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The use of emotion regulation by visitors to contemporary art commissions in heritage sites

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how a series of contemporary art commissions displayed in heritage sites were used for emotion regulation purposes. The data used was qualitative and originated from a research project entitled *Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience*, which was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (undertaken between 2017 and 2019). The respondents ($n = 22$) came from four groups who visited five contemporary artworks that were commissioned for four heritage sites in North East England. The literature used to support the analysis originated from several disciplines and was chosen for its ability to help to explore the responses of the participants. We conclude that the respondents used the experience of engaging with the contemporary art commissions in heritage sites for emotion regulation. However, this was mainly observed when change in emotional response was perceived as necessary by respondents.

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Introduction

The commissioning of contemporary art for heritage sites has become increasingly popular (Bagnall and Randell 2020; Cass et al. 2020; Shaw, Bennett, and Kottasz 2021). In the UK this has been facilitated by organisations such as Arts&Heritage¹ and the National Trust² (Trust New Art,³ in England and Wales). This phenomenon was explored in a research project entitled *Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience*⁴ (MCAHE, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council⁵ AH/N007557/1), undertaken between 2017 and 2019. MCAHE (Black et al. 2020) considered the perspectives of artists, commissioners, and audiences. It involved creating a series of new artwork commissions in partnership with heritage organisations including the National Trust and the Churches Conservation Trust.⁶ The following analysis considers the responses of those who were the audiences for the contemporary art commissions displayed in heritage sites, as part of the research project. Emotion regulation emerged during the coding of the interviews as an unanticipated and under researched aspect of how visitors used the experience of encountering contemporary art in heritage sites, both individually and in groups.

The focus of the analysis is not on the contemporary artworks and heritage sites themselves but on how those who were recruited to the research project used the experience of the visit. It responds to Smith (2021, 20), who states that ‘finding out what people do with heritage, why they do it, and the consequences of their “doing”, should be central to Critical Heritage Studies’. The analysis is situated within the same tradition as other visitor studies-oriented work such as Hoare (2020), who

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considered affect and emotion in visitor responses in an historic house, Roppola et al. (2021), who considered national identity and war heritage and Ginzarly and Srour (2021), who looked at children's perceptions of a world heritage site.

The aim of this paper is to explore how those who were recruited to the research project, with greater or lesser heritage site and contemporary art engagement, used the experience for emotion regulation purposes. Because of the complexity of the concepts involved and the challenges in applying them empirically, the analysis presented below must be viewed as exploratory. This paper is organised in the following way. Firstly, a theoretical framework introduces the theory that has been used to support the analysis. Secondly the methodology is described, then the analysis, discussion, and conclusions are presented.

Theoretical framework

The following consists of several sections. Firstly, emotion in Critical Heritage Studies is introduced and secondly a discussion of the main concepts of emotion and emotion regulation is provided. The third section reviews the appraisal and social constructivist approaches to emotion regulation which are used in the analysis of the dataset. Next emotion regulation in social contexts and the relationship between emotion regulation, attitudes, and evaluation are explored. Then cross-cultural emotion regulation is discussed and finally the impact of age on emotion regulation is considered. The definition of the main concepts used in this paper are drawn from a limited number of authors who have established a coherent and influential body of work on this topic.

While emotion has been introduced to Critical Heritage Studies through what Smith (2021) describes as the 'affective turn' (Clough 2007) in the social sciences and humanities, the topic can be viewed as under researched within this discipline. For example, Wetherell, Smith and Campbell (2018, 1) note that, 'although a consensus is emerging around the importance of emotion in constituting heritage, dilemmas about how to theorise and investigate affect are much less resolved'. While wider emotion research has developed extensively over recent years (Feldman Barrett, Lewis, and Haviland-Jones 2016), there has been little application of this within Critical Heritage Studies. However, emotion regulation is mentioned by Bagnall (2003) and is like the emotional management described by Smith and Campbell (2015, 455), which they note 'has important implications for interpretive strategies for heritage sites and museums, but also in allowing us to rethink the ways that they are used by their audiences'. For the purposes of this paper, it is firstly necessary to present an account of how emotion and emotion regulation is understood.

While ideas of emotion date back to Plato and Aristotle (Feldman Barrett, 2006a) and first scientifically approached by Darwin (1872), the concept is hard to define and is used in different ways by different disciplines. For this paper, the definition adopted is that provided by Gross and Feldman Barrett (2011, 9), in that it is 'a collection of psychological states that include subjective experience, expressive behaviour (e.g. facial, bodily, verbal) and peripheral physiological responses (e.g. heart rate, respiration)'. They go on to say that while the above definition is widely agreed, anything beyond this is subject to debate.⁷

The differences in how emotions are understood is presented by Gross and Feldman Barrett (2011, 10). Drawing on 30 papers, dating from 1884, the authors present four major themes. These are: a) where mental states are unique, described as basic, where 'emotion words such "anger", "sadness" and "fear" each name a unique mechanism that causes a unique mental state with unique measurable outcomes'; b) caused by cognitive appraisals of a context or stimulus, where 'models retain the assumption that emotions are distinct functional states, but emotions are increasingly viewed as emergent acts of meaning making'; c) where 'all mental states are seen as emerging from an ongoing, continually modified constructive process that involves more basic ingredients that are not specific to emotion', known as psychological construction, these models view emotions as folk categories; and d) where emotions are viewed as 'social artefacts or culturally prescribed performances' described as social construction. Moving from a) to d) follows a continuum, rather than

a definite series of categories, where there is less of a place for internal processes and more of a place for the social world in how emotions are generated. The history of research on emotion regulation is described by Gross (2014), who notes the considerable increase in interest in the topic. The construct is defined by Gross (1998, 272) as ‘a process by which individuals influence which emotion they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions’. Moving across the continuum given above from a) to d) there is less of a distinction between emotion generation and emotion regulation.

