5-2024

Developing an eBook for First Responders: Exploring Arts-Based Interventions to Counter Burnout and Build Resilience

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Exploring Arts-Based Interventions to Counter Burnout and Build Resilience

by

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A research paper presented to the

Faculty of the Department of
Marital and Family Therapy with Specialized Training in Art Therapy
Loyola Marymount University

In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Marital and Family Therapy with Specialized Training in Art Therapy

May 2, 2024

Signature Page

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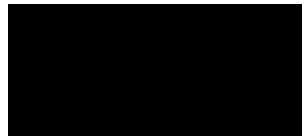
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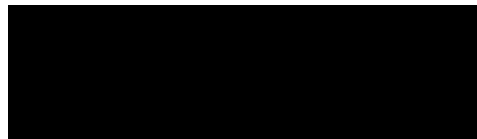
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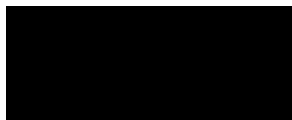
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Abstract

The researchers in this project studied the prevalence and impact of burnout among first responders, after which they produced CRISP (Creative Resilience Initiatives for Service Providers), a groundbreaking art therapy-based program published in an electronic book format aimed at addressing burnout and fostering resilience among first responders. Our program aims to foster resilience by integrating art therapy's Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) model with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and anti-racism strategies. The ETC model aligns with inclusive and diverse practices as it emphasizes a system-focused approach in using creativity, self-reflection, and cultivation of effective body-mind empathy. The CRISP eBook features 18 arts-based activities, each accompanied by relevant psychoeducation and self-reflective questions. These activities engage first responders in kinesthetic, sensorial, perceptual, affective, cognitive, and symbolic components of information processing in the ETC, utilizing multi-faceted creativity as a powerful tool for building resilience and countering burnout signs that can lead to depersonalized and biased practices in their work. Future studies are warranted to assess the efficacy of art interventions, such as those explored in the CRISP eBook, in addressing the unique stressors faced by first responders.

Keywords: Expressive Therapies Continuum, burnout, resilience, creativity, art therapy, meaning-making, first responders, eBook

Acknowledgements

Emme extends her gratitude to the research members for their collaboration and teamwork, as well as to her family and friends for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout graduate school. She also expresses appreciation for the guidance provided by the CRISP team research advisor.

Olivia would like to thank the team, our research advisor, and everyone along the way who supported this project.

Hannah wishes to convey her profound gratitude to her esteemed team members for their unwavering support, which has been instrumental on this journey. She extends heartfelt appreciation to her research advisor for the invaluable guidance and steadfast dedication to the team and our collective pursuit of this essential research. Additionally, she wishes to extend warm thanks to her beloved family and friends for their enduring encouragement and boundless optimism. Lastly, she expresses sincere gratitude to all first responders for their selfless service and unwavering commitment to the well-being of others.

Ashley would like to thank her fellow researchers for their collaborative efforts and consistent team mindset that made this project possible. She extends grateful acknowledgement to the group's advisor, Dr. Nancy Choe, for sharing her extensive knowledge and providing guidance and assistance in helping the project to stay afloat and on track. Ashley wants to thank her family, especially her parents for their unwavering support throughout her life, as well as those first responders in her family for both their services and for offering insight into their industry experience, which was exceedingly helpful for this endeavor. Last but certainly not least, she would like to thank her partner for his constant provision of encouragement, assurance, and validation as she navigated this research process.

Baylor would like to thank her collaborative research team for their efforts, hard work, and dedication. She would like to make a special thanks to Dr. Nancy Choe for her guidance and support throughout our research and execution of the eBook. She would like to extend gratitude and acknowledgment to her family and friends for the endless support throughout her life and journey throughout graduate school; nothing would be possible without them.

Taysia warmly thanks her research partners and faculty advisor for their creativity and collaboration in this project. This project could not have been developed without these key people. She would like to extend gratitude to her family and friends for their constant love and support throughout her time at Loyola Marymount University. This project is in gratitude to first responders who service the community, thank you.

The CRISP team extends its heartfelt gratitude to our advisor, Dr. Nancy Choe, for her invaluable guidance, support, and expertise, which have been instrumental in bringing this eBook to fruition. Additionally, we wish to express our sincere appreciation to the Department of Marital and Family Therapy with specialized training in Art Therapy at Loyola Marymount University, as well as its esteemed professors, for providing us with the necessary tools and knowledge to conduct our research as we venture into this field.

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Introduction

Study Topic

The practice of Japanese Kintsugi, which involves repairing broken ceramics with gold lacquer to highlight the beauty and transformation in the breaking, is a common mental health metaphor for resilience. While integrating creative practices for mental well-being is a common intervention, research on its impact on burnout among first responders, as well as resilience building tailored to this demographic, remains limited. Within the extant body of research, studies consistently demonstrate that both curated and independent creative engagement effectively supports alleviating depersonalization, exhaustion, and diminished self-efficacy— major three signs of workplace burnout. These findings are optimistic given the high prevalence of burnout in this critical profession and its significant impact on morale and social judgment, especially when interacting with marginalized social and racial groups. Conventional didactic learning methods, such as diversity training and self-care emphasis, often prove insufficient in providing support, necessitating a more innovative and holistic intervention approach.

