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An Exploration of Art Therapy Services Offered to University Community Members During Transition

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An Exploration of Art Therapy Services Offered to University Community Members

During Transition

By

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examined art therapy services offered by Loyola Marymount University's Helen B. Landgarten Art Therapy Clinic to university students and staff amidst the transition back to in-person services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this study was to explore the efficacy of interventions and clinical themes that emerged as a result of the services offered to members of the university as they transitioned back to in-person services. Two focus groups were held to gather data from participants and facilitators of the workshops. The analysis of this data led researchers to find that the art therapy services resulted in decreased stress and created a sense of community support amongst both participants and facilitators. In addition, the researchers found other emergent clinical themes that were illuminated in the data collected from both focus groups. The findings from this study are supported by literature that aligns with the outcomes from the workshops: being effective in managing stress and building community support.

Keywords: Qualitative, case study, art therapy, focus group, university, community, stress management, transition, COVID-19.

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Introduction

The Study Topic

During the Fall 2021 semester and the return to in-person classes, Loyola Marymount University's department of Marital and Family Therapy, with Specialized Training in Clinical Art Therapy, offered a range of art therapy services to the community through the Helen B. Landgarten Art Therapy Clinics in-person and virtual art therapy workshops. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the efficacy of interventions, namely opportunities to manage stress and build community as well as identify other clinical themes that emerged as a result of art therapy services offered to members of the university as they transitioned back to in-person services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The concepts within different co-occurring themes during periods of stress and transition experienced by students, staff and faculty members from Loyola Marymount University are explored after their engagement in a range of art therapy services offered by the Helen B. Landgarten Art Therapy Clinic. Researchers focused on the (a) needs of the university community, (b) the settings, materials, and populations within collaborative groups, and (c) the role of the art product within community art-making during the current global transitions experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The connections made with participants from art therapy workshops, facilitated by graduate student, staff and faculty members of the Marital and Family Art Therapy program at Loyola Marymount University, were examined through focus groups to gain insight to different perspectives of the workshop's efficacy. Further, the participants' experiences provided information about the needs of the surrounding communities and populations during the various transitions resulting from the COVID-19 crisis. The study also explored the efficacy of community art making during crisis, transition, and its potential to

foster interpersonal connection, communication, and joining of shared experiences. The art

created in these groups contributed to the discussion of various clinical themes that emerged

during these workshops and may have played a role in highlighting hopefulness, connection, and

reflection. The use of a qualitative research approach ensured that researchers explored deeply

the participants' experiences to further understand clinical themes and the efficacy of art therapy

workshops within the university community at Loyola Marymount University.

Significance of the Study

In examining the efficacy of art interventions introduced through the Helen B.

Landgarten Art Therapy Clinic, the opportunity to give voice to participants and their

experiences during this time of transition and heightened stress is highlighted and encourages

consideration of various mental health needs during this transition. This research has the

potential to contribute useful and effective interventions for individuals impacted by the

COVID-19 pandemic, and other social crises. As the pandemic is still underway, this research

supported the present work that is being done by mental health professionals including art

therapists as they work alongside communities who have been greatly impacted by the

COVID-19 pandemic. This study provided the opportunity to better understand the effects on

individuals' mental health and needs associated with experiences during times of crisis and

transition.

This study offered the examination of the efficacy of community art making and art

therapy in assisting with mental health assessment and development of healthy coping skills.

Artwork created during this study offered information regarding how the art can be clinically

meaningful in understanding individuals' experiences and process. It is important to

acknowledge that more research is needed regarding the use of art therapy groups with university

students, especially during times of crisis and transition. This study provided the opportunity to

initiate the exploration of art therapy groups with university students, staff and faculty in order to

continue to investigate the efficacy of community art making and art therapy.

Background of the Study Topic

In times of continued stress such as the COVID-19 pandemic, university students' pre-existing academic stress has been exacerbated with an increased need for inter/intrapersonal support. University students have reported high levels of stress closely associated with academic success and pressure to achieve high standards (Yasmin, et. al., 2020). These pre-existing stressors have intensified by the ongoing circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and have increased students' need for support from their peers, family members and mental health service providers (Besser, et. al., 2020; Yasmin, et. al., 2020; Sonnone & Rochford, 2020). In addition to the academic stress, students with unique cultural circumstances experienced another layer of challenges during times of crisis. Michel and Durdella's (2019) ethnographic case study highlighted the challenges first-generation low income Latinx college students faced during the transitions made amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Michel and Durdella's (2019) and DeRossett et. al. (2021) found that first generation college students relied heavily on social support due to higher levels of financial stress, decreased sense of belonging and challenges faced due to being a part of a marginalized group.

For student populations coming from marginalized groups, research suggested that these groups might experience greater symptoms associated with the pandemic than non-marginalized groups, possibly due to pre-exsisting stress, such as front line employment and racial discrimination (Cubrich, 2020, Chowkwanyun and Reed Jr, 2020; Hooper et al., 2020, as cited in Devaraj & Patel, 2021). When looking at the specific demographics of populations, identifying-females between the ages of 11 and 17 years of age, showed higher rates of anxiety, depression and other pathology during the transition of the COVID-19 pandemic and other stress-inducing transitions in life (Lessard & Puhl, 2021, Philpot et. al. 2021). Philpot et al.,

2021, demonstrated the potential for increased vulnerability during times of crisis, specifically

noting that identifying females experienced higher levels of stress and loneliness than reported

and observed by identifying males (Philpot, Ramar, Roellinger, Barry, Sharma, & Ebbert, 2021).

After careful consideration and understanding of the needs of students and marginalized

populations, the efficacy of community group art making can be considered as a useful

intervention during times of crisis. Price (2019) highlighted the ability that collaborative art

making holds in instilling hope, strengthening interpersonal connections, enhancing a collective

identity and sharing of experiences while providing support for group members in expressing

their inner world. Participating in an art therapy group facilitates a shared experience to decrease

feelings of isolation and increase connectivity amongst its members (Price, 2019). Collaborative

art-making has also been shown to decrease work and academic stress and reduce burnout, while

also decreasing stress associated with other types of crises (Salazano et al., 2013; Morrison et. al

2018).

Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review aimed to survey recent literature focused on exploring the efficacy of art therapy-based interventions during periods of stress and transitions amongst university students, staff and faculty members. This review first explored literature pertaining to the university community members' experiences during periods of stress and transition, specifically literature focused on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted academic and interpersonal stress. The second section of the review examined literature that looked at how continued stress related to the COVID-19 pandemic impacted those of particular cultural backgrounds. The third section explored literature that investigates the efficacy and usefulness of community art making to decrease stress responses activated by transitions, like the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, this literature review examined the specific role of the art process and materials in community art making, with particular focus on the importance of access to materials and the power of connection that community art making offers to communities.

Needs During Transitions and Continued Stress

The COVID-19 pandemic has reportedly heightened students' academic stress levels and impacted their performance in school due to continued stress and transition to new methods of learning, interacting and coping (Besser, et. al., 2020; Yasmin, et. al., 2020). Several articles (Besser, et. al., 2020; Yasmin, et. al., 2020; DeRossett, et. al., 2021) addressed the stress students experience and how their stress has been specifically exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yasmin, Khalil and Mazhar (2020) provided an overview of the various stressors college students experience. These included academic performance, scheduling and establishment of routines, plans for their future, health issues, maintaining social and familial relationships and

financial challenges. Additionally, young adults experienced developmental tasks, such as constructing a growing self-concept, that intensify their reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic (Sonnone & Rochford, 2020). Managing these stressors requires resiliency, establishment of coping skills and support systems, but has recently been disrupted due to the unprecedented circumstances of the global pandemic. Students are challenged by uncertainty and ambiguity as they alter their way of learning while simultaneously navigating how COVID-19 has impacted their personal lives (Besser, et. al., 2020). Studies showed that students of various ages are experiencing heightened stress as the ceaseless pressure to succeed academically feels increasingly less attainable (Besser, et. al., 2020; Yasmin, et. al., 2020). The intensification of these stressors potentially exacerbated mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression in college students, if not tended to (Sonnone & Rochford, 2020). This next section investigates considerations regarding students with unique cultural contexts.

Consideration of Students with Unique Cultural Circumstances

Research in this section explored the needs of first generation students (Michel & Durdella, 2019) during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact on their academic success. The needs of older adult students during their transition back to college is also explored (Schaefer, 2010) regarding support received as a student during their specific developmental stage of life.

In a qualitative study, Schaefer (2010) studied the experience of nine "Baby Boomer" students, ages 50-62 years old, that were pursuing bachelor's degrees. Navigating a system that favors young adults caused older adult students to experience increased feelings of isolation, insecurity and doubt, which exacerbated stress that is presently felt due to academics (Schaefer, 2010). In addition, this study found that most of its participants were first generation college students, which added another layer of complexities and considerations (Schaefer, 2010).