The appraisal and social constructivist understandings of emotion regulation are major themes in the analysis and so are presented in more detail below. According to Moors et al. (2013, 120) appraisal accesses the ‘significance of the environment for wellbeing’ and this triggers emotions. Links between emotion and wellbeing are also explored by Kitayama and Park (2007), who state that wellbeing is achieved by psychological adaptation, through emotion regulation, to the culturally normative expectations of the group or society. However, as Feldman Barrett (2017, 170) notes ‘not all of our feelings emerge from goal-directed or normatively oriented actions’.

An integral aspect of the appraisal understanding of emotion is the construct of valence. Feldman Barrett (2006b, 36) describes this as:

a basic building block of emotion life that largely derives from the psychological process of valuation. (a simple form of meaning analysis that codes the environment in terms of whether it is good or bad, helpful or harmful, rewarding or threatening at a given instance in time)

The author goes on to say that if a pleasant or unpleasant feeling is produced depends upon whether the situation is ‘consistent or inconsistent with a person’s goals’ (42).

Appraisal is also explored by Gross and Feldman Barrett (2011, 11) who describe their ‘modal model’ which comprises of ‘situation, attention, appraisal, and response’ where regulation can occur at different points of the process. They highlight five points where emotion regulation might occur. These are.

- Situation selection refers to the actions we take that make it more likely we will be in a situation we expect to give rise to the emotions we would like to have.
- Situation modification refers to efforts to directly change a situation to modify its emotional impact.
- Attentional deployment refers to influencing emotional responses by redirecting attention within a given situation.
- Cognitive change refers to changing one or more of one’s appraisals in a way that alters the situation’s emotional significance.
- Response modulation refers to influencing experiential, behavioural, or physiological responses after response tendencies have already been initiated.

The overlap between the domains of emotion regulation on the one hand and attitudes and evaluation on the other, have been used to interpret the participant’s responses. Jones, Kirkland, and Cunningham (2014) argue that attitudes and evaluation are emotionally valenced responses to a particular object (for example, goodness or badness, desirability or undesirability, pleasure or pain). The distinction is that attitudes are conceived as predispositions to respond, positively or negatively, to an object based on accumulated prior experiences or valence information (Fazio 2007). Evaluation is understood as an appraisal process which unfolds over time and is responsive to the social context within which the evaluation is taking place. Moving from emotional responses to situations to attitudinal responses to objects, whilst relying on common underlying process, makes it possible to think of emotion regulation as processes which occur when people encounter art objects or heritage within a wider situational context.

The responses are seen within a social constructionist account of emotion regulation which focuses on the action of emoting as a process embedded within the structure of

relationships as they occur in each setting and wider context, acting based on a goal or strategy. In this account, emoting is a 'property of the relationship rather than the individual' (Mesquita 2010, 84). A social constructionist account of emotion regulation might therefore focus on the social or cultural conventions that function to regulate the behaviours of those within a particular social context. The importance of social contexts is supported by Mesquita et al. (2014, 298) who state that 'the large majority of our emotions occur in the contexts of social interactions and relationships' and that 'social interaction and emotions form one system of which the parts cannot be separated'. In a similar vein, Burkitt (2017, 170) states that 'emotions are not primarily individual phenomena but are patterns of relationship'.

The social purposes emotions are put to is explored by Fischer and Manstead (2018, 424) who state that emotions help us to:

form and maintain positive social relationships and establish and or maintain a social position relative to others, and to preserve our self-esteem, identity, power, sometimes at the expense of others (distancing function).

They note that these goals are achieved through emotion regulation and that any sharing of emotions is 'likely to involve some degree of co-regulation' (434).

Mesquita et al. (2014) work with a model of culture being both in the world, in the sense of the affordances and constraints on individual experience, and in the head, in the sense of internalised goals, values and meanings that are nonetheless common to the people around the individual. This model is open to the possibility of multiple cultures and multiple ways of responding to them. They see emotion as emerging from taking a particular stance towards the (social) world and emotion regulation as the processes intended to fashion emotions to be the most adaptive to the social relationships they are in the midst of. With this in mind, the authors argue that there is evidence for the cultural regulation of emotions in every step of the emotion regulation process outlined by Gross and Feldman Barrett (2011). This encompasses cultural influences on, amongst others, what aspects of a situation should be the focus of attention, what emotions are approved and the ways in which those emotions are expressed or managed.

It is possible to view differences between the groups of respondents as potentially resulting in different emotion regulation strategies. The literature mainly explores differences between individualistic and collectivist cultures which are explored through cross-cultural emotion regulation (Deng, An, and Cheng 2019; Ramzan and Amjad 2017). However, more broadly, Haga, Kraft, and Corby (2009) note from their empirical study of university students in Norway, Australia, and the United States, that differences in emotion regulation could be observed across age, gender, and culture. They also state that culture plays an important role in signalling 'what emotions are appropriate and valued and this is how they are regulated' (287). These ideas are explored further by Mesquita et al. (2018, 407) who note 'cultural products, practices, rituals, socialisation strategies, and interpersonal behaviours all help to do emotions in ways consistent with cultural morality'.

Because the participants in this study are older people (aged between 57 and 83 at the time of the study) it is important to consider the role of age in emotion regulation. Mather and Ponzio (2018) argue that older people are more effective at regulating emotions than younger people. Charles and Carstensen (2014) support this argument and state that, in general, older people have greater experience of, and are therefore more skilled at, emotion regulation. They also suggest that with age comes an increasing awareness of the ephemerality of life and a shift in focus from instrumental or knowledge-based goals towards more emotional goals, 'so that experiences are more emotionally meaningful and satisfying' (206). Being experienced in emotion regulation has been suggested as a possible reason why older adults, who experience losses in several domains as they age, have higher levels of hedonic well-being than younger people (in the UK if not internationally, see Steptoe, Deaton, and Stone 2015). Research also demonstrates that older people show improvements in emotional wellbeing through 'minimising engagement with negative stimuli' (Sands, Ngo,

and Isaacowitz 2016, 337), amongst other mechanisms. Older people who demonstrate low well-being, according to Urry and Gross (2010, 356), might ‘fail to make a compensatory shift in emotion regulation in light of changing resources’.