Background

In the demanding and emotionally taxing field of human services, burnout has become an alarmingly prevalent concern, affecting a significant proportion of service providers. A post-COVID-19 survey measuring job satisfaction, assessment of efficacy, and feelings of accomplishment of 1,500 U.S. employees resulted in more than half of the participants reporting having experienced burnout (Moyer, 2022). Furthermore, another 4.3 million Americans quit their jobs at the end of 2021, citing similar dissatisfaction and stress related to occupational demands (Moyer, 2022).

In 2017, the University of Phoenix conducted a survey regarding first responder mental

health with 2,000 U.S. adults identifying as firefighters, police officers, EMT/paramedics, and nurses and found that 85% of American first responders have experienced symptoms related or attributed to mental health conditions (Heisel, 2017). Additionally, Nissim et al. (2022) noted that U.S. firefighters and police personnel are more likely to die by suicide than in the line of duty. They further report that since the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of suicide completion demonstrated a moderate-to-minimal decrease in American first responders in 2020 (Nissim et al., 2022). With statistics of this significance, ignoring this phenomenon – or claiming a lack of grit as an employee's self-imposed downfall – is unproductive and minimizes the impact of burnout.

Despite the gradual reduction of mental health stigma in the United States, first responders continue to encounter stigma as a hindrance to seeking help. The concept of the profession itself aligns with traditional masculinity norms, emphasizing traits like "grit" and swiftly overcoming challenges with minimal personal or emotional impact. While the introduction of creative practices may initially appear contrary to those masculine norms, evidence supports that the benefits of arts-based interventions and everyday creativity are widespread and may be particularly helpful to this population. Art may prove to be more accessible than originally considered and may enable first responders – as well as other service providers – to discover connections and meaning in jobs that can be profoundly isolating. The links between art, creativity, and the mental health and well-being of first responders are currently under-researched, presenting a significant opportunity to undertake further research and make a meaningful impact.

Significance of the Study

First responders face daily challenges that can cause significant amounts of stress, which over time can build up and lead to burnout. The prominence of burnout in these first responders can lead to a lack of motivation, efficiency, and efficacy in both their personal and professional lives. This not only affects their own quality of life and mental well-being but also can in turn lead to a decrease in the quality and quantity of the services that they are able to provide in their roles, which then affects those in the community whom they are meant to serve. This is especially true in low-income and/or densely-populated areas with high occurrences of violence or limitation of resources, where the pressure put on the few resources – the first responders – in these areas can become especially demanding. When first responders experience feelings of burnout, they can also become depersonalized and implement biased practices in their work, which is detrimental to those in these communities, as well as first responders who identify with cultural groups outside the norm in the first responders' work environment.

This project aims to foster resilience by integrating the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) art therapy model with DEI and anti-racism strategies. Our CRISP eBook emphasizes a system-focused approach, self-reflection, and cultivation of effective body-mind empathy through arts-based activities that are coupled with relevant psychoeducation and DEI components. These activities will engage first responders in kinesthetic, sensorial, perceptual, affective, cognitive, and symbolic components of information processing, utilizing multi-faceted creativity as a powerful tool for building resilience and countering burnout signs that can lead to the depersonalization and biased practices in their work. By addressing the unique challenges faced by first responders – including BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ first responders – CRISP aims to enhance their overall well-being, which will in turn contribute to a more sustainable approach to

their vital roles in supporting communities. CRISP will also highlight links between institutional

racism and burnout in communities of color and the role of art as a powerful tool of human

healing, connection building, and meaning-making.

Literature Review

Burnout has become an alarmingly prevalent concern in the demanding and emotionally taxing field of human services, affecting a significant proportion of service providers. The persistent states of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lowered personal accomplishment that characterize burnout can have detrimental consequences for service providers' mental and physical health, work efficacy, and job satisfaction. Within the service-providing sector, individuals in the first responder field are at significant risk of experiencing burnout. While each state may have their own definition of first responders, the federal law defines first responders as "firefighter, law enforcement officer, paramedic, emergency medical technician, or other individual (including an employee of a legally organized and recognized volunteer organization, whether compensated or not), who, in the course of his or her professional duties, responds to fire, medical, hazardous material, or other similar emergencies" (Comprehensive Acts, 2016). In 2017, the University of Phoenix conducted a survey regarding first responder mental health with 2,000 U.S. adults identifying as firefighters, police officers, EMT/paramedics, and nurses and found that 85% of American first responders have experienced symptoms related or attributed to mental health conditions (Heisel, 2017). To this date, burnout remains unrecognized as a mental health diagnosis

Leaving the mental health of service providers unattended will only enable these trends to continue. Therefore, it is essential to support service providers' mental health in addressing symptoms of burnout by emphasizing and bolstering resilience within these providers. In this literature review, we (a) comprehensively examine the concepts of burnout and resilience; (b) explore the Expressive Therapies Continuum theory as a framework in art therapy and how creativity such as arts-based interventions can contribute to holistic mental wellbeing; (c)

describe the characteristics of the first responder population that may impact their wellbeing; and (d) review considerations of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in addressing mental health. These insights from the literature will contribute to the development of an informed arts-based program designed to tackle burnout and reinforce resilience.

