analyzing (as quoted in Moran, 2000, p. 14). This project allowed for participants to describe their experiences, which I believe is essential for a project that is examining phenomena that has not been widely

researched. In the future, it may be beneficial to gather data from a random sample to garner broader understanding of how participatory creative placemaking is perceived within the community among various stakeholders.

Non-Neutrality

Another salient limitation is the non-neutrality of the event. While this was intended as a method to bridge the gap between two major homogenous groups in Brantford, this also had a major impact on the participants of the event. Even though the signs were being created for the community, the event was hosted at the university, where it was assumed that most of the participants would be students. It was hoped that residents would come to the university to participate, and some did, but not as many as hoped. It is assumed that a similar result would have occurred, with residents being the larger population, if the event was hosted in a community location other than the university.

However, the university, regardless of its non-neutrality, is still observed as a suitable location. This venue has a constant stream of people, which was useful in drawing people in who had not previously seen the event advertised. Other potential venues that could have worked well for this event include the Lynden Park Mall and Harmony Square, as both of those areas are public spaces frequented by both residents and students. It was an important aspect of the event that these two groups interact, in order to bridge any gaps between students and residents.

It is also assumed that the academic setting influenced the research participants of this event, as well as the findings. Many Brantford residents attended the event, but only a fraction of those who attended filled out a survey. Many community members who were not affiliated with Laurier Brantford declined to fill out a survey, but did not disclose why. It is recognized that this may have been daunting for those outside of the academic realm, because they may not have understood where the data was going, or how it was being used. In the future, it may be beneficial to explicitly state to each participant that his or her participation and feedback could be very beneficial to understanding how creative placemaking impacts communities, while always ensuring confidentiality. There is little variation in the responses given by residents and students, so having a larger body of data provided by residents would have provided a richer comprehension of the event and its outcomes.

Advertising

Another major limitation of this project was the short window and limited space for advertising. The event was only advertised for approximately one week, which was the window between receiving ethics clearance and the event itself. While the event was heavily advertised on the Laurier Brantford campus, through posters and LBTV ads, the primary advertising in the community was done through Facebook, as only about five posters were hung around Brantford outside of the university before the day of the event. It is

acknowledged that an event like this needs more advertising, but it was not possible due to time constraints and ethics.

Accessibility

Accessibility proved to be an issue for this project, as it was discovered at the event that the room that *Create Your Community* was being held in was not typically open to the community. The room was in the basement of the Student Centre, and was a bit difficult to find, especially for those who have never been in this building. The easiest door to access the room was locked for most of the event, and after a certain time, a student card was required to get into the building. Luckily, participants heard knocking and often let others into the event, but it is very possible that some potential participants were not able to get into the building. To combat this in the future, it is recommended that the event be held in a space that does not have any locked doors, or requires special access (like student cards). Since participation from the community was already low, this is seen as a major limitation that could have further impacted participation of residents.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

While this project was not without its limitations, it is still considered successful, as enough data was collected to answer the research question, at least enough to provide a preliminary look at the impact of creative placemaking on individuals.

Future projects that aim to answer similar questions should ensure either neutrality—in locations that have multiple homogenous groups, or centrality—in locations that are meant to serve one homogenous group. This is important in order to ensure that the project has the most impact for the community. While neutrality was an issue for this project, centrality of the project was achieved for the generalized arts community in Brantford, by displaying the finished products at the Brantford Arts Block.

If a similar project were to be hosted in the future, or if I had unlimited time and funding, I would host this event at the library, which is shared by students and residents. The creative placemaking could be done along the west-facing outer wall, or even on a wall inside. This way, the art creation would take place *at* the site being affected by the placemaking, and participants would be able to see (almost instantly) the effect they've had on the community. I think that by transforming a space that is used somewhat equally by students and residents, it would redefine the space as shared, and there would be no “competition” over it. Creative placemaking can act as a form of branding in the community. When separate groups create the art together, the space can take on a new meaning for all parties involved. This study could benefit from snowball sampling, starting at agencies that service individuals who might be feeling displaced. It might even be useful to conduct the study in two parts; the first determining levels of place alienation among various individuals, and the second engaging those place alienated individuals in creating a space within the community. Since the research conducted is seen as a precursor to future

studies, I hope that the next project will use grounded theory to come up with a theoretical framework for this phenomenon.