The literature explored was chosen for its ability to provide an account of the field of emotion regulation and to provide a framework to interrogate the responses of the participants through. To do this, we explored the wider literature on the topic in conjunction with close reading and coding of the interview transcripts (see below).

Research approach/methodology

We adopted a non-positivist epistemology because we aimed to explore the meanings created by visitors in response to the contemporary art commissions in heritage sites. This approach considers that ‘reality or truth depends on the viewer or observer’ (Aliyu et al. 2014, 84). We employed a visitor studies approach, with the starting point being that the respondents were active in making meaning from their experiences within their own social contexts, as described by Dicks (2016). The study design was qualitative and pre-posted with the longitudinal aspect allowing change over time to be explored.

Focus group participants The focus group participants were recruited from existing social or voluntary groups in North East England.

More details of the groups are given below in [Table 1](#), [Table 2](#) and [Appendix 1](#).

We recruited the groups through multiple channels, these were:

- an open call via the National Trust and volunteers;
- friends’ groups at local galleries and museums; and
- regional local authority cultural teams.

We originally intended to recruit a group with no prior contemporary art and heritage site engagement, however, this did not prove possible. The groups had different engagement with and understanding of contemporary art and heritage, providing points of comparison (Mabry

Table 1. Groups recruited to the project.

| Category | Group |
|---|---|
| Heritage site volunteers | National Trust, volunteers |
| Art gallery attenders | Shipleigh Art Gallery, ⁸ Gateshead, Art club |
| Heritage site attenders | Beamish, The Living Museum of the North, ⁹ support group |
| Heritage and contemporary art attenders | Equal Arts, ¹⁰ Gateshead |

Table 2. Focus groups interview dates and number of participants attending.

| Group | Initial interview date and venue | Date of visit to Gibside (Number of participants) | Date of visit to Cherryburn (Number of participants) | Date of visit to Holy Trinity Church (Number of participants) |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| National Trust | Gibside Staff Offices, Gibside, Co. Durham, 23.4.18 (7) | 21.5.18 (5) | 6.6.18 (6) | 15.9.18 (3) |
| Equal Arts | Equal Arts Offices, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, 25.4.18 (9) | 18.5.18 (5) | 16.7.18 (1) | 15.7.18 (1) |
| Beamish, The Living Museum of the North | Education Room, Beamish, The Living Museum of the North, Co. Durham, 27.4.18 (5) | 9.8.18 (6) | 19.7.18 (3) | 21.7.18 (3) |
| Shipleigh Art Gallery | Education Room, Shipleigh Art Gallery, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, 27.4.18 (9) | 28.6.18 (6) | 11.7.18 (5) | 22.7.18 (7) |

2012). They were made up of older people (aged between 57 and 83-years-old) and the consequences of this are discussed below. The Equal Arts group had a different socio-economic background to the others (see below).

Initial contact with the organisations was made by Black and, if the groups were interested in becoming involved, a meeting was organised which both Newman and Black attended. If the group members confirmed their interest consent forms were completed. At this point, we organised another meeting for the baseline focus groups which probed their attitudes towards contemporary art and heritage. This was followed by three separate site-based focus groups (all audio-recorded) made after the visits (16 focus groups in total). The focus groups, as opposed to individual interviews, allowed us to explore emotion regulation within the social context of the groups (May 2001). They were digitally audio-recorded, and baseline demographic information was obtained (see Table 3). The focus group interview schedule is given as Appendix 1, which was used as the starting point for wider discussions.

The study received ethical approval from the University of Newcastle upon Tyne's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee (January 2017). All the respondents gave informed consent. However, it was recognised that the visits were not risk free and the recruitment protocol emphasised that they could leave the project without explanation at any point. One formally left and others did not attend all the visits (see Table 2). Newman and Black were both responsible for the data collection. Both had experience in undertaking qualitative non-positivist research in contexts such as this and Newman had undertaken research with older people. Links were developed with the sites that were visited prior to the visits some of whom were partners in the project (for example, the National Trust). The participants were picked up at a central point in Gateshead and then driven to the different heritage sites by minibus (by Newman and or Black), they then viewed the artworks and were given lunch.

The following summarises the characteristics of those recruited from the different groups.

Shingley Art Gallery, Art Club (art gallery attenders)

This group consisted of 5 males and 4 females, aged between 57 and 83, 6 had degrees and 3 had undertaken further qualifications as an adult. Previous occupations were mainly professional. The group meets on a regular basis at the Shingley Art Gallery, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear and produces art of various types, including film. They do not collectively visit heritage sites or art exhibitions, but often do so individually or with family members.

Equal Arts (heritage and contemporary art attenders)

This group consisted of 5 females and 3 males, aged between 67 and 83 (an older group than the others). Previous occupations consisted of shop worker, storeman, and teacher. This group are involved in a range of activities such as crafts, film making and collectively visiting exhibitions at places such as the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art,¹¹ on the Gateshead Quayside, and the

Table 3. Summary of data from all 28 participants present at the start of the project.

| | Participants | Gender | Age | Marital Status | Education | Occupation or main activity (when working) |
|-------|--------------|-------------------------|----------------|--|--|--|
| Total | 28 * | 16 Female 12 Male | 57–83 years | M = 18 C = 1 S = 1 W = 5 D/S = 3 | FQ as adult = 5 Degree = 2 Degree+ = 13 NVQ = 2 None = 4 NA = 2 | Professional = 14 Managerial = 4 Other specified = 6 NA = 3 Family = 1 |

*28 in initial meetings.

Ethnicity: All White British except where No Answer.