Burnout

Although not officially recognized as a diagnosable medical condition, the 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) defines burnout as the following:

> Burnout is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions: feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and reduced professional efficacy. Burnout refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life. (World Health Organization, 2022, para. 3)

Most authors also describe burnout similarly as feelings of emotional exhaustion, a decreased sense of accomplishment, and depersonalization demonstrated through loss of empathy, compassion, and the like (e.g., Barnett, 2014). These three characteristics are particularly detrimental and concerning to employees such as teachers, medical professionals, first responders, and therapists who work in a service-providing organization and require an elevated level of compassion and personable affect. One study found that occupational stress related to COVID-19 has been profound among healthcare workers and first responders with high levels of psychiatric symptoms and distress including thoughts of suicide or self-harm (Hendrickson et al., 2022). Even before COVID-19, high levels of burnout have known to negatively impact personal

physical and mental health as well as organizational wellness including but not limited to high turnover rate, low job performance, decline in job satisfaction, greater conflicts at work (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). Although occupation stress may be inherent among fire fighters, those with sleep disturbances and mental health problems have higher risk of developing burnout (Wolkow et al., 2019). Thus, supporting both physical and mental well-being may mitigate or protective role against burnout.

Resilience

Grit, defined as long-term goal-focused perseverance and passion (Duckworth et al., 2007), has been proposed as an antidote for burnout (Lockwood, 2019). Many outcome-oriented professions, such as academia and the medical field, emphasize grit as a characteristic that may counter or prevent burnout (Shakir et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2020). In contrast, resilience places less emphasis on one's traits and passion and more on strengths-based processes to overcome a challenging situation (Rashid & McGrath, 2020). Resilience acts as the gold lacquer reinforcing the structure's integrity, or an individual's ability to persevere using their strengths. Thus, resilience has emerged as a crucial factor in fortifying one's capacity to endure workplace challenges and reduce burnout.

The understanding of resilience, as defined by the American Psychological Association, states that it is "the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands" (n.d.). This dynamic includes how an individual views and interacts with the world and the availability of social resources. Research shows that continued practice and engagement in positive coping strategies can foster resilience. From this lens, resilience has come to be understood and emphasized as a dynamic process and a malleable characteristic that

can be acquired, if not inherent (Southwick et al., 2014).

These perspectives offer optimism for individuals grappling with occupational stress or burnout and those seeking to harness the power of resilience. Given recent efforts to develop various resilience training models in the workplace (Davis & Batcheller, 2020; Rothstein et al., 2016; Tabibnia, 2020), there remains an opportunity for researchers to innovate and evaluate processes and approaches to enhance an individual's adaptability and resilience.

Individual and Organizational Resilience

Enhancing resilience is crucial at the organizational level, as a symbiotic relationship between individual and organizational resilience (Vercio et al., 2021). Organizations, institutions, and communities play a pivotal role in either fostering or hindering resilience within these systems. Vercio et al. (2021) purport that "organizations may overemphasize personal resilience while avoiding critical systemic issues," (p. 572) which may place blame on the workers and contribute to their burnout. Therefore, strategies that integrate both individual and organizational resilience are more effective in mitigating burnout symptoms. The authors propose that organizational support can alter the trajectory of resilience for healthcare providers at an individual level in medical settings where burnout is prevalent. This emphasis on organizational support depicts a shift from identifying the "weakest link/individual" to recognizing the "weakest bonds between the individual and the organization" (Vercio et al., 2021, p. 572). Organizations' collaboration with and support of their members through adversity can enable individuals to persevere in their work rather than opting to quit (Yuan, 2023).

While many resilience building interventions have been proposed, using or integrating creativity proves to be an effective approach in building resilience and mitigating burnout (e.g., Engel et al., 2023; Patel et al., 2021; Torres et al., 2023). Integrating an art therapy-based

framework like the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) model may further enhance the creative and therapeutic process by supporting a holistic well-being and resilience (Hinz, 2018). The principles of flexibility and problem-solving inherent in creativity align with workplace practices, making creativity beneficial for both individual well-being and positive workplace outcomes.

Somatic Resilience

The body's physical processes have a profound impact on the development of resilience. Human beings operate as a "unitary whole," and understanding resilience through cognitive processes alone is insufficient (Buckley et al., 2018). As individuals progress through life, their bodies begin to encode learned habits in response to experiences of attachment, trauma, and other situations that may trigger the automatic physiological response to stress or danger, such as the fight-or-flight response. These habits are aroused through what Buckley et al. (2018) termed *neuroception*, "a neural process, outside awareness, [that is] neurobiologically programmed to detect features in the environment, including behavioral cues from others, that indicate degrees of safety, danger, and threat to life" (p. 227). Hence, neuroception triggers the body's habitual behaviors developed throughout life to defend and protect from outside threats.

Researchers have noted the significance of somatic resilience resources in mitigating the effects of stress responses. For instance, Kennedy et al. (2017) explicitly linked a deficiency in resilience to an elevated risk of physiological symptoms and even progressive diseases, such as lung and liver cancer; they assert the interconnectedness of resilience with the physiological stress response. Zaharakis et al. (2018) similarly emphasize the substantial role of resilience in reducing somatization, having noted its prevalence in adolescent girls. Yang (2020) concentrates on a trait associated with a propensity for physical aggression, exploring how resilience develops

through exposure to adversity, developing coping strategies, and lessening somatic symptoms.

The presence of physical resilience resources thus relies on attention to physiological systems and practices. Malarkey et al. (2016) developed a measure known as REMAP – which addresses five domains of resilience that they termed relational engagement, emotional sensibility, meaningful action, awareness of self and others, and physical health behaviors – that they found to be a predictor of resilience and fewer physiological and health symptoms. The latter of these five domains, the physical health behaviors that address the body's somatic systems, was vital in mitigating struggles such as pain and sleep troubles. Braun et al. (2020) have also presented findings on how active coping strategies increase quality of life and resilience.