Michel and Durdella's (2019) ethnographic case study expanded on this consideration by exploring experiences with first-generation, low-income Latinx college students and needs during this transition to obtaining a higher education. This study investigated social preparedness and familial support experienced by this population during their involvement in higher education (Michel & Durdella, 2019). The findings emphasized the importance of social support during these students' transitions, including support from faculty members, classmates, and family members, which increased feelings of belonging and success (Michel & Durdella, 2019). Evaluating this research from today's current climate of COVID-19 evoked inquiries around experiences of first-generation students during this global stressor. DeRossett et. al. (2021) responded to this curiosity in their study examining how experiences of first-generation college students differ from continuing generation college students during the COVID-19 pandemic. DeRossett et. al. (2021) reported that first generation college students are considered an "at-risk" population for dropping out, and may possess low academic motivation due to other factors. These factors include stress due to maintaining a job while in school, low SES, lower levels of self-efficacy and decreased sense of belonging, all of which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (DeRossett et. al., 2021). It is important to note that most first-generation college students come from marginalized communities and experience added layers of stress due to this (DeRossett et. al., 2021). The next section discusses the specific need for support from interpersonal relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Need for Support from Interpersonal Relationships

Research with students during transitions to school (Besser, et. al., 2020) show a common need for inter/intrapersonal support during these experiences. Other individuals impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic have collectively expressed a need for supportive interaction with their

peers to decrease feelings of stress and isolation (Lateef et. al., 2021; González-Sanguino et. al., 2020; Mukhtar, 2020).

Besser et. al. (2020) observed the adaptability of higher education university students during their transition to online learning. These students reported feelings of decreased self-worth due to isolation and altered living conditions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Besser et. al., 2020). Loneliness has been closely associated with feelings of helplessness, frustration and depression (Besser et. al., 2020; Lateef et. al., 2021). Besser et. al. (2020) proposed that self-worth is increased through interactions with others to make them feel valued and connected. This reported need for social interaction in response to the COVID-19 pandemic is experienced not just by students, but by other individuals as well.

Similarly, Philpot et. al. (2021) explored the change in social relationships of individuals within the initial stay-at-home phase of the pandemic to better understand the mental and physical effects that individuals experienced and potential effects on one's health. Their study showed that identifying females experienced an increased sense of loneliness in comparison to identifying males, even past the initial phase of the pandemic, fueling a possible correlation between stress and loneliness (Philpot, Ramar, Roellinger, Barry, Sharma, & Ebbert, 2021)

The psychosocial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has also been observed through experiences of parents and other adults (Lateef et. al., 2021; Mukhtar, 2020; González-Sanguino et. al., 2020). Lateef et. al. (2021) highlighted the needs of parents and the usefulness of informal and formal mental health support. Having access to informal support such as friendships and family members and various interpersonal relationships as well as formal support through professional mental health services could potentially meet the needs of the loneliness expressed by these individuals (Lateef et. al., 2021). Mukhtar (2020) furthered this point by observing

modified lifestyles as another effect of the pandemic. Contributing factors to psychosocial impact

on individuals and communities during this time included incidents of racism, misinformation

and disinformation, conspiracy theories, marginalization and violence and overwhelmed medical

centers (Muktar, 2020). González-Sanguino et. al. (2020) also provided considerations of the

need for greater psychosocial support in particularly vulnerable groups such as marginalized

communities. The next section dives further into themes of community artmaking during

transitions and continued stress such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Efficacy of Community Group Art-Making

This section reviewed the literature that discusses how collaborative art-making built

community and enhanced collective identity (Bublitz et al., 2019; Datlen et al., 2020; Price,

2019). Community art-making creates a sense of pride and self-reliance that increases prosocial

behavior and benefits the community, allowing for a space to express themselves and share their

values, emotions, and goals. Price (2019) discussed how it created a chance for community

members to come together, connect, and share their experiences while providing support for

group members in expressing their inner world through creating and sharing in a safe space.

Community art-making can become a symbol of what the community can achieve together by

building resilience, inspiring, and invigorating members of the community. Research highlighted

how art helped foster joy and meaningfulness in a community and how art-making in a

classroom cultivated a sense of solidarity, caring, and selective identity (Bublitz et al., 2019;

Datlen et al., 2020; Price, 2019).

Strengthening Communities

Datlen and Pandolfi (2020) identified how an art therapy group offered a safe and consistent space that encouraged creativity while also supporting its members. Similarly, Blatt-Gross (2017) highlighted that at the core of a community is the idea of bringing individuals, families, places, and experiences together. Bublitz et al. (2019) study demonstrated that collaborative art was transformative for a community and enhanced the connection with its members and created an opportunity for the community to come together over a similar goal while fostering innovation and growth. Further, this process promoted the feeling of appreciation, togetherness and allowed for members to feel a sense of belonging (Bublitz et al., 2019). Literature continued to explore how online art-making groups made social interactions possible with self-isolation and social distancing aspects of the pandemic (Datlen et al., 2020).

The effects of community art not only strengthens a community, but also strengthens the individual (Bublitz et al., 2019). The art creates an experience and an opportunity to provide healing for communities and individuals. Bublitz et al. (2019) highlighted how art allowed for community members to observe how art can be incorporated into their daily lives and created an appreciation for art. Moreover, collaborative art has been found to enhance group cohesion and offers an opportunity to establish connections, find commonalities, build social support, trust, and communication (Blatt-Gross, 2017; Salzano et al., 2013). Working together in a group creates ways to challenge and support one another toward enhancing self-exploration and personal growth (Price et al., 2019).

Recognizing Strengths

Collaborative expressive art enhanced wellbeing, calmness, joy, affirmation, and metaphor (Price et al., 2019). Art-making helped communities unlock spontaneity, playfulness,

expression, and creativity, providing a unique opportunity to externalize concerns and experience

healing (Price et al., 2019). People are intrinsically social, and art can be used as a vehicle to

enhance social interactions between members (Blatt-Gross, 2017). Art bound the group members

together and fostered bonds by its ability to communicate through creativity (Blatt-Gross, 2017).

After creating these bonds, working in a close-knit group can help reduce feelings of isolation

and burn-out (Salzano et al., 2013).

Collaborative art provides both emotional and tangible benefits to the community and its

individuals (Bublitz et al., 2019). It can benefit individuals academically, socially, mentally, and

emotionally by working towards their goals through enhanced group cohesion (Price et al.,

2019). As stated in the previous section, community art can support self-exploration and personal

growth (Price et al., 2019). It can also increase self-reliance, pride, and prosocial behaviors

(Bublitz et al., 2019). Community art allows for members to express their emotions and share

their views, ultimately enhancing their overall wellbeing (Bublitz et al., 2019). The following

section discussed the usefulness of community group art making during times of stress.

Community Group Art Making in Times of Stress

In moments of crisis, studies suggested there is power in having a space where you can

honor and hold experiences (Mohr, 2014; Boldt & Paul, 2011; Sonnone & Rochford, 2020).

Research showcased how collaborative art-making can help in the reduction of burnout and an

increase in social support (Salazano et al., 2013). Braus et al. (2020) highlighted how art can be

used as a tool and a coping skill for decreasing levels of stress and feelings of isolation. Potash

et. al. (2020) explored how the pandemic increased our ability to find social support through

virtual art workshops and groups, with emphasis that community art-making through a virtual

space can build resilience, boost self-expression, and create a safe space for the community to share their experiences and reconnect.

Managing Stress

During the pandemic, people are not only battling the different aspects within the COVID-19 pandemic but also mental health challenges, such as stress and trauma (Braus et al., 2020). Participating in an art program provided relief and escape during a stressful time (Mohr, 2014). Comfort and joy is offered to group members through the art, while affirming survival and identity (Mohr, 2014). Art not only helps people express discomfort and trauma, but it can also be empowering and imagine possibilities for positive change both internally and externally. Community art emphasized the need for a mindful framework, the practice of self-care, and self-compassion (Braus et al., 2020). Tapping into the natural ability to create and express oneself, individuals can manage stress and decrease feelings of isolation (Braus et al., 2020). Community art-making can be used to decrease work and academic stress and reduce burnout, while also decreasing stress associated with illness and military combat (Salazano et al., 2013; Morrison et. al 2018).

Morrison et. al. (2018) held a one-time, non-art therapist directed workshop which showed significant change in stress, emotion regulation and connection after the workshop was led. Participants identified as military cancer patients or survivors along with their support system and were asked questions based on an Emotions thermometer, a Silver Test Drawing and Draw a Story Guideline (Morrison et. al., 2018). The study demonstrated through qualitative interviews that a safe and open creative space even if led by a non-art therapist, could provide relief in times of stress, emotion regulation and connection between individuals sharing similar

experiences (Morrison et. al 2018). In this next section, Blatt-Gross (2017) explores how

collaborative art making also offers increased social support.

Increased Social Support

The establishment of art therapy groups is specifically explored in the literature (Boldt &

Paul, 2011; Sonnone & Rochford, 2020; Spier, 2010) as a way to assist students during times of

academic stress and provide inter/intrapersonal support. The impact of art therapy in group

settings provided students with the opportunity to not only process ongoing academic stress they

were facing, but to also process their experiences alongside others who felt similarly (Boldt &

Paul, 2011; Sonnone & Rochford, 2020). The creation of tangible art products and the

externalization process invited the students to validate and relate to experiences of others in their

group, decreasing feelings of isolation and increasing interconnectivity (Sonnone & Rochford,

2020). Boldt and Paul (2011) found during their study that the process of artmaking proved to be

critical in creating a healing and secure environment for the students, drawing emphasis to the

here-and-how and the interpersonal support that was being experienced. Additionally, Boldt and

Paul (2011) also acknowledged the overarching tool that art making offers to college students

during this developmental stage in their life, to gain insight and exploration into their evolving

identities.