Age: all participants were aged between 57 and 83 at the time of the focus group interviews with 14 aged 68+ and 14 aged 67 and younger.

Marital status: M = Married, C = Cohabiting, S = Single, W = Widowed, D/S = divorced/separated, NA = No answer.

National Glass Centre in Sunderland.¹² This group originated from the Gateshead Carers Association,¹³ people who had lost those they had cared for who came together, as an art group, to provide each other with support. They were more varied in terms of educational background than the other groups and were generally less socioeconomically advantaged.

Beamish, The Living Museum of the North (heritage site attenders)

This group consisted of 2 males and 3 females, aged between 61 and 71. Previous occupations were professional, and they had either degrees or National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs are work-based educational awards in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland). The group was culturally active, regularly visiting heritage sites, museums, and art galleries, although not as a group.

National Trust volunteers (heritage site volunteers)

This group consisted of 5 females and 2 males, aged between 61 and 76. Previous occupations were professional, apart from one who was an electrician. Five had degrees, one had further qualifications as an adult, and one had NVQs. They volunteered at National Trust properties in the NE region, some of whom had done so for several years. They did not visit heritage sites or art exhibitions as a group.

Settings and artworks

The following describes the heritage sites and artworks that were encountered by respondents as part of the project. The commissioning process was competitive with a call being published and a shortlist of artists identified, who were then interviewed. The art produced included the avant-garde and consecrated rear-guard (Grenfell and Hardy 2003, 2007). The sites for the artworks were chosen based on similarities in terms of their management (particularly in terms of those managed by the National Trust), being subject to policies in terms of how the sites were conserved and made available to visitors. The settings were different, particularly in terms of scale (ranging from an 18th Century landscape to a church), providing points of comparison. This represents purposive selection of comparative cases, the analysis of which will not produce generalisable theory (Mabry 2012).

Holy Trinity Church, Sunderland¹⁴ An ex-parish church in Sunderland, opened in 1719 and now in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust, a charity protecting historic churches at risk. The trust was awarded £2.8 million (in 2019) from the National Heritage Memorial Fund¹⁵ to convert it into a public cultural space (it was opened in April 2022). The artwork *Gogmagog: Voices of the Bells*, is described below.

*Gogmagog: Voices of the Bells*¹⁶ was a sound installation created by Matt Stokes.¹⁷ The installation reinterprets a peal rung on the Holy Trinity Church bells in 1898. Whilst the bells were silenced at the time of the visit due to the condition of the bell tower, a new version of the peal has been given life by local bell ringers, musicians, singers, and choirs, drawing lyrics from the story of the church's historical social roles.

Gibside¹⁸ Owned and managed by the National Trust, this estate is located near to Newcastle upon Tyne. Gibside Hall, the main house on the estate is now a shell and the property is most famous for its chapel. The stables, walled garden, Column to Liberty, and Banqueting House¹⁹ are also intact. A series of walks are available for visitors around the landscaped gardens which were originally laid out in the 18th Century. For the MCAHE project, two new temporary outdoor installations were created in response to the Gibside brief: *The Orangery Urns* by Andrew Burton,²⁰ and *Your Sweetest Empire is to Please* by Fiona Curran.²¹

The Orangery Urns sited within the walled garden and near Gibside's tree-lined avenue, took as its starting point a group of ornamental urns that once stood on the balustrade of the Orangery on the estate. The large ceramic vessels were Andrew Burton's response both to the story of Mary Eleanor Bowes (1749–1800, owner of Gibside), and to the sense of scale that is one of the features of

Gibside. Some of these vessels were inscribed with texts taken from journals written by Mary Eleanor Bowes.

Your Sweetest Empire is to Please Fiona Curran's work at Gibside centred on the creation of a new sculptural folly, situated next to the ruined Orangery and based on the design of 18th Century plant carrying casket (known as a Wardian Case²²), used by plant collectors to transport their finds.

Cherryburn²³ This is a small farmstead situated near Stocksfield, eleven miles west of Newcastle upon Tyne. Owned and managed by the National Trust, Cherryburn is the birthplace of British artist and naturalist Thomas Bewick (1753–1828), best known for his book 'A History of British Birds'²⁴ (Bewick 1797). The work by Mark Fairnington is described below.

Walking, Looking and Telling Tails Mark Fairnington²⁵ traced a series of walks around Northumberland and the local area, recording the landscape and conversations with people he met along the way. From these walks he produced a series of sketchbooks and painted landscape miniatures that explored Bewick's countryside, from a contemporary perspective, and made connections with his own family story. To complete the project, he created an installation of the paintings in the panelled 'half parlour' of Bewick's birthplace cottage.

Analysis and findings

We digitally recorded the focus group interviews using multiple recording devices, in case of equipment failure, and they took on average 60 min each. The recordings were then professionally transcribed and anonymised for analysis. We coded them using QSR NVivo 12²⁶ with the categories being identified through multiple close readings by Newman, Davenport, and Black, being emergent as coding progressed. The quotes used in this paper are representative of the focus groups apart from that used in the last two examples, of which there was only one example. They were all expressed within the social space of the focus group and might have been different if respondents were interviewed individually.

The first section of the analysis explores pre-existing attitudes towards contemporary art in heritage environments expressed in the initial focus groups. The second explores the responses of the participants to their visits to a contemporary art commission in a heritage site as part of the project. The theory used to explore the responses is provided in the theoretical framework, with the main theme being appraisal (Moors et al. 2013), which was framed within a social construction approach to emotion regulation (Mesquita 2010). Emotion is expressed by the participants using emotion words (Bedford 1957) which are valenced responses, either positive or negative (Feldman Barrett 2006b). The final example used differs from the others in that one respondent had a physical emotional response to visiting Holy Trinity Church, Sunderland. This is placed in a psychological construction approach to emotion regulation where internal processes are given greater prominence (Feldman Barrett 2011). It is recognised that the conclusions drawn cannot be generalised beyond the data set, however, the responses represent 'social practices which are possible' (Perakyla 2004, 296–7).

