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Nana Agyepong
UVM Larner College of Medicine

Karamatullah Danyal
UVM Larner College of Medicine

Lauren Gaffaney
UVM Larner College of Medicine

Nicole Jedrqynski
UVM Larner College of Medicine

Michael Rodriguez
UVM Larner College of Medicine

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Nana Agyepong, Karamatullah Danyal, Lauren Gaffaney, Nicole Jedrqynski, Michael Rodriguez, Matthew Sommers, Andrew Wick, Judith Christensen, and Ellen Meagher

Engagement and Disengagement in Art Interventions with Memory Impairment: A Pilot Assessment

Nana Agyepong¹, Karamatullah Danyal¹, Lauren Gaffaney¹, Nicole Jedrzynski¹, Michael Rodriguez¹, Matthew Sommers¹, Andrew Wick¹, Judith Christensen¹ PhD, Ellen Meagher²



¹Robert Larner College of Medicine, University of Vermont, ²Converse Home, Burlington, VT



Background

A growing body of research suggests that art intervention is an effective therapy for patients with memory impairments. In these residents, art therapy has been shown to

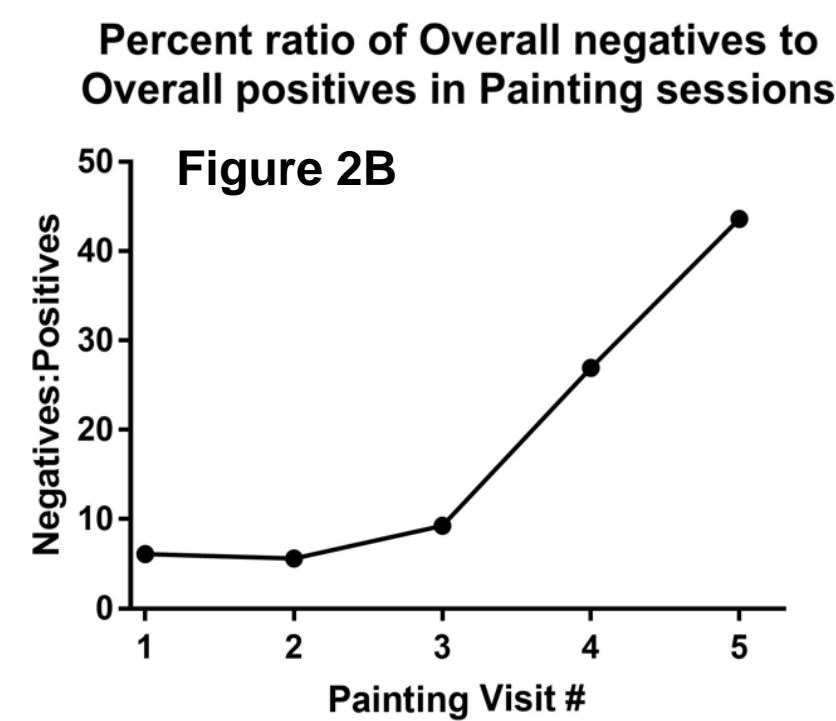
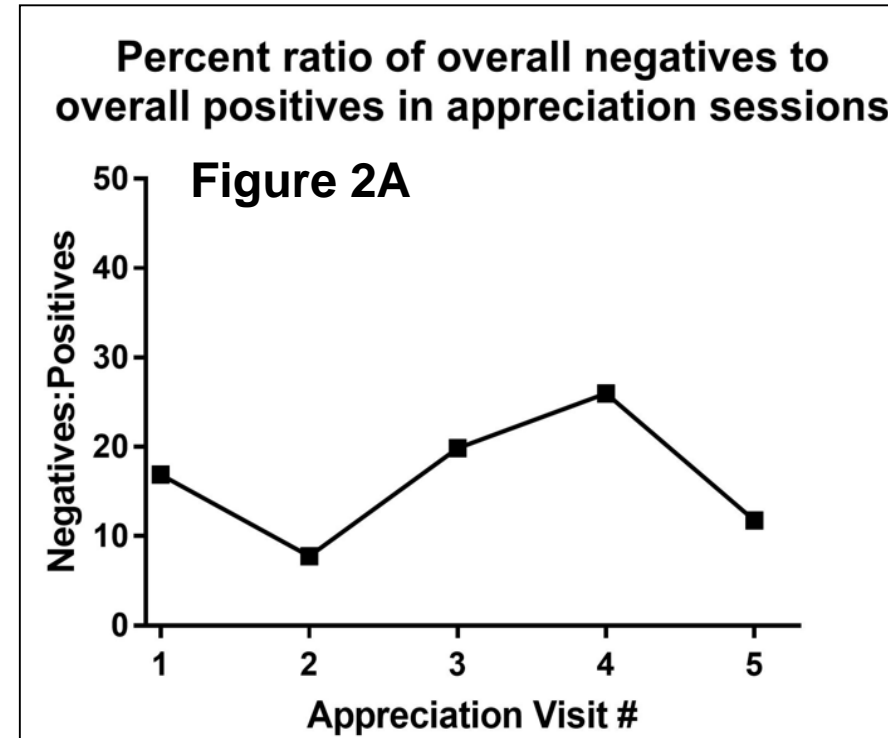
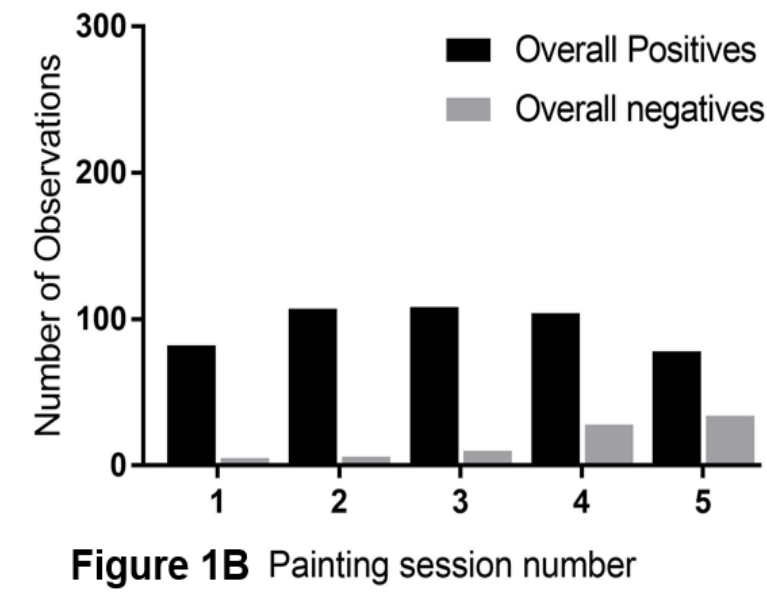
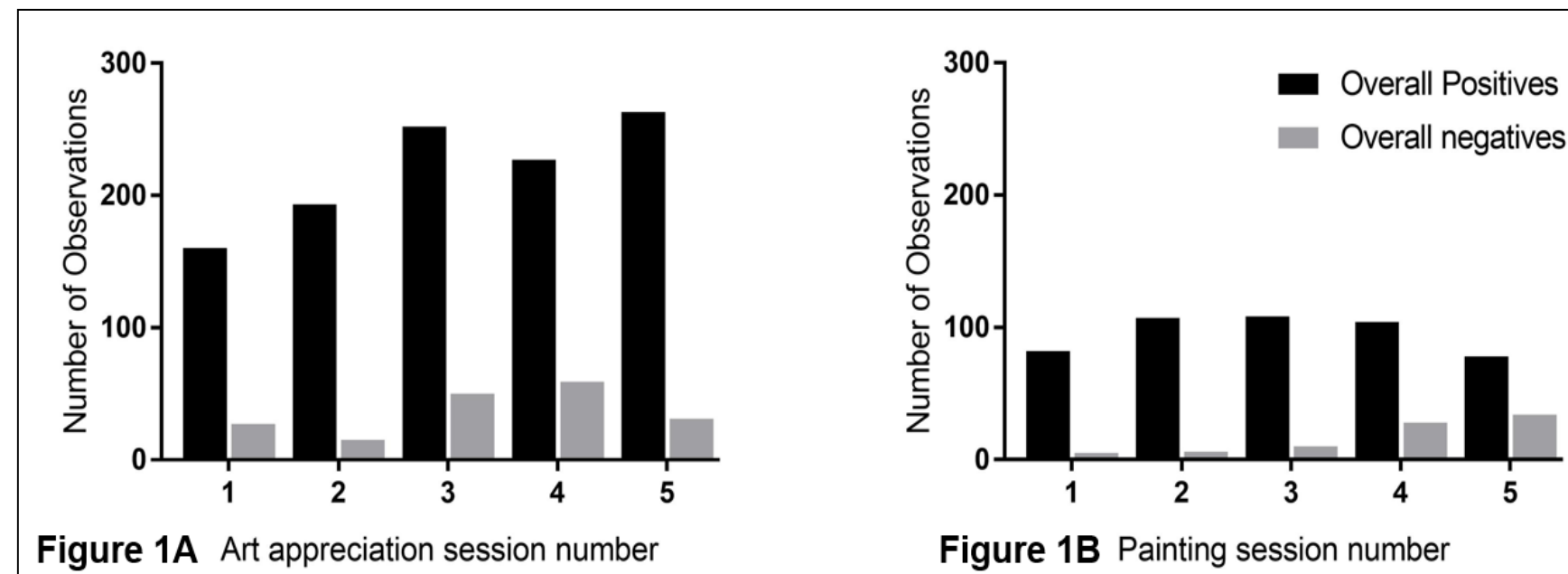
- improve sociability (1) and mood (2)
- reduce risk of dementia (3)
- decrease agitation (4)
- decrease depression and isolation (5)
- improve overall quality of life (6)
- reduce caregiver burden (1)