While the impact of creative placemaking on mental health was briefly mentioned, it mostly fell outside the scope of this paper, and should be explored further. Phenomenological studies of those experiencing mental health concerns may be useful in uncovering exactly how this process can affect mental health and wellbeing. This may be the most significant finding, as it could have major implications for how creative placemaking is conducted in communities in the future, as well as how mental health is understood. A project that examines mental health benefits would likely reach out to community mental health organizations in order to get the organization to refer suitable clientele to the project. A linear study would be useful in first determining the level of perceived alienation from the community, and then following up after creative placemaking to see if the level of perceived alienation has changed. Simultaneously, data could be collected specifically regarding any mental health benefits that participants cited. I assume that this project would work well for those suffering from depression or anxiety, as participants in this project cited that it was a way to relieve stress, and that it was relaxing. While the main purpose would be to cite the mental health benefits, I still think it is absolutely necessary to measure perceived alienation because connectedness to the community can affect one's mental wellbeing (Kitchen, Williams, and Chowhan, 2011). It is possible that by just increasing one's sense of belonging in the community, their mental health may also

increase.

Surveys were also seen as a simple, and efficacious way to gather data for this research. In future studies, however, it may be useful to interview some participants to get a more in-depth sense of how the process of participatory placemaking is perceived.

CHAPTER 6: PERSONAL REFLECTION

**“Placemaking is community organizing.
It’s a campaign.”**

Fred Kent, Project for Public Spaces, President

As with most qualitative research, reflexivity and positionality is crucial for interpreting my own role within data production, collection, and interpretation. As a student who has resided in Brantford for six years, I feel an immense connection to both the Laurier Brantford and the greater Brantford communities. As a member of the Brantford arts community, I recognized that this sub-community in Brantford was one in which typical preliminary identifiers of “student” or “local” were nullified, and the connections made through art were most salient. I wanted to host this event to help bridge the perceived gap between students and residents, and I think that this event provided a stepping-stone for achieving that. By connecting these two groups to the neutral arts community, it is hoped that the invisible lines drawn between students and residents are blurred through this method of community engagement.

I was particularly drawn to the work of Jane Jacobs throughout the completion of this project, and found myself referencing her work any time I

asked myself “Why complete a project like this?” She seemed to be completely enthralled with the social justice aspect of urban planning, and her view is one that I value immensely. From her take on single-uses, to her attitude that cities provide for residents when they are created by them (1961), her opinions were paramount within this project. As this project was completed as part of the Social Justice and Community Engagement program, I felt that it was necessary to look at this issue through a social justice and community engagement lens, which Jacobs’s work prompted me to do on several occasions.

After completing this project, I discovered a criteria for creative placemaking, as laid out by ArtPlace America, an organization dedicated to creative placemaking efforts in the United States. The criteria are:

- 1. Define a community based in geography, such as a block, a neighborhood, a city, or a region*
- 2. Articulate a change the group of people living and working in that community would like to see*
- 3. Propose an arts-based intervention to help achieve that change*
- 4. Develop a way to know whether the change occurred*

First, the geographical place that would be impacted by the project was the Brantford Arts Block, as well as the university. The Arts Block is open to the community, and is a staple location in the Brantford arts community. While the university is not typically seen as open to the community, this event tried to change that perception by opening it for the actual placemaking process. Second, through discussion with the Brantford Arts Block and Arts

After School Kids, change was desired and articulated. The Arts Block wanted increased visibility, and Arts After School Kids wanted the opportunity to help with this project and, thirdly, proposed the creation of signs made by the community. Lastly, the change implied by this criteria—that there be increased visibility and traffic to the Arts Block, falls outside the scope of this research. It would be interesting, however, to follow up with the Arts Block in order to see if the event was efficacious for them, as well as the participants who collaborated to create the signs. Change definitely occurred in this event, as it brought many people together that would likely not have crossed paths if they hadn't attended, however it is impossible to know exactly how this creative placemaking process impacted the Arts Block directly.