Pre-existing attitudes towards contemporary art commissions for heritage sites

Pre-existing attitudes (Jones, Kirkland, and Cunningham 2014) towards contemporary art commissions for heritage sites were illustrated in the ways that respondents spoke about them in the baseline focus groups. These attitudes will also have influenced their decision to be involved in the research, suggesting that it was judged as promoting emotions viewed as desirable (Gross and Feldman Barrett 2011).

The groups from the Shipley Art Gallery, Beamish, The Living Museum of the North, and National Trust made both positively and negatively emotionally valenced responses, which were based upon previous appraisals/evaluations of contemporary art commissions for heritage sites.

Those responses are made within the social contexts of the groups, with their differing views about the validity of the artworks and the appropriateness of their positioning within a heritage site.

A male respondent from the Shipley Art Gallery group (with a degree and professional occupation, he did not give his date of birth) stated:

I've never been to Cherryburn [one of the research sites], but you say it's a small site, whatever goes outside Cherryburn or within sight of the buildings at Cherryburn, is going to grate with that building. To put it crudely, I resent somebody putting tubular bells outside a heritage building, as is very often the case. No explanation, well there might be but who wants to read it?

This respondent has automatically activated a strongly negative emotionally valenced response when thinking about the contemporary art commission that would be displayed at Cherryburn. At this point he had not visited the site and was not aware of the nature of the contemporary art that was commissioned. However, others displayed more positively emotionally valenced responses. A member of the group that originated from Beamish, The Living Museum of the North, a male aged 64, with a degree and a professional occupation stated:

I mean I keep thinking of two or three exhibitions that I've been to at Belsay Hall.²⁷ One of them where I can remember looking into a room and there's this damn great big tree growing out of the middle of the floor. That was amazing. That was fantastic.

In a similar vein, a member of the National Trust volunteer group (a 66-year-old female with a professional occupation) described a positive emotionally valenced response from visiting the Tate Modern²⁸ in London.

I was just thinking about Olafur Eliasson, he did that sun in the Turbine Hall²⁹ (The Weather Project, Tate Gallery, Turbine Hall 2003–4). That was so powerful and that was in an industrial setting, wasn't it? That had a kind of healing quality and people were behaving really, like, 'I was moved to write a poem after visiting that'. Because it was so impactful.

Those who provided examples of art displayed in heritage sites responded using positive emotionally valenced responses, while those who did not display more negative emotionally valenced responses which were more generalised.

The following respondent did not want to make a judgement before seeing the contemporary art commissions. A 70-year-old male (who did not give his occupation) stated about Cherryburn:

I may have detrimental thoughts about it when I see it, but I mean it might just blow my socks off, I don't know. Let's keep an open mind.

This respondent is prepared to reflect upon what they see before taking a particular stance. They were not relying on previously encoded attitudes for their responses at this stage. As Cunningham and Zelazo (2007, 97) state:

automatic and reflective evaluative processes need to integrate stored representations from previous experience with current contexts and goals, but context and goals have a more prominent role in reflective evaluation.

The more open nature of their response reflects this person's adaptability, and they may be willing to use the experience in different ways. There were differences between individuals in their willingness and ability to change their emotional response through emotion regulation. These pre-existing attitudes, expressed as positive or negative emotionally valenced responses, have been created using emotion regulation and encoded over time in response to the perceived needs of the respondent's social and political environment.

The group from Equal Arts, while culturally active (in that they collectively visited arts venues in the region and created art of different types), did not express attitudes towards contemporary art being displayed in heritage sites, apart from one respondent who liked Stella

McCartney's Lucky Spot,³⁰ which had been displayed at Belsay Hall, Northumberland. Members of the group had left school aged 15 and 17 (they did not undertake further educational qualifications in later life as some of the other group members did) and this suggests that they had fewer resources of the sort needed to underpin their appraisals/evaluations of the contemporary art commissions in heritage sites. As a result, only one respondent in this group used emotion words (Bedford 1957) to describe the outcome of their appraisal/evaluation of an example of contemporary art in a heritage environment prior to the visits. These specific resources might be viewed as broadly synonymous with cultural capital, which is defined by Grenfell and Hardy (2007, 30) as 'symbolically valued cultural accoutrements and attitudes'. This group might be viewed as having a different culture to the others in respect of how they respond to the commissions in heritage sites.

However constituted, the above represents the 'starting point for evaluations' (Fazio 2007, 628) that might be made during the visits to the heritage sites to view the contemporary art commissions, which are examined below.

Responses to visiting contemporary art commissions in heritage sites

When visiting the contemporary art commissions for heritage sites the respondents undertook new evaluations/appraisals (Gross and Feldman Barrett 2011; Jones, Kirkland, and Cunningham 2014) in response to what they saw. As Kashima et al. (2020, 60) note, the first gut reaction is not always the most 'optimally adaptive response to the situation' and so emotion regulation is sometimes required to change that response. While some had visited the heritage sites concerned previously, the contemporary art commissions were new to them. The below focuses on their first encounter with the commissions as part of the research project, apart from the last two examples. The first of which demonstrates change over time and the second a physical reaction to Holy Trinity Church, Sunderland.

After visiting Gibside, several members of the Shipley Art Gallery group were still concerned about the appropriateness of situating the contemporary art commissions in a heritage site, as they were in the initial focus group. An 83-year-old male with a further degree and a professional occupation before retirement stated:

Not that I'm pre-judging before we get there, but from a distance, it didn't look good to me at all. I thought, 'Oh God, is that really there?' Once I'd got there, I liked it by itself. I don't like it next to the orangery, it's too close for me.

Within this group, it was common for aspects of the art or how it was situated in the heritage site to be liked or criticised with emotional responses being positively or negatively valenced, sometimes strongly and other times less so.