Our research evaluated the effect of participation in six weekly art appreciation sessions and six active painting sessions on the behavior of residents in the memory care program of an assisted living community. Our objectives included assessing differences in engagement and disengagement behaviors between the two intervention activities as well as during each session to assess for changes in behavior over time.

Methods

- Residents' behaviors were observed during art appreciation and active painting sessions over a twelve-week period.
- Each session consisted of either viewing and discussing artwork or actively painting in the style of the artist previously discussed.
- Positive and negative behaviors were recorded and tallied throughout the sessions.
- The total number of both positive and negative behaviors was compared between groups, over time within sessions, as well as over the six weeks.
- Each session was percent normalized to the time interval with the highest occurrence of select behaviors.

Results



- An upward trend of positive engagement during art appreciation sessions was noted, while painting sessions showed an increasing trend of negative engagement.
- Percent normalization was performed to control for the varying number of participants in each session. The average amount of disengagement or engagement was stratified by time interval for all sessions.
- The ratio of negative to positive engagements for each painting session showed an increase in negative behaviors.
- Disengagement increased as the appreciation sessions progressed, while disengagement decreased as painting sessions progressed.
- Overall, positive engagement increased in both appreciation and painting sessions.

Discussion

- Art appreciation sessions showed more overall behaviors (Fig. 1), both positive and negative, likely due to the appreciation sessions' structure. Participants who were engaged in painting had less opportunity for demonstrating other behaviors.
- Our data suggests art appreciation is a viable non-pharmacologic option for engaging residents of a memory care unit, providing cognitive and sensory engagement while requiring limited staff & resources. The increasing negative behaviors in Fig. 2 may be due to participants' fatigue with painting as time went on, supporting the role of art appreciation sessions.
- Fig. 3A shows that the first time interval had the highest level of disengagement, which we hypothesize is due to participants settling in and can be addressed by having time built in at the start.
- Based on anecdotal observations, the participants enjoyed more realistic art compared to abstract art, similar to the results of a previous study at this facility that demonstrated increased participation when discussing classical poetry vs contemporary poetry. These trends warrant further investigation to determine what types of art are most effective.

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