Many have developed and proposed interventions to foster resilience through attention to the somatic bodily processes. Buckley et al. (2018) note how physical somatic resources increase resilience and suggest interventions focused on posture, grounding, breathing, and compassionate self-touch that help stabilize and build resilience. Grabbe et al. (2018) developed the Trauma Resiliency Model (TRM) as a treatment modality that similarly focuses on the body's natural systems and energy, utilizing nine skills – including tracking, grounding, and others – to access internal coping skills and resources and foster mindful awareness.

Art Therapy and Burnout

Art therapy encompasses multiple modalities that inherently connect the mind, body, and spirituality. As resilience and burnout are described as physical, psychological, and emotional, exploring art therapy-based activities may contribute to countering burnout and developing resilient-building interventions (Engel et al., 2023). Tjasink et al. (2023) define art therapy as psychological therapy using art-making and creative expression as a critical element of

treatment. The American Art Therapy Association expands on this statement with its defining

qualities:

>Through integrative methods, art therapy engages the mind, body, and spirit in
>
>ways that are distinct from verbal articulation alone. Kinesthetic, sensory,
>
>perceptual, and symbolic opportunities invite alternative modes of receptive and
>
>expressive communication, which can circumvent the limitations of language.
>
>Visual and symbolic expression gives voice to experience, and empowers
>
>individual, communal, and societal transformation. (2017, How Art Therapy
>
>Works section)

Research indicates that addressing or expressing feelings may alleviate burnout (Granek et al.,

2017; Schaible & Six, 2016) and build resilience (Eldeleklioglu & Yildiz, 2020; Turan &

Canbulat, 2023). However, articulating emotions related to chronic challenges can be difficult

and dysregulating. Art therapy serves as a non-verbal intervention to address these symptoms of

burnout. According to He et al. (2019), art therapy interventions were found to be effective in

reducing symptoms of burnout in 65 medical students. Post-study, participants reported feeling

"reinvigorated" and "healed" after participating in sessions (He et al., 2019).

Phillips and Becker (2019) state that creative expression has the potential to enhance

psychosocial well-being and decrease stress. They demonstrate how incorporating creative arts

alongside psychoeducation about burnout further enhances understanding and offers tools –

including relaxation skills, techniques, and art exploration – for symptom management. Tjasink

and Soosaipillai (2019) created a 6-session procedure of 90-120 minutes per session

incorporating art therapy to approach three themes of burnout: self-awareness and self-care,

collegial connection and reflection on death, and bereavement and meaning-making. Participants

in this study shared their experience as positive and reported that this course helped identify and combat symptoms of burnout, including leading to a decrease in exhaustion.

In the systematic review conducted by Tjasink et al. (2023) of worldwide studies chronicling interventions implemented by or in conjunction with trained art therapists for the benefit of healthcare workers, the use of art-making was found to have a consistently positive effect on burnout, stress, anxiety, and post-traumatic recovery. Art therapy helped healthcare workers visualize and externalize stressors in both work and home life while providing them with new tools to help them cope with the stressors. The interventions utilized by Tjasink et al. also provided a means to become more aware of and share emotions and feelings that had been either repressed or difficult to identify. The group workshops gave way to feelings of solidarity and connection between co-workers, which in themselves often have a stress- and anxiety-reducing effect, and many achieved greater insight and perspective into both their own and others' feelings of burnout and stress. Also noted among the studies, however, was a significant lack of understanding regarding the mind-body connection that the art interventions might have elicited. Tjasink et al. (2020) proposed paying more attention to these connections and utilizing "increased body awareness" as a catalyst for change could yield potential benefits (p. 15). Still, the findings throughout all the studies bolster the case in favor of art therapy-based interventions as effective and beneficial resources for combating burnout in healthcare workers.

The Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC)

One framework in art therapy that allows for body and mind connection is the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) model. The ETC offers a path towards integrative creative functioning which can support personal wellness and resilience (Hinz, 2019). Initially conceived by Kagin (now Graves-Alcorn) and Lusebrink in 1978, the ETC is a holistic, developmental

model that emphasizes the connection between body and mind, external and internal realms, unconscious and conscious processes, and the interplay between the left and right brain hemispheres, among other factors. Specifically, the ETC is a multidimensional art therapy framework (Figure 1) that conceptualizes the creative processes in three levels and six components on a continuum of opposite sides: 1) Kinesthetic-Sensory, 2) Perceptual-Affective, and 3) Cognitive-Symbolic. As a neurologically-based model, the left side of the ETC involves logical and sequential information processing, while the right side activates intuitive, emotional, and spiritual engagement (Hinz, 2019). In art therapy, clients are encouraged to understand their strengths and engage both sides to promote self-efficacy and integration for well-being.

Figure 1

The Expressive Therapies Continuum
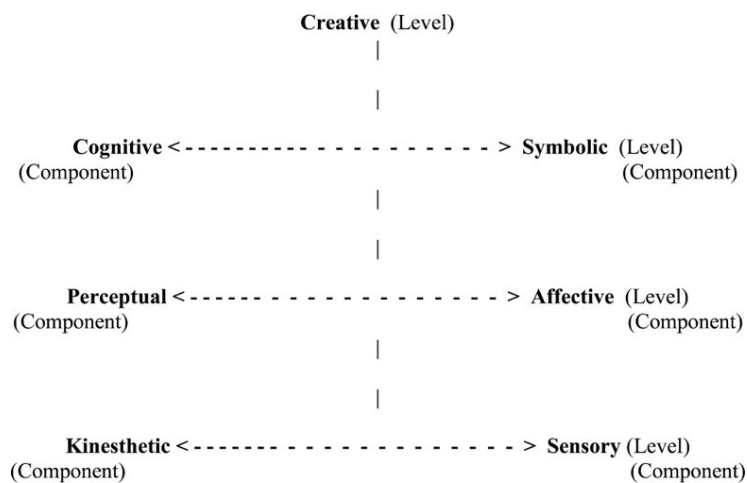
Note. Hinz (2019)