With the digital landscape that has increased during the pandemic, social groups were

able to come together during times of isolation, and people could support one another from a

distance (Potash et al., 2020). With online networks and online art groups, people can establish

creative chains that increase resilience and positive impacts that can spread through connections

made through these groups (Potash et al., 2020). Art in social groups allows for the expression of

emotions, both positive and negative, while being contained in a safe environment (Potash et al.,

2020). Collaborative art facilitated connections and established commonalities between

community members (Blatt-Gross, 2017). Considerations regarding the use of various materials

in the art making process with community groups is discussed in this next session. The following

section will describe the importance of the role of the art process in community art making.

The Role of the Art Process and Materials in Community Group Art-Making

One of the greatest transitions experienced during a global pandemic is the setting in

which community or collaboration is taking place. The materials available to individuals may be

scarce and the setting in which a community collaborates may have been taken away or altered.

As noted by Rubin (1999) in Snir and Regev (2013), the importance of community arts and

togetherness is emphasized in the following research as revealed by the participants' access to

familiar or different types of art materials and ability to explore in a contained space with

therapists. If participants have shared experiences, emotions, or feelings, it can also generate a

sense of relief dependent on the material as indicated by Snir and Regev (2013). Another

important aspect of the effectiveness of collaborative art making in a community or group setting

is the role of the therapist. In Snir and Regev (2013), Rubin (1999) referred to the importance of

the art therapist's knowledge of the art materials so they could help the client find the best way

possible to explore their emotions. The art therapist is a participant's guide in the explorations

and creation process (Corem, S., Snir, S., & Regev, D., 2015). The client's relationship to the art

and the collaborators is just as important to the art making and the space where the processing is

taking place.

Access to Art Materials

This section highlighted the importance of access to materials and what that could offer

or create in the environment in which the materials are used. The research presented by Snir and

Regev (2013) implied that the relationship between a client and materials are essential in helping

guide the art therapy process. Students offered reactions to provided materials and reported

feelings of disappointment, pleasure, and excitement, which appear to be correlated with

structured versus less structured materials (Snir & Regev, 2013). What a therapist or clinician

introduces to a group could determine the outcome of the process and indicates that the types of

material and access could potentially lead to positive feelings or "negative perceptions of the

material, the reflections also indicated feelings of detachment from the work" (Snir & Regev,

2013). Participants can also potentially have a negative or positive experience with a therapist in

correlation to their own experiences and feelings with the materials being used in a session

(Corem, S. 2015). This potentially proved the potentiality of frustration or dislike when it comes

to lack of access or dislike of materials leading to a less pleasant experience for the participant

(Corem, S. 2015).

Significance of the Art Process

This section highlighted literature that discussed the importance of social connectedness

in a community with diverse cultures and how art can bring individuals together and create a

connection through the art making process. Additionally, the research by Beauregard 2020

revealed that although individuals may come from different communities and backgrounds,

collaboration and engagement in a creative process can lead to resiliency to further strengthen

the community. The art making process is described as a creation of community through the

establishment of rituals between all individuals that form the community in which they are a part

of (Beauregard, 2020). It's also suggested that creative expression in the community should be

cultivated so that it can lead to further exploration in the art process for each individual in the

community setting, which in turn fosters a connection within the group and community setting

Barndt, D. (2008). Overall, collaboration and the art making process collectively can provide

access to a distinctive form of social connection during difficult and transitory times.

Conclusion

This literature review examined the themes related to the research topic regarding the

efficacy of art therapy-based interventions during periods of stress and transitions experienced by

students, staff and faculty members at a Los Angeles university. By first highlighting the needs

of university students, this literature review examined how academic stress was exacerbated by

the COVID-19 pandemic, inter/intrapersonal support was a continuous need throughout

continued education and the significance of considerations of students with unique cultural

circumstances. Following this section, the literature review highlighted the efficacy of

collaborative group art making and its ability to enhance connectedness between communities to

decrease stress responses. Lastly, it detailed the role of the art process and materials in

community group art making, specifically the importance of access to materials and connection

that collaborative art making has offered to communities.

Research Approach

Researchers of this study aligned with a qualitative research design to explore the patterns and themes that emerged during in-person art therapy workshops that were facilitated by graduate students/faculty and staff and tailored towards university students, faculty and staff members, during the COVID-19 pandemic. A qualitative case study provided in-depth data about a single subject or multiple subjects by exploring a specific phenomena through structured data analysis such as focus groups and observational data, creating a multi-faceted perspective approach to understand the findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Our study is focused on exploring our research question through focus groups involving art making with participants and facilitators involved in the art therapy workshops during the Fall 2021 semester at Loyola Marymount University.

Our reasoning for following this specific research design was due to the researchers' focus on illuminating the participant and facilitator experience that could possibly provide emergent clinical themes through diverse data sources (Greenwood, Leach, Lucock, & Noble, 2007). Additionally, providing opportunities that inquire about the subjects' experience provided the subjects with more agency of their perceived self-reporting (Robb, 2014). Furthering our rationale for incorporating focus groups as a form of data collection, we aimed to explore subjects engaging with one another in a natural setting that could provide additional insight of clinical themes that the researchers did not investigate through other data sources, highlighting even more of the importance of the participants' perspectives, "emotional responses" (Asawa, 2009) and reactions of their experiences through a diverse data collection (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 365, as cited in Asawa, 2009).

Methods

Definition of Terms

This section defines terms used throughout this research project. Key terms and concepts may have multiple or limited meanings attached to their defnition. Researchers used resources incorporating the dictionary, associated literature, and other terms used by other researchers to provide consistency in meaning throughout this research proposal.

Community Art making

Bublitz, M. G 2019 describes "Community art making" to, "community-based, collaborative arts initiatives enhance collective identity (Neel and Dentith 2004), build community (Jones 1988), and address community problems (Fisher 1996)."

College of Communication of Fine Art

Researchers used the following Loyola Marymount University definition of "CFA/Communication of Fine Arts", **"**a dynamic thinking, creating, and performing community that is wholly committed to exploring creative and critical expression as an essential component of educating the whole person."

Creative Process

Researchers used the following to best describe "Creative Process" as written by Botella et. al. 2013, the "creative process refers to the study of "the succession of thoughts and actions that lead to original and adapted ideas" (Lubart et al., 2003, p. 85). In this regard, the creative process refers to the application of the creative ability of the person to a creative type of production."

Crisis

Merriam-Webster definition, "an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending."

Faculty

Researchers also used the following Merriam-Webster definition of "Faculty" which describes, "The teaching and administrative staff and those members of the administration having academic rank in an educational institution."

Pandemic

Additionally, Researchers also used the following Merriam-Webster definition of "Pandemic" occurring over a wide geographic area (such as multiple countries or continents) and typically affecting a significant proportion of the population"

Process

Researchers also used the following Merriam-Webster definition of "Process" that best describes its use as a "a natural phenomenon marked by gradual changes that lead toward a particular result."

Staff

Researchers used the following Merriam-Webster definition of "Staff" that best describes its use, "the personnel who assist…" to describe staff members other employees of the university apart from faculty.

Student

Researchers also used the following Merriam-Webster definition of "Student" that best describes

its use; "a person who attends a school, college, or university."

University

Finally, researchers used the following Merriam-Webster definition of "University" that best

describes its use, "an institution of higher learning providing facilities for teaching and research

and authorized to grant academic degrees."

Design of Study

This section provides an explanation of the procedures utilized in this qualitative case

study. This study aimed to explore the efficacy and clinical themes of art therapy-based

interventions with students, staff, and faculty members at Loyola Marymount University. During

the Fall 2021 semester and the return to in-person classes on the LMU Campus, the Department

of Marital and Family Therapy with Specialized Training in Art Therapy offered a range of art

therapy services to the community through the Helen B. Landgarten Art Therapy Clinic. Services

included outdoor monthly in-person group art therapy workshops offered to university

community members, including students, faculty, and staff. The qualitative design will consist of

the following data sets; 1) a participant focus group including an art making directive, and 2) a

facilitator focus group including an art making directive.

The following subsections describe the methods used for deciding on sampling, the data

gathering process, and the approach for analyzing data.

Sampling

The subjects of this study were selected based on their enrollment or employment within LMU's College of Communication and Fine Arts. The participants of this study fell into two main categories; CFA Art Therapy Workshop participants and CFA Art Therapy Workshop facilitators. Both groups included consenting adults, representing a wide range of ages, genders, and cultural backgrounds. CFA Art Therapy Workshop Facilitators included art therapy graduate student trainees, faculty and staff members within the Marital and Family Therapy with Specialized Training in the Art Therapy Department.

Gathering of Data

The data collected for this study came from 1) a participant focus group including art making, and 2) a facilitator focus group with art making.

Facilitator and Participant Focus Groups. Researchers will conduct two separate focus groups in-person with a) participants and, b) art therapy workshop facilitators that will include a reflective artmaking directive created by the researchers. This art directive will provide space for expressing their unique perspectives and experiences during the time of transitioning back to in-person services with the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic to provide a deeper understanding of the efficacy and influence of HBL's in-person art therapy workshops to the university community.

Analysis of Data

Researchers will analyze data resulting from the 2 data sets; 1) participant focus group, and 2) facilitator focus group, both including discussions and artwork that were reflections from

the workshops. The participant and facilitator focus group data will be systematically assessed

and analyzed through the lens of efficacy of the intended goals of the workshops; managing

stress and building community support. The data will also be examined through cross-analysis

for any emergent clinical themes. This process will begin by reviewing all data together and

identifying areas that fit into the categories of stress management and building community

support. These categories will then be used to code each data set separately and collectively. The

researchers will then compare and contrast each data set for the overall efficacy of stress

management and community building. Any additional clinical themes that emerged will also be

acknowledged.