Similar responses are seen from the Site Volunteers group who also visited Gibside for the first visit. However, a more complex appraisal/evaluation of Fiona Curran's work was provided by a 71-year-old female who had a degree, further qualifications, and a professional occupation, she states:

My opinion of the Wardian Case fluctuates wildly all the time. Every time I come it fluctuates. I've gone from really resenting it and finding it an intrusion, to actually loving it. I loved it at the beginning. I love the symbolism of it. Having seen it now in sunshine with laburnum over it, it's softened it, where I felt it was an intrusion. The aspect that I don't like, the blackness and the bulkiness and the bars are there because they suggest jail and imprisonment.

This respondent is working out an appropriate emotionally valenced response to the artwork in the heritage site in the context of the group. To do this they used cognitive change or response modulation (Gross and Feldman Barrett 2011), where the appraisal/evaluation was changed to alter the artwork's emotional impact or when responses were changed after the emotion regulation processes had started. Therefore, the outcome of the appraisal/evaluation, and so the meanings this

respondent creates, change after reflection in response to the perceived appropriateness of the emotion being expressed.

There was discussion between respondents about how the commissions could be interpreted and how they related to the site. Members of the Shipley Art Gallery and Site Volunteers groups were comfortable discussing art, essentially appraising/evaluating it using emotion words (Bedford 1957), as this was a normal activity for them. They also appreciated that the results of this process might change when they learnt more about what they were viewing. Some admitted they had not read the leaflet provided by the National Trust about the site and did not know what the artists were aiming to communicate, they suggested that more information should be made available.

The culture of the group, underpinned by resources or cultural capital (Grenfell and Hardy 2007) for appraisal/evaluation, and how that might change in the context of the visits, determined the emotion regulation strategies.

The group from Beamish, The Living Museum of the North, visited Cherryburn as their first visit and the results of their appraisal differed to those given above. No strongly valenced emotional responses were expressed about the artwork or its position in a heritage site. This was possibly because they viewed the work as more accessible and less *avant-garde* than they were expecting. The style and size owed a lot to what Thomas Bewick (1753–1828) himself had created and so was viewed as being closely related to the site. A 71-year-old female with a professional occupation stated, ‘I think I was expecting something art wise, a little bit more unconventional’ and this was a ‘pleasant surprise’, which was a common emotional response amongst the group. The sort of discussion which took place in the groups reported upon above was not observed. Respondents were already relationally aligned in respect to the contemporary art commission displayed at Cherryburn (Parkinson 2021) and so the outcome of their appraisal/evaluation needed little calibrating through emotion regulation. As Livingstone et al. (2011) note when groups have similar emotional orientations, they have a common social identity. This can be viewed as an example of relation-alignment (Parkinson 2021) which involves the mutual positioning of individuals and is calibrated by emotion co-regulation (Fischer and Manstead 2018).

In the initial interviews (mentioned above), only one respondent from the Equal Arts group expressed a pre-existing attitude towards contemporary art commissions for heritage sites. Some members of this group were unsure about what they were being taken to see. After their visit to Gibside a 72-year-old male, who did not give his prior occupation said.

I was surprised, I thought that when we were coming here, I thought when you said about the art and that, I thought we were going to go into a gallery where there's pictures.

His lack of prior knowledge meant that any appraisals/evaluations he made were not based upon pre-existing attitudes. However, the group were making appraisals/evaluations and the results of these were universally positively valenced which was different to the other groups, possibly reflecting a pressure to approve of what they had been taken to see. When speaking about Andrew Burton's work an 83-year-old female who left school at 15 with no qualifications said:

I would love to know what went through his mind as he was making the pot and, ‘Well am I going to put a plant on here? Am I going to put a bird in here?’ That coloured bird was fantastic.

Members of this group were interested in obtaining more information about what they saw, and this would have the effect of increasing the resources that they could bring to bear on the appraisals/evaluations, that they were making over time. Those resources changed after the visits for all the groups. An example of this is illustrated by this response, which was from a 75-year-old male from the Shipley Art Gallery group visiting Holy Trinity Church, Sunderland, as the last of the visits.

My opinion before we started was that I didn't really like the idea of installation art. I probably have a preconceived idea of what that would mean. I have to say if, for instance, you'd said, ‘Right, we're just

going to this church to listen to a sound piece', I really would not have looked forward to that at all. I still had doubts when we came today but far less because, having been to the other two, my views of installation pieces have changed quite a bit. So, I certainly came with a more open mind.

Exposure to the contemporary art in a heritage context had increased the resources they could bring to bear, and they became better able to undertake appraisals/evaluations and emotion regulation processes as a response. As a result, in this case, this individual expressed a more positive emotionally valenced response than they might have done otherwise.

The following respondent (64-year-old female, National Trust site Volunteer group, with a degree and professional occupation) had an emotional experience when they visited Holy Trinity Church, Sunderland, that they struggled to explain.

I found myself getting a little bit emotional and I'm thinking, 'Why am I sad that this Church has basically died, and this is part of its resurrection? Or is it just the music that's having an effect on me?' I haven't got any connection to it, family wise or relationship wise or anything and yet I'm feeling, 'Aaah'. But why that happened, I've got no idea; I can't pinpoint that. I was being guided to feel optimistic. That was my initial feeling.

In this example, visiting the church with the sound piece initially made them sad, but the overall experience was an optimistic one. This was only one person's response, and despite being a departure from the appraisal and constructivist approach used above, it has been included as this was an example of an attempt being made to make sense of an internal emotional state which had been caused by the visit (Gross and Feldman Barrett 2011). This is one of the main ingredients of the psychological construction perspective on emotion regulation, which sees emotion as more than social constructions where bodily responses can be regulated psychologically. In this case meaning is being created through reflection within a social and political context, in this case the focus groups.