Art therapists can use various art media and materials to bring forth creative experiences that elicit a range of information processing in the ETC. According to Graves-Alcorn (2017), understanding the Media Dimension Variables model (MDV), which categorizes art therapy directives into structured-to-unstructured, tasks into simple-to-complex, and media properties into resistive-to-fluid, is essential to guiding clients therapeutically to move about the ETC

components and levels. Generally, resistive media (stone, wood, clay, pencils, crayons) can elicit cognitive experiences, whereas more fluid media (markers, oil pastels, chalk pastels, paints, watercolor) may evoke more affective experiences depending on the art directive (Hinz et al., 2022, p. 27). Ultimately, the ETC model highlights that the creative dimensions possess the capacity to integrate and foster holistic therapeutic functioning by customizing the variables of the media dimension (Hinz, 2019). For instance, Choe (2023) used art prompts based on the ETC framework in a narrative medicine workshop to address the resilience of healthcare and healthcare-adjacent professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research demonstrated how addressing all three levels of the ETC through short art activities with various art media yielded beneficial qualitative outcomes such as positive emotions, self-awareness, tolerance of uncertainty, and experiences of play and personal discovery. Such results support and demonstrate the ETC's foundation of "strengths and growth, resilience, and a positive attitude" (Graves-Alcorn & Green, 2014, p. 15).

According to Hinz et al. (2022), the creative dimension of the ETC is intimately linked to the concept of everyday creativity, which can result in personally meaningful actions, self-understanding, and resilience. Furthermore, despite its neurological and developmental underpinnings, the ETC is not specifically a tops-down or bottoms-up model; instead, art therapists are encouraged to elicit and start "using the component with which clients are most comfortable expressing themselves through the manipulation of art materials and expressive methods" (Hinz et al., 2022, p. 3). Such a client-centered and diverse view of art materials and media in creativity aligns with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) frameworks and anti-racist healthcare strategies with an emphasis on self-reflection and body-mind empathy (Galvan et al., 2023). Hinz (2019) describes the importance of reflective distance in art therapy, where the client

steps back from the immediacy of the art-making process and engages in self-reflection. In burnout and trauma, self-reflection and awareness play a pivotal role in prevention and treatment (Johnson, 2023; Spragg, 2011; Urdang, 2010).

Art-making can support cognitive processes such as mindfulness, effortful attention, and reflective thinking, while sensory inputs and kinesthetic manipulation through using and sharing art materials can mediate mind-body interactions and assist with emotional regulation and interpersonal learning (Hass-Cohen and Findlay, 2015). As such, the ETC is a valuable tool for assessing individuals' needs and employing selected art media to facilitate integration between mind and body. Art-making possesses a unique ability to bridge these domains, aiding in the integration of the mind and body. This integration helps alleviate burnout symptoms such as depersonalization and is an effective intervention in fostering resilience.

Neuroscience-Informed Art Therapy and Resilience

Art therapy can be designed to promote resilience and effectively address the totality of a person's ability to cope by activating their cognitive, affective, and somatic engagement and growth. In art therapy, the art process is central to the intervention than the final product (cite). Similarly, resilience is not an outcome but a multifaceted process that depends on multiple internal and external factors, including cognition, imagination, social interaction, personal beliefs, education, and affect (cite). The use of multiple domains in art-making not only allows for integration but encourages flexibility and adaptation, which are core factors in the development of resilience.

From a neuroscientific lens, learned resilience has been recognized as a process that results in measurable change via various systems in the brain and nervous system responses, including the vagus nerve. Vanderhasselt and Ottaviani (2022) detail the integration of both top-

down (from brain to heart activation via resonance breathing) and bottom-up (from heart to brain activation via neuromodulation) interventions to target the vagus nerve and facilitate effective communication between the mind and the body/heart, enabling greater control over the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). The researchers argue that integrating both top-down and bottom-up interventions builds resilience and increases the efficiency of the body's stress response, including its recognition of the onset and cessation of stress and its production of an appropriate reaction. Ultimately, the study suggests that this integration may generate a synergistic effect, helping the body process stress more efficiently and promoting resilience. Art therapy utilizes arts-based interventions that inherently integrate neurological processes and the body. Hass-Cohen and Findlay (2015) delve into the neurobiological underpinnings of art therapy interventions in their Art Therapy Relational Neuroscience (ATR-N) approach and describe how multimodal art therapy methods contribute to promoting resilience. They emphasize the integrative use of both top-down and bottom-up interventions in their ATR-N model, providing neuroscientific theories and research as evidence to support their claims. For instance, the authors propose that process-oriented art therapy interventions have the potential to initiate integrated changes across the brain by generating new neural connections and increasing cortical mass, thereby improving neuroplasticity.