While I wish that more residents attended the event, I feel that there was a healthy mix of participants, considering the time constraints and lack of advertising. The event itself was an extremely positive experience for me, and I enjoyed creating my own art, as well as seeing the art created by others. I had to create art in the form of posters and other advertisements for the event, and I felt a sense of pride every time I saw my work in public. I can only hope that this is the same sense of pride that participants will feel when they see their artwork publicly displayed at the Brantford Arts Block.

Many participants, both residents and students, claimed that this event was conducted in a safe and inclusive space. This was extremely important, I think, for the success of the event. It was refreshing to see students and

residents collaborating on the signs and encouraging each other. I can easily say that I definitely feel more connected to both communities (and the central arts community) after hosting and attending this event.

For future research, I hope to delve further into the mental health benefits of creative placemaking, as it is possible that this practice can help create and foster healthy communities.

This project did have some limitations, which could be easily combatted with the knowledge derived from this project and careful planning. It is hoped that future research takes neutrality and accessibility into consideration, in order to conduct a more inclusive and efficacious event.

In conclusion, creative placemaking is observed as a process that not only has the power to improve communities, but also positively affects the individuals living and working within those communities. Allowing this democratic practice to occur not only visually enhances community places, but also has the ability to aid in a sense of belonging among community members who help to create those places.

APPENDIX A: EVENT PROPOSAL

Create Your Community Event Proposal

What: 12-hour art-a-thon at the Laurier Brantford campus, providing a venue for students to engage in creativity and artistic endeavors both individually and with others to create a large community piece.

When: April 2nd, 10am-10pm. Marketing will begin as soon as possible, if the event is approved. Marketing will include posters, a Facebook event, word of mouth and weekly news.

Where: Student Centre Multipurpose room

How: The event will be a 12-hour-long art, crafts, and music day, to accommodate for busy schedules and school commitments. Students will be encouraged to bring their own materials for individual projects, or instruments if they want to “jam” with other students. Some instruments will be provided, and all materials will be provided for students who choose to work on the collaborative piece. Students are also welcome to use their own materials for the collaborative piece, if they wish.

Why? I would like to host an all-day art event open to Laurier Brantford students to encourage creativity and community participation. Through doing some preliminary research, I have discovered that placemaking in the community can be effectively done through community art. This “creative placemaking” approach will be taken to create a sign for the Brantford Arts Block. Gerry LaFleur, the director of the Brantford Arts Block, has expressed

concern about lack of visibility of the Arts Block and has requested that signs be created to enhance visibility and access to the organization. Though creating this sign is the primary goal of the event, salient objectives include placemaking in the greater community, getting students engaged with like-minded peers, and fostering a sense of belonging through collaborative art efforts. To bridge the gap between Laurier Brantford and the greater community, I think a collaborative project for a community organization is a positive step. Through creating this sign, it is my hope that Laurier Brantford students can engage in the creative placemaking process, which will hopefully lead to an enhanced sense of belonging within the community.

Cost: The event will be absolutely free for students to participate. I plan on spending >\$50 for materials, but I have set aside a budget of \$100 for incidentals. For economic and environmental purposes, everything that can be purchased second-hand, will be--aside from paint, glue, and floor covers.

Sign Specs: The sign will be created out of either an old door or a wooden board. The board will be sectioned into individual parts or squares (undecided) to mimic a quilt. The idea is for students to choose a section and fill it in using whichever style or medium they prefer. The end product will be a beautiful pastiche of students' work, to be semi-permanently displayed in a community organization. Not only does this tie the campus to a staple in Brantford's vibrant art community, but it also allows students to contribute to the community that they are living and learning in.