Presentation of Data

The following section describes the data collected that examines the efficacy of interventions and clinical themes that emerged from the Helen B. Landgarten's art therapy services offered to members of the university amidst the transition back to in person services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two separate focus groups were held virtually via Zoom to gather data for the purpose of this study and will be presented in this section. Researchers first present data collected from a focus group with four facilitators and then present data collected from a focus group of three participants. The focus group participants were given the opportunity to share their experiences and engage in an art activity to support them in discussing their involvement in these workshops. Consent for their engagement, recording of the focus group and the use of their art work for the purpose of this research study was gained at the start of each meeting and was approved by the university review board..

Facilitator Focus Group

To maintain confidentiality of our facilitator's identifying information, they will be referred to as Facilitator A, Facilitator B, Facilitator C and Facilitator D. Facilitator participants were core faculty members and/or second year art therapy graduate students. This focus group was held virtually and began by sharing with the facilitators their role in contributing information to the overall purpose of this research study by examining the efficacy of the interventions and clinical themes that emerged from the workshops they facilitated. After this brief introduction, researchers invited facilitators to reflect on the preparation they took to return to in-person services. Researchers welcomed facilitators to share a word, feeling or thought that represented this experience for them. Facilitators expressed mixed responses to this reflection, some relating to other's feelings of anxiety and some expressing feelings of excitement and curiosity.

Facilitator C stated, "It was weird [...] a lot of fear", while Facilitator A expressed, "I was really excited to be doing something outside of my home, so I was really looking forward to it". Facilitator B communicated similar feelings to both of these shared experiences stating, "I agree with all of the above. Excitement [and] apprehension, and definitely weird".

Facilitators were then welcomed to engage in some art making for the next portion of the focus group. Researchers invited facilitators to create an art piece that represented their experience in facilitating the art therapy workshops in the fall of 2021. Facilitators were given 20-minutes, using their choice of materials to engage in this activity individually. When finished, researchers offered facilitators time to share and engage in dialogue with other facilitators about their art piece and experiences. Facilitators collectively expressed that witnessing the process of the participants largely contributed to their experiences. Facilitator D (Figure 1) described their recollection of the "phases" that went into planning these workshops with the intention to "empower". Facilitator D stated, "we had this conversation around really not treating it as a fresh start but treating it as the end of a chapter [...] without necessarily acting as though it was a completely new phase". Facilitator D elaborated on their experience during the initial and final phases of the workshop, stating, "I remember standing up there in a mask and thinking, this is like kind of weird [...] that's all kind of awkward at first, and then the last phase I kind of drew was the actual table where people were drawing". During this experience, Facilitator D described feeling "impressed and moved" and noticing "how badly people seemed to really want to share [...] and support each other". Further, Facilitator D expressed that, "there was such a range in the content that people shared about, people were talking about their experience coming back to campus as being like a return to a safe space, which I felt was something that I hadn't

considered". Lastly, Facilitator D commented, "I mostly just felt like people really do want this

[...] and would probably benefit from something like this regularly. That was my big takeaway".
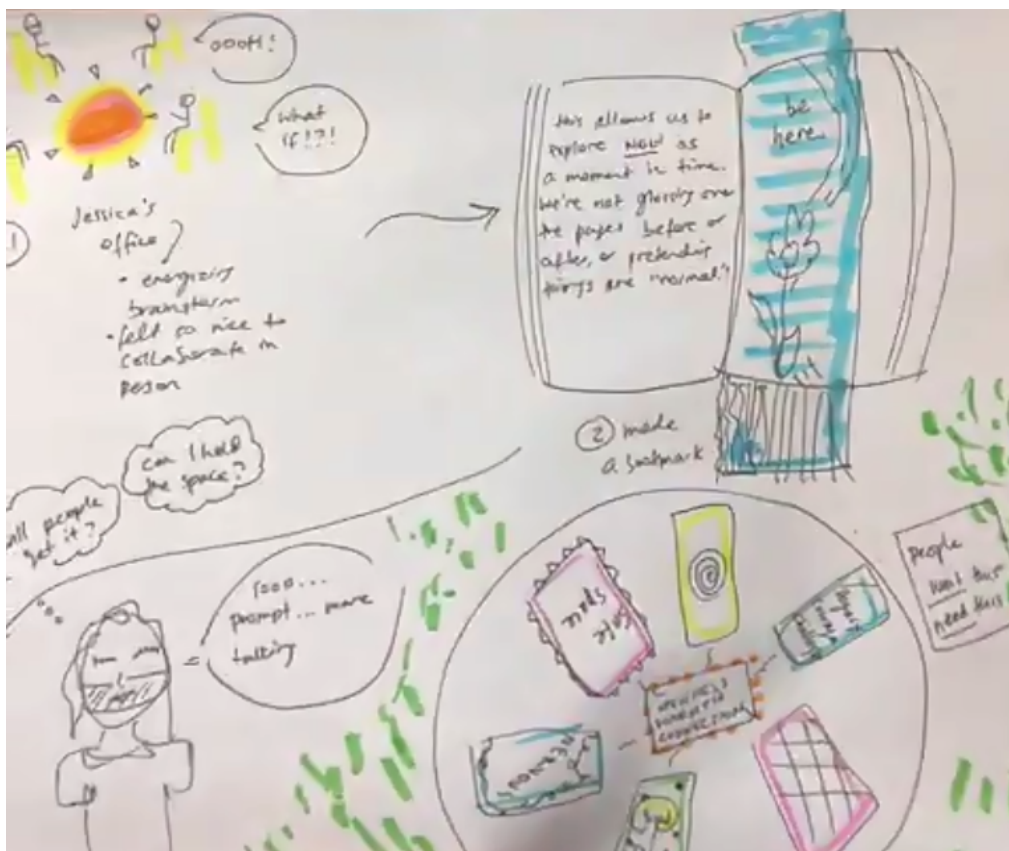
Figure 1: Facilitator D

Similarly, Facilitator C (Figure 2) expressed, "After the workshop, I felt like something

nice had been able to unfold for each and every participant [...] it made me feel peaceful."

Facilitator C continued by reflecting on the prompt that was given to the participants of the

workshops, " the bookmark was so interesting because we can take it with us. It was like a

transitional object. We asked them to reflect on how the transition back on campus had happened

for them and to create a piece, and everybody came up with something different." Facilitator C

also reflected on an experience they had following the workshops and seeing a participant with

one of the objects they had created. Facilitator C stated, "[They] had the button on [their] bag,

and [...] [they] were carrying it with [them] and it had been more than three months." In addition

to facilitating the workshops, Facilitator C also engaged as a participant of one of the workshops.

Facilitator C reflected on this perspective, stating, "I really had a magical experience, because I

hadn't been around people doing art outside for a while. Having facilitators that were offering the

space, I really felt held."

Figure 2: Facilitator C

Next, Facilitator A (Figure 3) reflected on their initial feelings of facilitating, stating,

"The engagement for me was very organic [...] I kind of just wanted to be there in the space and

feel the participants." Facilitator A expressed, "it felt like we were individual worlds trying to

come together and kind of root ourselves back [...] It kind of led us to this sense of how do we

find our organic way back to well being." When reflecting on their image, Facilitator A stated,

"the roots were upside down. I mean it just kind of was what it was but all together, it felt very

organic. I guess, kind of like a virus."

Figure 3: Facilitator A

Facilitator B began by reflecting on details represented in her image, "There's the mask,

and the glasses fogging up [and] this road. At the bottom here you can see that there's what I've

intended to be a fence." Following this observation, Facilitator B shared about the prompt that

was offered during her time facilitating a workshop, "I provided rocks for the staff as an attempt

to have both as a transitional object, but also like a weight as they have like a heaviness [and]

grounding to them. There was little direction, other than decorating the rock and whatever they

wanted that represented what coming back meant for them." Connecting to the reflection made

by Facilitator C, Facilitator B focused on the idea of providing participants with a transitional

object, "This became something they could take back to their office to put on their desk, as a

representation for being reunited with their space, or on their way back walking to their office

they could planted somewhere on campus to sort of reclaim their sense of place." Facilitator B

chose to include a rock as a part of her art work and reflected more on the meaning of this,

stating, "There's a big crack on the rock, [...] reflecting now that represents my own feelings of

coming back to this place that feels like home to me, and having it be broken, in a sense there

was something that was broken for all of us. We were back, but it wasn't normal and the sense of

a fracture that occurred, and that we were all attempting to, you know, move forward in the safest

ways that we can on our journey back home."
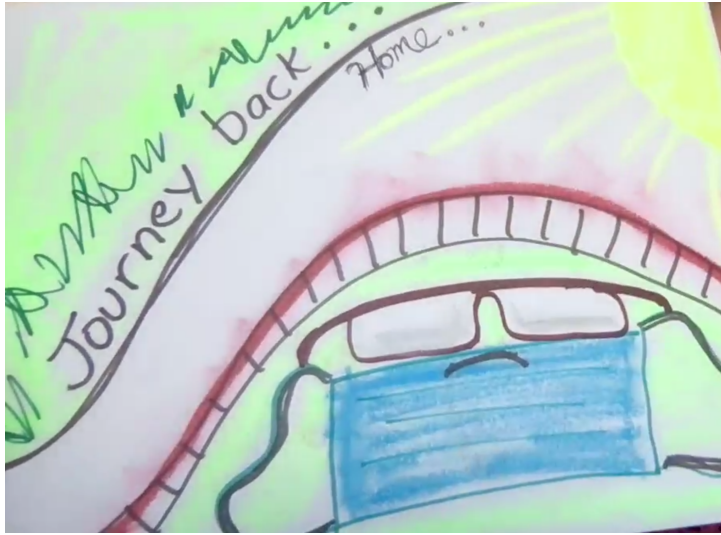
Figure 4.1: Facilitator B   *Figure 4.2: Facilitator B*

Figure 4.3: Facilitator B

Lastly, there were several comments about being outside and how it offered an emotional, physical and mental reprieve for facilitators. Facilitator C reflected: "the atmosphere [...] the greenery of the grass was so delightful for my eyes" and Facilitator B agreed, stating: "I was able to take off my mask [...] and being outside felt like a safe place to take off your mask and be in the beautiful sun on the grass."