Applying ATR-N principles and trauma models, Hass-Cohen et al. (2018) developed and investigated the efficacy of a four-drawing trauma and resilience protocol for participants with a trauma history. The participants in this study reported finding an increase in resilience-based resources, among other significant findings, that alleviated their negative emotional and mental impacts from trauma. Similarly, Kometiani and Farmer (2020) explored the effects of group art therapy on sex trafficking survivors; they found that art therapy enhanced resilience by

facilitating emotional catharsis, empowerment, and the ability to work through trauma and move toward finding meaning. Furthermore, Kalmanowitz (2016) explored the effects of using art therapy to develop resilience and support individuals, particularly refugees, who have experienced adversity. The study concentrated on twelve refugee participants from diverse cultures and backgrounds and measured resilience as the capacity to function and cope despite encountering difficult events and feeling distressing emotions. The art served as a tangible representation of experienced resilience, demonstrating how it can be a marker of internal strength and growth.

Meaning-Making and Everyday Creativity

Burnout extends beyond mere exhaustion; it encompasses cynicism, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of accomplishment (World Health Organization, 2019). These, in turn, give rise to decreased empathy for oneself and others and a diminished sense of purpose. Engaging in the symbolic aspect of the ETC facilitates the creation of new meaning. Hakkim and Deb (2021) highlight how the arts-based process of meaning-making has the potential to transform adversity and foster self-growth. Art-making allows for the discovery and growth integral to the development of resilience. Unlike the rigidity of burnout, creativity and resilience are flexible, elastic, and open for the rebuilding of meaning.

Furthermore, the qualities of spontaneity, effective problem-solving, divergent thinking, and flexibility, which are inherent in creativity, are also characteristics commonly observed in resilience (Richards, 2011). These seemingly ordinary tasks can inspire flexibility and adaptation. The term "everyday creativity" has been coined to describe the daily, ordinary, individual expressions of creativity that can occur during work or leisure time. Everyday creativity is defined by originality and meaningfulness and can include tasks like organization,

planning a vacation, fixing a car, or journaling (Richards, 2011). These routine employments

may be subtle, but they contribute to flexibility and adaptation, both of which are crucial

elements of resilience.

Moreover, everyday creativity is linked to self-actualization, as the creative process

enhances personal growth. Wilkinson and Chilton (2018) further categorize everyday creativity

into "little c's" and "mini c's." Little c's are described as hobbies and passion projects, whereas

mini c's are described as reflective art processes that produce personal insight and knowledge.

Little-c activities may include artistic hobbies, dancing, cooking, writing, and often-overlooked

tasks like housekeeping. Little c's can also be categorized under self-care, as they may include

leisure activities that enhance mood, facilitate empowerment, and reduce stress. Mini c's can

increase our well-being by facilitating body-mind integration. The satisfaction from engaging in

everyday creativity can also result in greater satisfaction in other domains of life. This further

supports the engagement of everyday creativity in fostering satisfaction in work life and

mitigating the effects of burnout. Students who engaged in journaling deep thoughts and feelings

made fewer student health visits and reported feeling significantly happier than those who did

not engage in the control group (Richards, 2007). The expression of positive emotions using art

helps us manage overwhelming negative feelings and trauma; they aid in the discovery of

positive meaning (Wilkinson & Chilton, 2018, p. 81). Creativity not only enhances our mental

well-being with increasing meaning-making and life enjoyment, but it also positively impacts

our bodies, resulting in greater health benefits. Engagement in the kinesthetic domain in the ETC

is found to decrease bodily tension, release energy, and aid in well-being. Thus, the use of the

ETC model not only aids in the integration of our body and mind but also increases emotional

regulation, which is a component in maintaining well-being (Wilkinson & Chilton, 2018).

Prevention

A final avenue to consider in targeting burnout would be enhancing resilience as a preventative measure. In occupational settings susceptible to burnout, Kerig (2018) has researched and proposed a curriculum focused on preventing burnout when individuals experience trauma. Although not directly related to art therapy, their research emphasizes factors similar to those found in art therapy studies, such as self-efficacy, emotional awareness, and affect regulation. Hass-Cohen et al. (2014) developed an arts-based protocol to address trauam and build resilience to facilitate narrative coherency which can decrease anxiety and increase self-efficacy. Furthermore, Kerig (2018) suggests incorporating these elements across three stages: pre-exposure prevention, coping during trauma or stress, and post-event maximization of the adaptation of resilience as a preventative method.

Additional research reinforcing Kerig's measures (2018) focuses on supporting first responders and firefighters, recognizing their vulnerability to burnout due to frequent exposure to trauma. However, the approach made by Denkova et al. (2020) differs in that it targets executive functioning as a way to promote resilience through strengthening cognitive, social and emotional processes. Their research underscores the somatic aspect of resilience and the importance of focusing on the present moment for detachment from past and future stressors.

Hass-Cohen and Findlay's work (2015) echoes the significance of detachment in building resilience through art, emphasizing process over product. The ETC approach further supports this by offering differing art media that engage the physical, emotional, and cognitive processing of information. This supports art-making's ability to serve as a tangible act to process internal and external stressors related to burnout. Arts-based interventions implementing principles of the ETC can be utilized as preventative processes that promote integration and foster resilience.

Demographics of First Responders

It is critical to the credibility and efficacy of this project to consider the current demographics of first responders in the United States, as it highlights the unique experiences these individuals bring to such a challenging and critical occupation. However, it is equally important to note that existing research regarding the mental health landscape of first responders is minimal; similarly, there are limited comprehensive and concurrent resources that thoroughly detail this information. Therefore, the following statistics should be understood with these considerations in mind.