APPENDIX B: ETHICS APPROVAL



Dear Amber Richardson

REB # 4424

Project, ""Create Your Community" Art Day"

REB Clearance Issued: March 26, 2015

REB Expiry / End Date: April 03, 2015

The Research Ethics Board of Wilfrid Laurier University has reviewed the above proposal and determined that the proposal is ethically sound. If the research plan and methods should change in a way that may bring into question the project's adherence to acceptable ethical norms, please submit a "Request for Ethics Clearance of a Revision or Modification" form for approval before the changes are put into place. This form can also be used to extend protocols past their expiry date, except in cases where the project is more than two years old. Those projects require a new REB application.

Please note that you are responsible for obtaining any further approvals that might be required to complete your project.

If any participants in your research project have a negative experience (either physical, psychological or emotional) you are required to submit an "Adverse Events Form" within 24 hours of the event.

You must complete the online "Annual/Final Progress Report on Human Research Projects" form annually and upon completion of the project. ROMEO will automatically keep track of these annual reports for you. When you have a report due within 30 days (and/or an overdue report) it will be listed under the 'My Reminders' quick link on your ROMEO home screen; the number in brackets next to 'My Reminders' will tell you how many reports need to be submitted.

All the best for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Basso". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'R' at the beginning.

Robert Basso, PhD

Chair, University Research Ethics Board

Wilfrid Laurier University

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

“Create Your Community” Art Event

Principal Investigator: Amber Richardson Advisor: Dr. Bree Akesson

You are invited to participate in a research project, led by a M.A. candidate in the Social Justice and Community Engagement program at Wilfrid Laurier University. The purpose of this project is to engage students and community members in “creative placemaking” by collaborating with other students and creating signage for the Brantford Arts Block. Participants’ level of engagement and sense of place and community will be evaluated through the surveys attached to this consent form.

INFORMATION

This project entails contributing your own artistic design to a collaborative art piece for the Brantford Arts Block. You are invited to use the materials provided, including paint, brushes, glue, magazines, glitter, etc. You may choose to draw/paint/collage anything you wish, as long as it is respectful and inclusive. To ensure the safety and wellbeing of all participants, any contributions depicting profanity, oppressive/hate speech, nudity, or illegal content will be promptly removed.

AS A PARTICIPANT, YOU ARE REMINDED OF YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO ACT IN ACCORDANCE WITH WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY’S STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT. (2)

There is no minimum or maximum time requirement for this activity; however, all artwork must be completed by 11:00pm on April 2nd, 2015.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable *major* risks involved with participating in this project. Please exercise caution when handling any materials, to avoid any adverse reaction or injury. To minimize any emotional or psychological risk, please ensure to only speak positively about others’ work.

BENEFITS

We hope that this research teaches us more about creative placemaking in the community, through exploring an artistic approach. We also hope that students and community members will experience an enhanced sense of community and belonging through participating in this project.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All artwork and surveys will be completely anonymous, unless the participants choose to identify themselves. To ensure anonymity, this consent form and survey will be detached upon completion and collection, and no names are required on the survey. Only the researcher will

have access to the surveys, however, the artwork (signage) will be displayed publicly outside of the Brantford Arts Block. Upon program completion in September 2015, all surveys will be destroyed. Consent forms will be kept for 4 years. Quotations from the surveys may be used in the final reflection paper, with any identifying information being removed. You may decline the use of any quotations from your survey. _____ participant's initials

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study) you may contact the researcher, Amber Richardson, at rich8799@mylaurier.ca, and 647-808-0730. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, extension 4994 or rbasso@wlu.ca

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study, every attempt will be made to remove your data from the study, and have it destroyed. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

The information collected from this study will be used in a final reflection paper, as a component of the researcher's M.A. program. The sign that you have contributed to will be displayed in the community at the Brantford Arts Block.

CONSENT *(item 10)*

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature_____ Date _____

Investigator's signature_____Date _____

I CONSENT TO THE USE OF QUOTATIONS FROM MY SURVEY, ACKNOWLEDGING THAT ALL IDENTIFYING INFORMATION WILL BE REMOVED. (3)

Participant's signature _____ Date_____

APPENDIX D: SURVEY

Create Your Community Art Event Participant Survey

Please fill out this survey and return it to Amber Richardson, the principal investigator for this project. By returning this survey, you are consenting to have this data analyzed for the research project. Please refrain from including identifying information in your responses.