Participant Focus Group

To maintain confidentiality of our participant's identifying information, they will be referred to as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3 and Participant 4. Participants were staff members and/or first year art therapy graduate students.

Upon initial reflection of the transition back to campus in-person, Participant 1 expressed being "anxious." After the art-making activity, Participant 1 shared first about the process and content of their artwork (see Figure 1): " [...] a lot of anxiety was from just being completely new

on campus, not as much as relating to the pandemic. But my drawing, I think, with the workshop, I wanted to capture the theme of community. [...] And I felt like the area that we were in, up by the clinic and whatnot. It just felt like it's little, like a safe little haven. And I remember the weather being really bright and nice and sunny and beautiful. And I really felt kind of like held there. And also really excited for what was to come. It was the first time really getting to know some of the people that were in the second year of the program. I just felt like this theme of community and growth." In reference to their experience with the art directive, Participant 1 elaborated: "I could take this piece [bookmark] and actually apply it throughout my journey like putting it into my textbooks, that's how I've been using it. And I just feel like it serves as kind of like a totem of like this was the beginning, and you're going through the process, and also the words that I put on it are really good reminders for when I'm feeling overwhelmed." Participant 1 reflected upon the tangibility of the art therapy workshop's materials, specifically, the bookmark and rock art prompt and environment: " I can use it in every chapter as I move through the book. It's like a placeholder. And I can always come back and return to it versus it being something in my journal. And I also think the environment played a really big role in just lifting my spirits and making me feel excited to be there."

Figure 5: Participant 1

Participant 2 expressed their experience transitioning back to school in-person stating: "Overall overwhelmed. [..] I think because there was no real transition." Regarding their content and process, Participant 2 described their artwork (see Figure 2): "I drew a storm with, like, I guess this is like the eye of the storm just like the one moment of calm. [...] last semester was terrible, coming to those workshops, was just like that one hour of the day where it was sunny and beautiful and I was outside, and I was calm, and I was just drawing or coloring, or making art with my fellow staff members and everything was okay in that moment, I call it like the peace within the chaos. The time to connect and ground myself reminded me to slow down, which [..] I think I wrote 'slow down' on my bookmark." Participant 2 further elaborated on a workshop's

art directive revolving around a rock that, "The materials I think had a big effect on the impact, [...] it was also the fact that it was a rock and it was incredibly like grounding." Reflecting on the setting that the workshops were being hosted, Participant 2 shared that, "For me when I'm in my office, I just kind of forget about the rest of the world and then when I'm outside, [...] there's things happening and there's wind and and sun like I'm chilly and I'm warm at the same time. [...] it definitely impacted my mood and how I probably approached the art itself."

Figure 6: Participant 2: "Peace within the chaos."

Participant 3 conveyed their experience returning back in person on campus that, " I felt relief coming back, I felt like I was coming back to normalcy." Concerning their artwork (see Figure 3) and elaborating on the previous transition during 2020, Participant 3 explained their content to the group: "this is a house, a structure I built, because that's what I felt like coming back . [...] we were at home, the days would blur into each other, and there was all this chaos with everything going on in the world. [...] coming back to work was kind of a relief because there was structure, [...] I knew what I do every day and coming to work became like grounding

for me. the workshops in particular, it was something to look forward to." Concerning the rock

directive, "[...] the rock actually I really enjoyed, to the point where I started painting rocks at

home. it was a grounding experience, [...] the workshops took me out of chaos and disorder and

created some structure." Participant 3 elaborated the impact the environment had on the

workshops: "I get to see that setting every day. So that helps a lot. [...] this lovely, almost Zen

type environment, so that was the ideal place to have an exercise like this. [...] the environment

has everything to do with it."

Figure 7: Participant 3

Analysis of Data

The data collected from this qualitative case study was analyzed in order to explore the efficacy and clinical themes of art therapy services offered to Loyola Marymount University amidst the transition back to in-person services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data consisted of two data sets; 1) data from a focus group with art therapy workshop facilitators and 2) data collected from a focus group with art therapy workshop participants. The intention of the art therapy workshops was to offer university students and staff opportunities to manage stress and build community through group art making. Therefore, analysis was conducted by first examining each data set separately for efficacy; effectiveness in providing opportunities for community building and effectiveness in providing opportunities for stress management. Additionally, each data set was analyzed separately for additional clinical themes. Researchers analyzed data by first reviewing and coding each focus group transcript (facilitator and participant) for examples of community building and stress management. Next, researchers separately reviewed focus group transcripts again for other emergent clinical themes. After each data set was analyzed separately for efficacy and clinical themes, both data sets were cross-analyzed to identify the overall efficacy and clinical themes within both Participant and Facilitator experiences of the workshops.

Facilitator Focus Group

Efficacy

Community Building. The re-establishment of community support was initially highlighted through the experiences of facilitators of the art therapy workshops. The opportunity to offer these workshops appeared to be effective in creating a sense of support amongst members of the university community. Facilitators related to one another on the experience of

re-engaging, grounding and finding a safe space. Facilitator A (Figure 3) expressed, "it felt like we were individual worlds trying to come together and kind of root ourselves back [...] It kind of led us to this sense of how do we find our organic way back to well-being." Following this reflection, Facilitator B stated, "there was something that was broken for all of us, [...] we were all attempting to, you know, move forward in the safest ways that we can on our journey back home." Facilitator D described feeling "impressed and moved" and noticing "how badly people seemed to really want to share [...] and support each other." Further, Facilitator D expressed that, "there was such a range in the content that people shared about, people were talking about their experience coming back to campus as being like a return to a safe space, which I felt was something that I hadn't considered."

Stress Management. Regarding the intention to provide opportunities to manage stress, researchers discovered that facilitators' responses pointed to the contribution of the art and physical environment in accomplishing this goal within the workshops. Facilitators resonated with the usefulness of prompts offered to participants during the workshops. The creation of what several facilitators named as "a transitional object", supported participants in managing stress related to the transition back from the COVID-19 pandemic. Facilitator B shared, "I provided rocks for the staff as an attempt to have both as a transitional object [...] This became something they could take back to their office to put on their desk, as a representation for being reunited with their space, or on their way back walking to their office they could plant somewhere on campus to sort of reclaim their sense of place". Facilitator C also commented on the efficacy of the prompts offered and art product, stating, "The bookmark was so interesting [...] it was like a transitional object".

The setting of these workshops also appeared to contribute to the experience and effectiveness in creating a peaceful environment, which was in line with the goals of the workshop to assist in decreasing stress amongst participants and facilitators. The choice to hold the workshops outdoors, due to COVID-19 regulations and availability in space, offered feelings of tranquility and relief for facilitators. Facilitator C reflected: "the atmosphere [...] the greenery of the grass was so delightful for my eyes". Facilitator B agreed, and specifically reflected on the ability to have some relief from regulations related to COVID-19, stating: "I was able to take off my mask [...] and being outside felt like a safe place to take off your mask and be in the beautiful sun on the grass."

Clinical Themes

Varying Emotions with Returning to In-person Classes & Workshops . One theme that arose for facilitators, were the varying emotions of how they were feeling returning to in-person classes and workshops. Facilitators grappled with the uncertainty of providing in person classes and workshops at the school were initially reflected upon. Feeling a sense of relief presented itself with Facilitator A expressing, "I was really excited to be doing something outside of my home, so I was really looking forward to it." Facilitator B communicated similar feelings by expressing, "I agree with all of the above…" Feelings of fear were described by Facilitator C when explaining, "It was weird [...] a lot of fear" and similarly Facilitator B expressed, "...Excitement [and] apprehension, and definitely weird". Facilitator D also stated, "I remember standing up there in a mask and thinking, this is like kind of weird [...] that's all kind of awkward at first."