According to federal law, first responder is described as "firefighter, law enforcement officer, paramedic, emergency medical technician, or other individual (including an employee of a legally organized and recognized volunteer organization, whether compensated or not), who, in the course of his or her professional duties, responds to fire, medical, hazardous material, or other similar emergencies" (Comprehensive Acts, 2016). According to a United States employment record (Zippia, 2023), as of 2021, an average of 61.4% of first responders identified as male, with 38.6 percent identifying as female. There are currently few, if any, resources that note the work of non-binary first responders within the United States. Resources report the average age of first responders to be 36.1 years and an average retirement age of 52 years for firefighters and 55 years for police officers. Statistics report that 67.3% of first responders identify as White, followed by 15.4% identifying as Hispanic or Latino, 6.6% identifying as Black or African American, 5.4% as unknown, and 4.5% identifying as Asian. Aside from English, the most common language spoken amongst first responders is Spanish at 47%, followed by Czech at 9.5%, German at 9.5%, Mandarin at 9.5%, Chinese at 4.8% and other at 19.1%. Regarding the highest level of education received by first responders, studies found that

43% have reported receiving a bachelor's degree, 23% receiving an associate's degree, 15% receiving a high school diploma, 6% having obtained a master's degree, and 13% have obtained another degree or equivalent. Finally, approximately 5% of first responders identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Recently, there has been a more informed understanding of the job requirements of various careers within the first responder field. This understanding includes the risk to one's physical, mental, and emotional health. Based on the findings concluded by the U.S. Department of Health conducted with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMSHA), roughly one third of first responders develop behavioral health conditions such as depression and PTSD with higher suicidal attempt and ideation rates than the general population. Luster (2022) presents distressing statistics that show over 50% of firefighter deaths are due to stress, stress-induced chronic illness, and exhaustion. Smith et al. (2021) state that 10.4% of first responders have reported experiencing suicidal ideations, 28% have expressed feelings that "life is not worth living," and 3.1% have revealed past suicide attempts. SAMSHA (2018) estimated that first responders are ten times more likely to contemplate suicide than the average American adult.

Studies that have looked further into the specific mental health-related symptoms and disorders that first responders experience have noted that 32% of law enforcement officers and firefighters report experiencing PTSD or PTSD symptoms (Carbajal et al., 2021). A study focusing on the mental health diagnoses and needs of first responders residing in southern states in the United States found that 14% of EMTs and paramedics reported feeling severely depressed, 28% reported experiencing moderate to severe anxiety, 30.6% reported misuse of substances as coping mechanisms, and 93% reported experiencing sleep disturbances (Carbajal et al., 2021).

Bullying in First Responder Workplace

Unhealthy workplace culture may contribute to poor mental health outcomes for first responders. The historical growth of fire departments cultivated a workplace environment marked by a specific hierarchical structure and homogenous group of [often white] male first responders that uphold values reminiscent of paramilitary culture and traditional masculine ideals. These have been perpetuated by things such as the consistent representations of "white male heroes" and the use of language such as "firemen" (Griffith & Roberts, 2018). Upholding these group traditions can beget alienation from those who do not fit within the original picture of what those in the fire department were "supposed" to be and even violence – whether drastic or micro-aggressive – when traditions like hazing or pranking occur. This is when discrimination, intentional or nonintentional, and bullying take effect.

Bullying typically falls upon those who sit outside these preestablished norms, especially those of a different gender or race than the cis Caucasian men who make up the traditional firefighter demographic. There is pressure to "fit in" within the culture of the fire department, especially when these men spend upwards of 24, 48, 72, or more hours together – cooking together, sleeping together, answering calls together – and those who do not fit the traditional mold may feel more significant levels of stress. When unable to do so, some individuals end up experiencing harassment and facing gender and racial biases, negative attitudes, hostility, and career obstacles (Griffith & Roberts, 2018).

Walker and Stones's study (2020) on workplace bullying among first responders cites the hierarchical nature within stations that offers the potential for power struggles within the workplace. The authors found that 60% of first responders have experienced or witnessed workplace bullying, which is six times greater than the national average. Sansone and Sansone

(2015, as cited in Walker & Stones, 2020) elaborate on emotional consequences, adding

symptoms like sleep disturbances, fatigue, and sexual disorders to possible mental distresses, and

note how these struggles appeared to be equally applicable for both men and women. Further, the

effects of bullying end up giving rise to more hazards in the workplace, as the emotional

exhaustion, minimized sense of optimism, and diminished sense of self-efficacy lead to toxic

work environments, increased employee turnover and absenteeism due to burnout and decreased

job satisfaction, and a greater chance of error when on the job (Tuckey & Neall, 2014, as cited in

Walker & Stones, 2020).

Walker and Stone (2020) cite toxic masculinity and isolation as factors that increase

bullying behaviors, which the perpetrators themselves describe as "a rite of passage" rather than

identifying themselves as bullies. It is imperative to note that the masculine culture that

permeates this field may worsen the stigma against mental health and wellness. Milliard (2021)

details the various ways that self-stigma and public stigma can alter a first responder's

experience within the workplace that may become internalized and affect their self-image or

ability to continue within that field. Many first responders hesitate to seek out mental health

support out of concern that others may consider them unfit to perform the tasks necessary for

their job. Other concerns include the misconception that someone is not "pulling their weight" or

is being unreliable. With the influence of stigma being so far-reaching within first responder

culture, it is important to consider that this may skew the aforementioned statistics towards not

accurately representing the extent of mental health struggles within this demographic.