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your age?
3. Are you a student at Laurier Brantford?
4. Please describe your experience at this event today.
5. What was your favourite part of this event?
6. Briefly describe your connection to/relationship with the Brantford community.

7. Do you feel more connected to the Brantford and/or Laurier community after participating in this event?

8. In your opinion, what role (if any) does art play in the community? Please explain.

9. Are you ok with direct (non-identifiable) quotations from your survey being used in the final project report?

APPENDIX E: POSTER

You are invited to...

CREATE YOUR COMMUNITY
--an all-day art event--

ON THURSDAY APRIL 2ND FROM 11AM TO 11PM,
COME TO THE MULTIPURPOSE ROOM IN THE STUDENT CENTRE
FOR A DAY OF ART, MUSIC, AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK ON A
COLLABOARTIVE ART PIECE FOR THE BRANTFORD ARTS BLOCK.
PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN MATERIALS FOR INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS
(PAINT, CROSS-STITCHING, CANVAS, MAGAZINES, ETC.)
*** ALL MATERIALS WILL BE PROVIDED FOR
COLLABORATIVE PROJECT ***
REB-4424

All art forms are welcome!

THIS EVENT WILL BE HOSTED BY A M.A. CANDIDATE IN THE SOCIAL JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
MASTER'S PROGRAM. SURVEYS WILL BE CONDUCTED FOR THOSE PARTICIPATING IN THE COLLABORATIVE
PROJECT. PARTICIPATION IS OPTIONAL. EMAIL RICH8799@MYLAURIER.CA FOR MORE INFO!

APPENDIX F: FACEBOOK PAGE



You are invited to “Create Your Community”, an all-day arts and music event at the Laurier Brantford campus. This event intends to engage students and community members in “creative placemaking” and will take place in the multipurpose room in the Student Centre basement on Thursday April 2nd, from 11 am to 11pm. Everyone is invited to create individual visual art projects, play some instruments, and enjoy each other’s company before the exam rush begins.

There will be also a collaborative project on the go during the event, which will involve the creation of some signage for the Brantford Arts Block. All of the materials required for the collaborative piece will be provided, but you are encouraged to bring your own materials for individual projects.

Take the opportunity to engage in some self-care before exams, and relax with some like-minded students who appreciate art and creativity as much as you do.

Some ideas for what you can bring:

- Paint
- Canvas
- Glitter
- Glue
- Magazines
- Paper
- Brushes
- Guitar
- Hand drums
- Embroidery thread

-Knitting stuff

...THE LIST GOES ON.

You can expect a fun-filled day, including wonderful peers, jam sessions, and all the creativity our campus has to offer.

****DISCLAIMER****

This event is being hosted by a M.A. candidate in the Social Justice and Community Engagement Program as part of a final project. All students/faculty who participate in creating the signs for the Brantford Arts Block will be asked to sign a consent form and complete a short survey. Participation is appreciated, but completely optional.

For more information, email Amber Richardson at rich8799@mylaurier.ca

APPENDIX G: LBTV ADVERTISEMENT

You are invited to...

CREATE YOUR COMMUNITY

--an all-day art event--

11AM - 11PM.

THURSDAY APRIL 2.

STUDENT CENTRE MULTIPURPOSE ROOM.

PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN ART MATERIALS!

ALL ART FORMS WELCOME <3

EMAIL RICH8799@MYLAURIER.CA FOR MORE INFO

APPENDIX H: SIGN #2

This sign looks vastly different from the first one. Both signs, however, seem to carry a theme. The first image painted on this one is the green and pink checkers in the corner. Most other images stayed very geometrical, showing that one image can inspire others. These doors, in my opinion, can symbolize community because of the cohesion apparent in each one.



APPENDIX I: PHOTOS OF EVENT



APPENDIX J: INSTALLED SIGNS



The signs created at the event were installed at the Brantford Arts Block, surrounding the building.

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