Providing an Environment For Creation and Support. Another theme revealed was facilitators' feelings towards creating and providing an environment where participants felt safe

to create and express themselves. Facilitator D reflected on noticing "how badly people seemed to really want to share [...] and support each other." Facilitator D also expressed that, "there was such a range in the content that people shared about, people were talking about their experience coming back to campus as being like a return to a safe space, which I felt was something that I hadn't considered". Facilitator D stated, "I mostly just felt like people really do want this [...] and would probably benefit from something like this regularly." Facilitator A expressed how the space welcomed conversation and engagement, "The engagement for me was very organic [...] I kind of just wanted to be there in the space and feel the participants…it felt like we were individual worlds trying to come together and kind of root ourselves back [...] It kind of led us to this sense of how do we find our organic way back to well being". Facilitator C reflected that, "the atmosphere [...] the greenery of the grass was so delightful for my eyes" and Facilitator B agreed, stating: "I was able to take off my mask [...] and being outside felt like a safe place to take off your mask and be in the beautiful sun on the grass." Not only did the facilitators view the importance of providing a welcoming environment, but also providing the workshops offered them an opportunity to take a break from the day to day. The environment also created additional support, Facilitator D explained being "impressed and moved" and noticing "how badly people seemed to really want to share [...] and support each other". Facilitator D also mentioned how beneficial creating a supportive environment could be and expressing "I mostly just felt like people really do want this [...] and would probably benefit from something like this regularly."

Effectiveness of Transitional Objects. An additional clinical theme that came up for the facilitators was the effectiveness of transitional objects for participants and the significance they could carry. Facilitator B expressed that during one of the workshops, "I provided rocks for the staff as an attempt to have both as a transitional object, but also like a weight as they have like a

heaviness [and] grounding to them….” Facilitator B went on to express the purpose of the

transitional object, “This became something they could take back to their office to put on their

desk, as a representation for being reunited with their space, or on their way back walking to

their office they could plant it somewhere on campus to sort of reclaim their sense of place.”

Facilitator C who was also a participant at one of the workshops, described a directive given to

participants where they would leave the workshop with a transitional object. Facilitator C went

on to reflect “ the bookmark was so interesting because we can take it with us. It was like a

transitional object…” Facilitator C experienced seeing participants carry the transitional objects

and reflected “[They] had the button on [their] bag, and [...] [they] were carrying it with [them]

and it had been more than three months.” Overall, facilitators found it important to provide the

participants with an object that had meaning behind it, while also being able to move it or move

with it, while providing them with grounding and comfort during stressful times.

       Challenges when transitioning to In-person Classes & Workshops. Facilitator B

shared details that described limitations and challenges that had to be overcome when returning

back to in person, represented in *Figure 4.1: Facilitator B* by saying “There's the mask, and the

glasses fogging up [and] this road. At the bottom here you can see that there's what I've intended

to be a fence”. When describing *Figure 4.3: Facilitator B,* Facilitator B expresses additional

limitations in stating, “There's a big crack on the rock, [...] reflecting now that represents my own

feelings of coming back to this place that feels like home to me, and having it be broken, in a

sense there was something that was broken for all of us. We were back, but it wasn't normal and

the sense of a fracture that occurred, and that we were all attempting to, you know, move forward

in the safest ways that we can on our journey back home”.

Participant Focus Group

Efficacy

Stress Management. The workshops provided a general sense of stress management and grounding qualities for participants. While recalling the environment influencing their mood into a more calm state, Participant 1 stated, "When I'm outside, [...] there's wind and and sun like I'm chilly and I'm warm at the same time and [...] it definitely impacted my mood and how I probably approached the art itself."Additionally, participant 2 described their artwork as "peace within the chaos" and reflected on difficulties they experienced during the Fall 2021 semester, while highlighting that the workshops they attended were a "[...] time to connect and ground myself, reminded me to slow down. Coming to those workshops, was just like that one hour of the day where it was sunny and beautiful and I was outside, and I was calm, and I was just drawing or coloring, or making art with my fellow staff members and everything was okay in that moment, I call it like the peace within the chaos." Similarly, participant 3 described their artwork (Figure 2) and transition describing it as "chaos" and that "the workshops [were] a grounding exercise for me [..] the workshops took me out of chaos and disorder and created more structure… [..] this lovely, very, almost a Zen type, you know, environment, you know so that was the ideal place to have an exercise like this […] So, the environment has everything to do with it"

Community-building. Participant 1 additionally shared their experience within their artwork: "I just felt like this theme of community and growth. And I felt like the workshop, for me at least I felt like I definitely got what I came for which was just being able to be together and to get to know other people, and through art therapy as well." Participant 1 also commented on feelings of being together in what felt like a safe space and how this contributed to a sense of support stating, "It just felt like [...] a safe little haven. And I remember the weather being really

bright and nice and sunny and beautiful. And I really felt kind of like held there." Participant 2

described that their colleagues also participated in the same art workshops as them and added: "it

was really nice moment we got to know each other as people instead of colleagues for an hour."

Clinical themes

   Art Materials. Participants resonated with the art materials offered and appreciated that

they could use as physical reminders throughout their journey. Participant 1 stated, "We made a

bookmark. And it was all of the things that we thought would, like, including different topics or

ideas or images that we thought would support our journey as this was like the start of this path,

we were all on." The importance of materials was also brought up by the other participants.

Participant 3 shared, "So, it was the medium, as much as anything, but I think the symbol of the

rock was the main thing for me." Participant 2 mentioned, "the materials I think had a big effect

on the impact, […] I mean I don't paint rocks at home but it felt like I think it was also the fact

that it was a rock and it was incredibly like grounding it came from the ground so it just kind of

made a lot of sense in my body too." Following the reflections of the other participants,

Participant 1 shared, "I think the use of materials was probably the idea that it's something.

When we make art and it's just a drawing on a page, I think it loses its ability to be in certain

areas where it's useful. Like, with a rock, I'd imagine putting it in one of my planters and

walking by it every day and that becomes something that I go to and I water and I see it and it's a

recurring theme. With the bookmark, I can use it in every chapter as I move through the book.

It's like a placeholder. And I can always come back and return to it versus it being something in

my journal."

Physical Environment. The environment where the workshops were held played a significant role for the participants, with Participant 3 stating the environment is "this lovely, very, almost a Zen type, you know, environment, you know so that that was the ideal place to have an exercise like this […] So no, the environment has everything to do with it." Participant 1 shared, "And I felt like the area that we were in, up at by the clinic and whatnot. It just felt like it's little, like a safe little haven. And I remember the weather being really bright and nice and sunny and beautiful. And I really felt kind of like being held there." Upon hearing this, Participant 2 stated, "coming to those workshops, was just like that one hour of the day where it was sunny and beautiful and I was outside, and I was calm, and I was just drawing or coloring, or making art with my fellow staff members and everything was okay in that moment, I call it like the peace within the chaos." Participant 2 continued with mentioning, "When I'm outside, [...] there's wind and and sun like I'm chilly and I'm warm at the same time and [...] it definitely impacted my mood and how I probably approached the art itself." Participant 1 also mentioned, "I think the environment really helped make the workshop what it was."

Overall Efficacy and Clinical Themes

Efficacy

The efficacy of the workshops pertaining to stress management and community building was highlighted in both data sets. Community building was highlighted by providing a space for support and creativity. Stress management was emphasized through the physical environment and the process of artmaking

In the facilitator focus group, community building was highlighted by creating a sense of support. Facilitator A stated, "it felt like we were individual worlds trying to come together and kind of root ourselves back [...] It kind of led us to this sense of how do we find our organic way

back to well-being." Facilitator D emphasized feeling "impressed and moved" and stated "how badly people seemed to really want to share [...] and support each other." Whereas in the participant focus group, community building was expressed more through the artwork. Participant 1 mentioned, "I just felt like this theme of community and growth. And I felt like the workshop, for me at least I felt like I definitely got what I came for which was just being able to be together and to get to know other people, and through art therapy as well." Participant 2 added, "it was a really nice moment, we got to know each other as people instead of colleagues for an hour."

In the facilitator focus group, both artmaking and the environment contributed to the decrease in stress for participants. Facilitators brought up that creating "transitional objects" aided in stress reduction. Facilitator B shared, "I provided rocks for the staff as an attempt to have both as a transitional object [...] This became something they could take back to their office to put on their desk, as a representation for being reunited with their space, or on their way back walking to their office they could plant somewhere on campus to sort of reclaim their sense of place." Participant 2 described the workshops as a "[...] time to connect and ground myself, reminded me to slow down." The physical environment contributed towards decreasing stress amongst participants and facilitators. Facilitator C mentioned, "the atmosphere [...] the greenery of the grass was so delightful for my eyes."

Clinical Themes

As noted, clinical themes in the facilitator group include varying emotions associated with returning to in-person classes and workshops, providing an environment for creation and

support, effectiveness of transitional objects and challenges when transitioning to in-person

Classes and Workshops.

Firstly, the facilitator group had feelings of relief when recalling the transition back to

in-person, "...Excitement [and] apprehension, and definitely weird" as stated by Facilitator D

when returning to campus. Similarly Participant 2 described a similar sense of relief as, "peace

within the chaos." Participant 3 reflected the transition as "chaos."

Additionally, the facilitator group felt as though it was important for them to create and

provide this space for participants to engage in. Facilitators reflected on their observations on

how helpful it was providing the community with a space where they were free to express, to

explore their emotions and feel supported. Similarly, for the participant group it was important to

be a part of the community and be in an environment where they felt contained and that was

outside of the norm, specifically being outside with others who are their colleagues that had an

opportunity to engage differently as stated by Participant 2, "it was really nice moment we got to

know each other as people instead of colleagues for an hour."

Furthermore, the environment played a large role in both the facilitators' and the

participants' experience when present at the workshops. The environment provided "a safe little

haven" as shared by Participant 1. For facilitators, the environment allowed for sharing of similar

and different experiences as stated by Facilitator A, "The engagement for me was very organic

[...] I kind of just wanted to be there in the space and feel the participants…it felt like we were

individual worlds trying to come together and kind of root ourselves back."