Discussion

It is possible to view pre-existing encoded attitudes (Jones, Kirkland, and Cunningham 2014) as being constitutive of the cultural conventions that underpin the social constructivist understanding of emotion regulation (Gross and Feldman Barrett 2011; Mesquita 2010), within the focus groups. These cultural conventions associated with encountering contemporary art commissions for heritage sites are broadly similar for the groups from the Shipley Art Gallery, Beamish, The Living Museum of the North, and National Trust and were well established. However, the Equal Arts group did not have the cultural conventions to draw upon when they first discussed the commissions, although these were being developed the more exposure they had. These cultural conventions can be seen as closely related to the resources or cultural capital (Grenfell and Hardy 2007; Newman, Goulding, and Whitehead 2013), which underpin the appraisals/evaluations that took place.

The respondents were retired people aged between 57 and 83-years-old, at the time of the study, and so might be expected to adopt emotion regulation strategies that reflect changing resources and goals (Urry and Gross 2010) that come with increasing age. Charles and Carstensen (2014) suggest a progression from knowledge-based goals to those that are more emotionally based (although it is unclear what this means). However, there is limited empirical work on this topic and age-related changes in emotion regulation strategy preferences are under researched (Martins et al. 2018). Respondents in this study had both knowledge-based goals and others associated with pleasure. Knowledge-based goals gave them greater resources, so their evaluations/appraisals and emotion regulation strategies became more sophisticated. None of the respondents mentioned running out of time and they did not 'give primacy to enhancing emotionally gratifying experiences in the moment as opposed to future rewards' (Allen and Windsor 2019; Scheibe and Carstensen 2010, 135). It is probable that changing goals and resources for emotion regulation, as a product of age,

are present, but the evidence is complicated by the heterogeneous nature of the older population. Factors influencing this are likely to include ageing, period, and cohort effects³¹ (Alwin, Hofer, and McCammon 2006; Scherger 2009). Theoretically, it might have been expected to see differences between a 57-year-old and an 86-year-old (the youngest and oldest person in the study), however, this was not evident empirically because of the complex interplay between the different factors involved (Idler 2006). Respondents were healthy older people, rather than those whose health was starting to fail (third and fourth ages respectively, Laslett 1994) who might have been expected to employ different emotion regulation strategies. It is also possible that the mixed-age group meant that the different orientations of the younger and older adults may get downplayed in favour of relation-alignment (Parkinson 2021), for example.

While emotion regulation can be observed in the data the reasons for undertaking it within the contexts of the groups involved are less obvious. The literature links it theoretically with wellbeing although this cannot be directly observed in the data. For example, Urry and Gross (2010, 356) state that:

the more frequent use of reappraisal (cognitive change) is associated with higher levels positive and lower levels of negative emotion, lower levels of depressive symptoms, and higher levels of life satisfaction.

This is supported by Fancourt and Ali (2019, 1) who note that ‘the ability to regulate our emotions is fundamentally linked to our mental health’ and might be impaired in those with mental illness of various types. As is noted in the literature review (Kitayama and Park 2007), the objectives of emotion regulation and how it relates to wellbeing is determined by psychological adaption, through emotion regulation to cultural norms. Therefore, what results in wellbeing in one culture would not necessarily do the same in another. The differences between the groups would have meant that the goals of emotion regulation so what constitutes wellbeing may also have differed. The ability to regulate emotions can also be linked to the construct of resilience which is defined by Windle and Bennett (2011, 152) as ‘the process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma’.

This study provides a way of thinking about the ways people use visits to contemporary art commissions in heritage sites and their relationship to good mental health, that has not been explored elsewhere. As such, it contributes to policy-oriented debates over the social value of arts and heritage and the contribution they make to the ways that people manage their lives. It also provides a potential mechanism for describing how changes in attitudes amongst visitors to museums, galleries, and heritage sites could occur. However, not all respondents were open to change, and some rejected the idea of contemporary art situated in heritage sites. Emotion regulation difficulties have been widely studied, for example, in terms of post-traumatic stress (Tull et al. 2007) and personality traits (Pollock et al. 2016). Practical implications include the need to provide background information when siting artworks in heritage sites as the respondents wanted to find out what the works were about and what the artists intended to communicate. This provided resources that supported appraisals/evaluations made by the respondents of an unfamiliar art form in a heritage site context.

From a social constructivist perspective (Mesquita 2010), it is through enculturation that participants determined what they thought was an appropriate emotional response to the artworks commissioned for the heritage sites. This varied between respondents and would have been influenced by pre-existing attitudes, the social and political context of the visit and emotion regulation goals. However, this could also be influenced by not having the sorts of resources or cultural capital (Grenfell and Hardy 2007; Newman, Goulding, and Whitehead 2013) needed to support emotion regulation in this context. Little, if any, emotion regulation was required if group members had a common emotional orientation towards something. The former is illustrated by the fact that respondents did not use emotion words to describe the heritage sites themselves, which implies that they already had a collective emotional orientation towards them. It would be interesting to repeat the study with people with from minoritised³²

ethnic groups who might not see the heritage sites as being part of their personal and community history. It could also be predicted that individual personality traits would influence emotion regulation styles (Hughes et al. 2020). However, the research did not capture personally traits which would require a project designed for the purpose. This could be explored in further research.

It was not evident that emotion regulation was being used to maintain social position, identity, or power, or to distance others (Fischer and Manstead 2018), in this dataset. Individual and non-normative goals being achieved through emotion regulation were also not observed but could be explored in further research. As is noted by Smith and Campbell (2015), visitors may consciously manage their emotions by visiting one venue as opposed to another (situation selection, Gross and Feldman Barrett 2011) and the decision might be influenced, for example, by the particular historical narrative being communicated. It might also involve, for example, viewing a much-loved painting after a difficult day (Thoma et al. 2012). However, the analysis above shows that emotion regulation can work on an implicit level as well as a conscious one.

