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Art: the Beautiful, Relieving Agent for Mental Illness

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Composition 201

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Art: the Beautiful, Relieving Agent for Mental Illness

Abstract

Art: the Beautiful, Relieving Agent for Mental Illness is aimed to present a thorough analysis of the relationship between art and mental illness. With this proposal, I show the hidden meanings behind some art works, *The Starry Night* and *Kaleidoscope Cat VII*, and how the importance of creation gives to others. Creation allows people with mental illness to express their personal experiences liberally on a medium, to potentially release their tension they may hold inside their mind. As my research proposal demonstrates, art provides individuals with a sense of unattachment from reality, by allowing them to freely express their mental instability without fear of judgement from outsiders. This proposal walks through the necessary background, methodology, and literature review with a creative lens in mind. One key argument my proposal suggests is that traditional therapy is not always realistic for all people. As a whole, my research contributes towards the bigger conversation between mental illness and available options for people who may not have access to traditional therapy. Art therapy creates a realistic bridge to cross for those people.

Key Words: Proposal, Art therapy, Mental illness, Impressionism, Hallucinations

I. Introduction

Mental illness is a struggle I have been dealing with throughout the entirety of my life. I have found myself constantly avoiding traditional coping mechanisms, therapy, and counseling because I personally do not feel it would benefit me in the ways I want it to. With this idea in mind, I have found myself turning to the same activities when I feel an anxiety attack conjuring, and that activity is art. Creating art has given me an unspoken voice, and a tangible material to work with during my difficult times. Tranquility and serenity are the waves of emotions I am washed with as I work through these tough times. Throughout the entirety of this paper, I will

be analyzing the positive effects art making has on the mentally ill because traditional talk therapy may not be realistic option for all people. Art implemented as a route of therapy is an increasing career for individuals who may feel intimidated by others. Creating art allows for a voice to be spoken and a division or space from their mental illness to exist. Containing a separate identity from their mind is not the only benefit from creating art; when a perspective outsider examines a piece of art, they do not consider the mental background of that specific artist. They often solely praise the individual piece of art, not the artist themselves.

My purpose for conducting this research is to explore more options for forms of therapy, rather than a traditional talk therapy. I have also found myself falling into the same career I have been interested in, art therapy. My original major was psychology; however, I will be transitioning into Art Education Alternative Studies to enlighten my knowledge in art changing people's mental states.

II. Background/Significance/Methodology

With art implemented as a coping mechanism towards mental illness, I hope to break the stigma around talking therapy being the only therapy available. Many people may not have the money, or their insurance may not cover their ability to gain access to high quality therapy. Art can be done anywhere, pen and paper, or miscellaneous objects glued together; art is cheap and allows for a different voice to be instilled in a person. The methodology behind this research is to highlight an important aspect of life: everyone person is different; therefore, people deal with their mental issues differently, turning towards different outlets. Art therapy is a relatively new field, where creating projects may be more enticing towards people than conversing with a stranger.

Mental health is talked about in a stereotypical way, therapy is not a realistic option for people, and talking may be intimidating, finding the right connection with a therapist takes time and time is an object people find hard to make. I want to contribute to the importance of the arts in life. Often times, people may be afraid to pursue this activity or lack the confidence because their work is incomparable to the Mona Lisa. However, art is not meant to look perfect; it can be different meanings to different people. The definition of art is not to have the exact results of *Starry Night*, but to have the same enthusiasm and meaning behind this painting, live vibrantly through any piece of art a person creates.

III. Literature Review

From the time, my old psychology teacher opened my eyes to Louis Wain, an artist who struggled with schizophrenia. I found his work to be fascinating, for I continuously analyzed all the colors inside of his cats. Schizophrenia is a type of mental illness characterized by several hallucinations an individual may visualize, or thoughts seeming out of touch with reality. The striking question I had was, how does this mental illness influence his art? The analysis of *Kaleidoscope Cat VII* transported the audience into another realm, where neon colored, disoriented cats come to life (Wain). Mental illness may be the primary muse for some artists, allowing the artists to create and bring their vision to life. Many artists may use a form of impressionism. Impressionism is the style of art implementing relatively visible, thin brush strokes allowing for movement to shine through. The style of movement, I thought, could potentially allude to the possible ‘movement’ in the artist’s mind. Van Gogh was known for his *Starry Night*, he created this during his stay at an asylum in Saint Remy (Van Gogh). Many individuals may not have known he was struggling with mental illness during this creation. The

audience often praises Van Gogh for his work, not focusing on his mental state, allowing for a separation between the two to be established.

Erik Kandel similarly explains a term known as the ‘beholders share’; audience members personalize a piece of art as they analyze it (Kandel 135). Many outsiders will connect different aspects from their lives and project them towards the painting to create a type of symbolic meaning. Kandel allows a relationship between art and people’s experience to occur. Ekaterina Netchitailova explores the world of art from a ‘madness’ perspective. He argues this new emerging field to shed light on the possible visualization of art through mental illness. “The Mystery for Madness through Art and Mad Studies” contributes to the argument by providing the structure and analysis between art and mental illness (Netchitailova 1509). A pattern exists between artists and possible different painting strategies. Art tells a story, and Netchitailova executes the different type of deranged stories art can create.

Ceri Wilson and Darren Sharpe examine the effects of the Zinc Arts ArtZone program on people experiencing a mental illness. The program entailed 122 participants between the ages of 11-25 attending 10-week sessions of art creation to possibly increase the well being (Wilson and Sharpe 39). Some of the common themes involved within this program include: a sense of confidence, empowerment, and a feeling of being unattached. The source highlights the important idea, contrasting from my main argument: art is not a therapy for all to use, sometimes art can be more harmful than helpful. The program may have been slightly misleading because some people prefer to work independently rather than a collaboration.

IV. Conclusion/Implications

A grounding relationship between art and mental illness prove to be prevalent towards today's society in building divisions between people and their mental illness. The ability to detach someone from their illness allows for a person to rediscover themselves, free from the strings on an illness. People can let go of their present stage in life and then create their own masterpiece knowing they felt liberated from their minds. The groundbreaking research is hoping to open other's eyes to various types of therapy and learn to live again free from mental illness. With a fresh perspective, people may be able to help their loved ones struggling with mental illness and offer art therapy as an alternative solution rather than traditional talk therapy. Art is for all, and I feel people forget their meanings behind life, often taking things too seriously; therefore, the importance of taking breaks is imperative to stay mentally stable. Art can be that break of reality.

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