Moreover, participants expressed the importance of connecting with the art materials, in

relation to the art directives that then provided a symbol, a transitional object, or a piece that

brought meaning to them or relief during times of stress. Participant 2 described it as "[...] time

to connect and ground myself, reminded me to slow down." Having access to these materials

supplied them with a chance to form their artwork into a transitional object. Participant 3

reflected that "the workshops [were] a grounding exercise for me [..] the workshops took me out

of chaos and disorder and created more structure." Facilitators felt it was important to

provide the participants with an object that had further meaning behind it that could be

implemented in their daily lives. As reflected by Facilitator B, the purpose of the transitional

object, "..became something they could take back to their office to put on their desk, as a

representation for being reunited with their space…"

Lastly, there were some challenges that came with returning to in-person classes and

workshops. Facilitator B reflected about *Figure 4.1: Facilitator B*, "There's the mask, and the

glasses fogging up [and] this road. At the bottom here you can see that there's what I've intended

to be a fence". And later reflecting about *Figure 4.3: Facilitator B,* "There's a big crack on the

rock, [...] reflecting now that represents my own feelings of coming back to this place that feels

like home to me, and having it be broken… we were all attempting to, you know, move forward

in the safest ways that we can on our journey back home".

Findings

In review, the purpose of this study was to explore the efficacy and emergent clinical themes amongst participants and facilitators of art therapy workshops offered to students and staff during transitions back to in-person activities. Main objectives of these workshops were to offer participants opportunities to manage stress and build community during times of continued uncertainty. The study was conducted through a qualitative case study-lens that examined the efficacy of art therapy services and the emergence of other clinical themes.. Researchers obtained and analyzed data comprised of two separate focus groups; one for participants, one for facilitators.Focus groups included group discussion,group art-making and opportunity for discussion about their experience of the art therapy workshops. Analysis of the data suggested that the art therapy workshops showed effectiveness in addressing its two main objectives which were to provide opportunities to decrease stress and to build community support. Additionally, analysis of data illuminated several other clinical themes specifically related to the role that art played in this process that are unique yet connected to the workshop's main objectives. The following sections will detail the other clinical themes that were found, as depicted in Figure #8 , Connections Between Key Findings.

Figure 8: Connections Between Key Findings
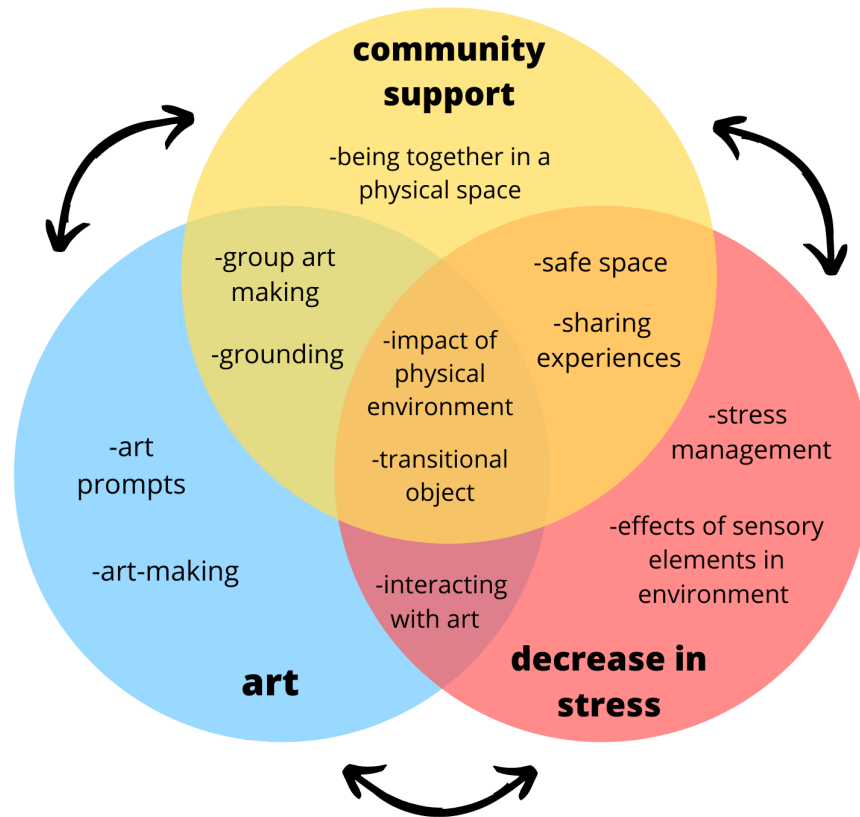
Effective in Decreasing Stress

　　Researchers discovered that the workshop was effective in establishing its intention to

decrease stress. Facilitators and Participants shared reflections during the focus groups that

illuminated this finding and suggested that the workshops aided them in decreasing and

managing their stress during a time of transition back to campus during the COVID-19

pandemic. The importance of stress management during times of transition was observed in this

study and is supported by the literature discussed below. Researchers also found that the sensory

elements within the physical environment of the workshop contributed to decreased levels of

stress. Researchers found that the impact of sensory elements within the environment was

supported by data gathered from both the participant and facilitator focus groups, but there is an

opportunity for more research within the literature to support this emergent theme.

The Need of Stress Management During Times of Transition

For instance, one of the researchers' findings came from discovering how important it

was for individuals to manage their stress during transitional periods. According to Grasser and

Javanbakht (2021), the therapeutic art workshops demonstrated, "Creative arts and movement

therapies promote creativity and adaptability to better develop cognitive flexibility while

enhancing self-regulation and self-direction, adaptive skills that are protective in the face of

stress." Through the literature you can also find research making note of students and other

individuals needing additional support during the shared transitionary period (Besser, et. al.,

2020) expressing a need for social interaction and connection with their peers to decrease

feelings of stress and isolation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic (Lateef et. al., 2021;

González-Sanguino et. al., 2020; Mukhtar, 2020). This is confirmed by several facilitators

expressing the intent of including a transitional object that would support participants of the

workshops in managing stress related to the transition back from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sensory Elements within a Physical Environment Contributing to a Decrease in Stress

Upon analyzing the data gathered from Facilitator and Participant focus groups, the

researchers recognized a common emergent theme across both data sets within the theme of

decreasing stress. Researchers found that both Facilitators and Participants reflected on the

impact of the sensory elements of the physical environment during the workshops and how this

contributed to an overall decrease in stress. When reflecting on their experience facilitating and

their art made during the focus group, facilitators recalled elements of the outdoor environment

where the workshops took place. Several facilitators commented on how being outside offered a

sense of relief from the COVID-19 mask mandate, and feelings of tranquility and delight from the scenery surrounding the workshops. In line with these reflections, the participants of the workshops recalled how the sensory elements of the environment contributed to their experiences within the group. Participants also identified feelings of tranquility, specifically Participant 3 referring to the surrounding areas of the workshop as "almost a Zen type [...] environment." Participants identified feelings of peacefulness as direct responses to the environment and felt the sensory elements of being outside contributed greatly to the atmosphere within the workshop. These recollections suggest that the sensory elements within the environment played a role in making participants and facilitators feel calm and less stressed during and after the workshops. A study by Boldt and Paul (2011) demonstrated how environmental elements contributed to creating containment and grounding in a group setting. Boldt and Paul (2011) examined therapeutic groups held amongst a university community and found that these groups resulted in decreased stress and connectivity amongst students. Boldt and Paul (2011) briefly explored the setting in which the groups were held, acknowledging how the educational space used for these groups were reimagined to create a sense of familiarity and exploration amongst students. An emphasis on the here-and-now was also noted as a key element in grounding students and fostering safety in the group (Boldt & Paul, 2011). This aligns with what the researchers found in relation to the impact of sensory elements in the workshops and its grounding quality. The feedback from the participants and facilitators suggest that the sensory elements encouraged them to stay grounded in their present environment to decrease stress and promote a sense of calm. The calming and tranquil elements of the environment noted by participants and facilitators suggests that this assisted them in feeling grounded in the here-and-now of the workshops and being present in the setting.

Effective in Building Community Support and Togetherness

The other main objective of the art therapy workshops was to build community support. Based on the data analysis, participants did build a sense of community support as demonstrated in both Participant reflections and Facilitator observations. Data analysis indicated that community support appeared to be accomplished specifically through the act of being together in a physical space. Regulations related to the COVID-19 pandemic created limitations in engaging in such environments and these workshops offered space for the university students and staff to re-experience this. Additionally, the creation of a safe space and opportunity to share experiences worked in tandem with the management of stress and creating a sense of community support.

Being Together in a Physical Space

Researchers discovered an overlap between both Facilitator and Participant focus groups when discussing feelings of community support during the workshops. This suggests that the physical presence of being in a space with others offers increased feelings of togetherness, connectivity and support. Within the participant focus group, Participant 1 spoke to this sense of support in their statement, "I definitely got what I came for which was just being able to be together and to get to know other people, and through art therapy as well." Boldt and Paul (2011) offers insight that aligns with this suggestion, stating the focus on the interpersonal interactions being experienced in group settings and how they can contribute to creating a healing and secure environment for individuals. Facilitators also offered insight through observations of participants's responses, as well as their own recollections of being in a physical space together. Facilitator D reflected on observations of the interactions between participants and feeling "moved" by "how badly people seemed to really want to share [...] and support each other." This suggests that the opportunity to engage in a group setting proved to be beneficial in building a

sense of community support by being in the physical presence of others. In addition to this, both Participants and Facilitators commented on the impact that the art materials and prompts offered in creating a sense of joining and connection in the group. Research by Bublitz et al. (2019) aligned with this finding in their study that examined collaborative art making within communities and its transformative effects. Bublitz et al. (2019) found that the process of being together as a group allowed for members of the community to feel a sense of support, belonging and strength. This reinforces what researchers found in that being together in a physical space helped to increase feelings of community support amongst Participants and Facilitators.