Conclusion

It is concluded that the respondents were using emotion regulation strategies to calibrate their response to the contemporary art commissions displayed in heritage sites, within the social context of the groups. This process was more difficult for the group from Equal Arts, who did not have the same resources or cultural capital to call upon than the groups from the Shipley Art Gallery, National Trust, and Beamish, The Living Museum of the North. The evaluations/appraisals only resulted in emotion regulation processes when individuals felt that change from an original position, or a refinement of that position, was required. This was evident in the response to the contemporary art commissions but not to the heritage sites themselves as the groups already had a common emotional orientation towards them. The analysis provides a way of thinking about the cultural value of contemporary art and heritage and the part it plays in the lives of the respondents. However, many questions remain and these need to be explored in further research.

Notes

1. <https://www.artsandheritage.org.uk/>
2. <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/>
3. <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/trust-new-art-exhibitions-and-events#:~:text=Since%202009%2C%20Trust%20New%20Art,performance%2C%20writing%20and%20immersive%20installations.>
4. <https://research.ncl.ac.uk/mcahe/> see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Cxq0YYPUb8>
5. <https://www.ukri.org/councils/ahrc/>
6. <https://www.visitchurches.org.uk/>
7. An example is the cognitive/noncognitive debate. England (2019, 102) states that ‘cognitive theories account for the intentionality of emotion, its interaction with belief, and the linguistic and evaluative sophistication of some emotion types. However, they cannot easily account for “reason-resistant” or “recalcitrant” emotions’.
8. <https://shipleyartgallery.org.uk/>
9. <https://www.beamish.org.uk/>
10. <https://www.equalarts.org.uk/>
11. <https://baltic.art/>
12. <https://sunderlandculture.org.uk/our-venues/national-glass-centre/>
13. <https://www.gatesheadcarers.com/>
14. <https://www.visitchurches.org.uk/visit/church-listing/holy-trinity-sunderland.html>
15. <https://www.nhmf.org.uk/>
16. <https://www.visitchurches.org.uk/what-s-on/gogmagog-voice-of-the-bells-sunderland.html>
17. <https://www.workplacegallery.co.uk/artists/21-matt-stokes/overview/>
18. <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/gibside>

19. Owned by the Landmark Trust https://www.landmarktrust.org.uk/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA_c-OBhDFARIsAIFg3exFgAGiL1A5GWfUSKf4fjK2qyzQJ0cJGEDTvuFuvU5q4lWqjMXgyzwaAt92EALw_wcB
20. <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/sacs/people/profile/andrewburton.html>
21. <https://fionacurran.co.uk/>
22. <https://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/Wardian-Case/>
23. <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/cherryburn>
24. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/bewicks-history-of-british-birds#:~:text=The%20History%20of%20British%20Birds%20is%20the%20best%2Dknown%20work,wood%2Dengraving%20at%20this%20time>
25. <https://markfairington.com/>
26. <https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home>
27. https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/belsay-hall-castle-and-gardens/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=aka_belsay_hall_22
28. <https://www.tate.org.uk/>
29. <https://olafureliasson.net/archive/artwork/WEK101003/the-weather-project#:~:text=Created%20for%20the%20Turbine%20Hall,the%20illusion%20of%20a%20sun.>
30. <http://blog.lightopiaonline.com/lighting-videos/stella-mccartneys-lucky-spot-swarovski-horse-chandelier/>
31. Alwin et al. (2006) state that the effects of historical time can be defined in terms of cohort effects, which are described as ‘the stable differences among birth cohorts as a result of the historical circumstances of their development’ (p. 22), and period effects which can be identified ‘when an entire social group is affected by historical events, such as war, an economic depression, or social movement’ (p. 22). Ageing effects are viewed as the physical, psychosocial, and social effects of ageing (Scherger 2009).
32. A guide to race and ethnicity terminology and language <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/ethnic-minority-lawyers/a-guide-to-race-and-ethnicity-terminology-and-language>

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Appendix 1 Baseline socio-demographic questions and focus group interview schedules

Gender

Date of Birth

Age

Are you married/single/widowed or divorced?

Place of residence

Postcode

How long have you lived here? (Years/months)

If longer than 3 years, where did you live before?

Ethnic group

Educational achievement

Main activity/occupation (before retirement for those who have retired)

Focus Group interview schedules and data collection (these questions were used as starting points for wider conversations).

Pre-site visit

Do you have/What kind of/artwork do you have in your home? Any favourites?

What art works would you like to have/to engage with (visit/see etc)?

Where would you predominantly go to engage with art?

Have you ever made any art? (or taken part in art classes?)

What do you consider as 'your heritage'?

What heritage sites do you visit, if any?

In the last 12 months have you been to ... ?

| | Has your level of engagement changed in the last 10 years? | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Yes | No | YES | NO |
| 1. Museums or art galleries | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. The theatre or to see dance or music performances | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Historic sites (this includes historic attractions such as old buildings, historic parks and gardens and archaeological sites) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. The library | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Festivals | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. An exhibition or collection of art, photography or sculpture | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. A craft exhibition (excluding 'craft markets') | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Any event including video or electronic art | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. None of these things | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Site interview questions – questions being used as the starting points for wider discussions.

Section 1. Response to the Site

Who has/hasn't visited the site before?

What did you think of the site visit today?

Section 2. Response to the Artwork

What did you think of the artwork?

What did you do/use to understand the artwork?

Section 3 Situating art in heritage

What do you think of as Contemporary Art?

Can you describe any examples of art works in heritage sites which you've visited?

What do you suppose was/is the intention/purpose of art in a heritage site?

Section 4 Expectations of respondents

Why did you want to be involved?

What do you hope to learn/gain from taking part about heritage and/or contemporary art?

Section 3. Relationships between the Artwork and the Site

Did the artwork contribute to your understanding of the site?

Did the site contribute to your appreciation of the artwork?

For after the first visit.

How did today's visit/experience differ from your last site visit?