Creating a Safe Space

Through the analysis of the Facilitator and Participant focus groups, researchers also illuminated the impact of creating safety to increase a sense of community support. This finding worked in tandem with the efficacy of being together in a physical space and suggested that creating a sense of safety within this physical space enhanced community support. In particular, Facilitator D reflected on this emergent theme stating, "there was such a range in the content that people shared about, people were talking about their experience coming back to campus as being like a return to a safe space." Facilitator D's reflection is elaborated by the experiences collected from Participant 1 regarding an acknowledgement of how feelings of safety contributed to a sense of support within the group. Participant 1 reflected, "It just felt like [...] a safe little haven [...] And I really felt kind of like held there." Morrison et. al. (2018) found that building support amongst a group contributed to an overall sense of safety. In the data gathered from art therapy workshops by Morrison et. al. (2018), they found that offering the opportunity to interact in a safe and creative space contributed to increased feelings of connection. Morrison et. al. (2018) also highlighted noticeable reports of stress relief, which we can see how this works in tandem

and impacts one another in Figure 8. The impact on increasing connectivity and feelings of

community were also highlighted by Price (2019). Price (2019) found that the creation of

community art groups allowed for members of the community to come together and connect with

one another's experiences which created a sense of safety in joining. Morrison et. al. (2018) and

Price (2019) demonstrated how coming together to engage in community workshops and sharing

experiences act as components to the creation of a safe space. This safe space promotes

interactions amongst community members and increases overall feelings of community support

(Price, 2019).

Sharing Experiences within a Group

        The opportunity given to participants to share their experiences within a group and

facilitators to witness this, intertwine with the findings discussed so far. As mentioned,

Facilitators observed the effect that being in a group offered to participants to share and relate to

one another's experiences during this time of transition. Participants reported in their reflections

from the workshops that being together during this time allowed them an opportunity to share

experiences, which they may not have gotten if they had not participated in the workshop.

Participant 2 stated, "we got to know each other as people instead of colleagues for an hour."

This statement from Participant 2 appeared to resonate with others and suggests the impact that

sharing their time and experiences played a role in building a sense of community. Sonnone &

Rochford (2020) also examined the impact of art therapy groups with students that were found to

support them in processing their academic stress and sharing their experiences. These results

from Sonnone & Rochford (2020) align with the findings of this research study that demonstrate

the accomplishment of the goal of the workshops to enhance community support and

togetherness through being together in a physical, safe space and having the opportunity to share and relate to one another.

Other Emergent Clinical Themes in relation to the role of the Art

Throughout the analysis researchers found the following findings related specifically to the role of the art. The role the art played in the workshops for both facilitators and participants involved the creation of space for group art-making, and the opportunity to feel grounded with art materials. Altogether these findings worked collectively in relation to one another to increase the efficacy of stress management and importance of community support to provide relief during the transitions back to in person classes and workshops during Covid-19 pandemic.

Use of Art Materials in a Group setting

To begin, several findings suggest the use of art materials in the group setting proved to be effective in decreasing stress and increasing community amongst group members which is echoed by Snir and Regev (2013) specifically when participants' have access to familiar or different types of art materials. Similarly noted in the literature by Morrison et. al. (2018), it was found that the created environment was related to the participants' experience, including feeling welcomed by the others in attendance of the workshop. Participants confirmed this finding by stating, "the materials I think had a big effect on the impact" and how effective a piece created alongside others with intention can have.

Impact of creating art in different environments.

In addition , Grasser, L. R., & Javanbakht, A. (2021) illuminated the importance of the arts delivered in different community environments including the increased accessibility to the community's population. The research highlights the impact of support through creating art in different environments - transitioning back to inperson services and change in environment,

confirmed by participant 3 stating, "this lovely, very, almost a Zen type, you know, environment,

you know so that was the ideal place to have an exercise like this […] So, the environment has

everything to do with it." While participants may have agreed on the change in setting from

online to in-person and participating in person, literature suggests otherwise for youth

transitioning to online services at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Overall, in the

literature Snir and Regev (2013) implied the art materials used in the art therapy process are

important in guiding the process, creating a unique experience in any type of setting.

Effectiveness of Art to create a sense of Grounding.

Researchers also found, as noted in the literature by Snir and Regev (2013) participants

shared experiences, emotions, or feelings, that can also create a sense of relief that was a direct

effect brought on from the materials provided. Participant 2 affirmed, "...I mean I don't paint

rocks at home but it felt like I think it was also the fact that it was a rock and it was incredibly

like grounding it came from the ground so it just kind of made a lot of sense in my body too."

There is also a sense of ritualism that is brought on through the creation as noted by Beauregard

2020, expressing the art making process created in a group or community setting could lead to

the creation of rituals, therefore creating a bond or strong connection that can form between all

the individuals involved in the ritual process. As shown by Figure 8 there is a large correlation

between all findings; the transitional object. The purpose of the transitional object was to also

support Participant during times of transition and as noted by literature, "The COVID-19

pandemic has had a significant impact [...] including through increased isolation, the transition to

online schooling decreased access to arts and sports programming, exposure to illness, and

anxiety." (Grasser & Javanbakht 2021). This is confirmed by Participant 3 describing the

transition as "chaos" and further expressing the "the workshops [were] a grounding exercise for

me…" Sholt and Gavron (2006) suggested that the therapeutic power of other different materials, in the three-dimensionality of the product, and in its ability to serve as a real-life object.

Summary of Findings

Our findings suggest that the art therapy workshops were effective in decreasing stress and highlighted the need for additional support and connectivity through times of stressful transitions. To supplement the decrease in stress, the sensory qualities of familiar art materials paired with a calming physical environment that provided a sense of community were found to also provide a decrease in stress and a sense of togetherness, support and grounding. This increased feeling of support produced additional feelings of a safe space within the group. Finally, the making of transitional objects through times of stress and transitions provided participants with feelings of grounding that aided them during times of transitions.

Conclusion

As the world began to transition back into in-person services, including art therapy workshops and services, there was an opportunity for researchers to investigate the efficacy of in-person art therapy workshops and whether themes of community-building and stress management would emerge. To obtain this data, researchers examined literature focused on stress-inducing transitions, and the benefits of collaborative art-making, as well as obtaining data collection from focus groups of the participants of the art therapy workshops.

Our research purpose focused on investigating the efficacy of interventions and clinical themes that emerged as a result of art therapy services offered to members of the university as they transitioned back to in-person services during the COVID-19 pandemic through a qualitative research case study. Our findings from this study suggest in-person art therapy services hosted by the Helen B. Landgarten Art Therapy Clinic provided participants with an opportunity to have a sense of community, and decrease stress levels, by using grounding art materials and interventions that allowed participants to have a safe and contained space during times of transitions during the continual of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Limitations

When beginning this research study, the researchers original plan included obtaining data from external populations outside of the university community, however, due to not having authorization to contact the schools partnered with the LMU's Marital and Family Therapy's department to interview children and family participants of workshops occurring off campus, researchers relied on the data produced by university participants and facilitators in hopes to provide sufficient data regarding our research question. Because of this limitation, researchers possibly missed experiences of the families that participated that could have elicited further

clinical themes. Additionally, the small population pool may not be sufficient data to apply or be

representative of diverse populations, due to all participants being homogeneous,

identifying-female and either employed or attending Loyola Marymount University. Moreover,

researchers acknowledge that analysis of the focus groups' participants' responses rather than

examining their artwork could have highlighted more implicit information and themes. In

addition, researchers recognize that the art therapy workshops were held only a few times in the

Fall 2021 semester, which possibly reduced our population pool even more. Further studies

focused on similar study topics should aim for more of a larger and diverse population pool that

could be more inclusive to provide greater representation of the research topic for more

applicability to the greater population.

Personal Discoveries

Upon reflecting on the research process and study, researchers discussed their overall

personal discoveries. Researchers agreed that finding the data collection of the research was the

most engaging as it provided an opportunity to connect with participants and hold deeper

conversations through the influence of art-making. Researchers also discussed how collecting the

data through a focus group and group art-making seemed to parallel their experiences as art

therapy practitioners as our duties revolve around holding a safe space for expression to flourish

and for reflection to manifest. Researchers also noted their interest in how influential the

physical environment was for participants in their abilities in how to connect and express with

one another, which elicit a general interest in studies that focus on how physical environments

impact an individual's sense of safety, grounding, and community. Finally, researchers

unanimously enjoyed the collaborative process of being in a research group which parallels the

intentionality of the art therapy workshops; coming together to create and to have support during

times of transitions, and having ourselves be contributing to the art therapy field during the

COVID-19 pandemic.

Suggested Future Studies in the Field of Art Therapy

Researchers hope future studies will focus on the effects of the pandemic on wider and

more vulnerable populations and find effective art therapy interventions that could help decrease

feelings of stress in drastic life transitions like the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers also hope

for later studies to focus on the impact and relationships of physical environments and stress

management through an art therapy-based approach.

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