Within police stations, Silvestri (2017) describes "the Cult of Masculinity," in which a

heightened focus on physicality with a more dated concept of gender binary exist. Silvestri states

that "men's bodies, sexuality, and relationships to life beyond work ... are subsumed in the image

of the 'ideal' police worker [and] the imagery of men and masculinity permeate organizational

processes and cultural beliefs" (2017, p. 293). This imagery then leads to the marginalization of

women – and, by extension, other non-male genders – and reinforces the segregation of the

genders within these organizations and workplaces (Silvestri, 2017). The study further notes a

pattern of misogynistic and patriarchal attitudes towards women. Given the smaller percentage of

females and out queer employees, it is likely that these attitudes may exacerbate feelings of

burnout, struggles with community support, or mental health within the workplace.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Considerations

First responders are often dehumanized as villains, machines, and heroes by society and

their communities, and such perceptions of dehumanization are predictive of burnout and may

exacerbate poor mental health (Mika-Lude et al., 2023). Public stereotypes about first responders

and organizational culture within first responders emphasize machine-like masculinity and lack

of human expression leaving no space for diverse expressions and inclusive mental health

support. Current mental health programs for first responders often neglect Diversity, Equity, and

Inclusion (DEI) and anti-racism integration, while other DEI initiatives can lack resilience-

building strategies. Demou et al. (2020) noted that the prevailing culture of vigilance and

toughness among first responders contributes to stigma around mental health support, hindering

efforts to promote inclusivity and diversity in identities and expressions. Many first responders

use emotional avoidance and suppression to cope, which leads to a diminishment of their well-

being. This culture also leads to organizational dehumanization, resulting in depersonalized and

biased practices in community engagement.

The high prevalence of burnout within this critical profession adversely affects morale

and social judgment, which can be detrimental when serving those from marginalized social and

racial groups. Traditional didactic learning approaches, including diversity and inclusion training and emphasis on self-care, often fall short, necessitating a more innovative and holistic intervention. By addressing the unique challenges faced by first responders, particularly BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ first responders, anti-racist healthcare strategies aim to enhance their overall well-being, contributing to a more sustainable approach to their vital roles in supporting communities (Galvan et al., 2023). Furthermore, considering the current statistics that highlight the high percentage of BIPOC first responders and the low percentage of LGBTQIA+ first responders, DEI training and considerations are crucial for fostering a more inclusive and accepting environment that would promote resilience during downtime at stations. By increasing awareness and creating an environment more focused on holistic resilience practices, employees can advocate sharing the same attitudes and protocols within the diverse communities they serve. Using inclusive art materials will also aid in the support of accessible well-being; these may include everyday items found in the work or home space, using cost-effective materials, or providing free-of-cost material kits to aid in approachability.

Conclusions

As highlighted in this literature review, resilience is an ever-evolving process, a versatile skill capable of mitigating burnout symptoms and addressing intense external and internal stressors. Viewing resilience as malleable, the way we harness it and bolster it becomes more accessible, especially when working with populations such as first responders who experience intense chronic external stressors. Resilience can be molded by creativity informed by neurobiology and somatic processing. Growing evidence shows that resilience is dynamic and trainable and suggests that creativity plays a pivotal role in its cultivation. Creativity and arts-based interventions open avenues for creative problem-solving and provide a space for diverse

meaning-making that can be an effective tool in professions where burnout is prevalent.

Consequently, through engaging in creative practices, resilience is learned and nurtured in the

process. Thus, utilizing arts-based interventions can serve as an effective tool in mitigating

burnout and enhancing resilience.

Research Project Approach

Project Framework

The eBook created incorporates six levels of human processing as modeled by the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC), utilizing creative activities to tap into the kinesthetic, sensorial, perceptual, affective, cognitive, and symbolic components to combat signs of burnout and promote adaptivity and resilience. The included directives call for the use of diverse, inclusive, and accessible art materials, media, and methods that follow the ETC model and align with anti-racist healthcare strategies (Galvan et al., 2023). This holistic approach using the ETC is aimed at using a system-focused approach that elicits self-reflection and fosters empathy. Its goal is to address the unique challenges faced by first responders, leveraging multifaceted creativity as a tool to promote resilience and counter the burnout that can lead to reduced work/life satisfaction, decrease self-efficiency, and increased depersonalization in their interactions with colleagues and with the communities they serve.

Project Aims

The research project is a creative program in the form of an eBook, which we have titled CRISP (Creative Resilience Initiatives for Service Providers). The eBook has the following three goals :

- Reduce burnout signs and enhance resilience using arts-based activities;
- Emphasize a system-focused approach of using creativity with an emphasis on self-reflection and cultivation of effective mind-body empathy
- Create awareness of the unique challenges faced by first responders, including BIPOC and LGBTQAI+ first responders.

The CRISP program has culminated as an eBook featuring eighteen arts-based activities, accompanied by relevant psychoeducation. These arts-based activities are meant to engage first responders in kinesthetic, sensorial, perceptual, affective, cognitive, and symbolic components of information processing in the ETC, provide psychoeducation about burnout and creativity's impact on wellness, and support sustainable self-reflective practices. The easily accessible eBook can be used to help build resilience, counter burnout, find meaningfulness, and combat biased practices in their work.

Project Design

We used brainstorming in a self-focus group to develop art prompts that can address resilience from a holistic and integrative perspective. Brainstorming is a collaborative technique where group members share and generate ideas and thoughts to address practical problems (Gogus, 2012).

A traditional brainstorming session includes four rules: 1) generating as many ideas as possible (quantity over quality), 2) avoidance of criticism, 3) combining and improving on previously expressed ideas, and 4) encouraging "wild" ideas (Osborn, 1957). However, our group's client-centered and solution-centered approach prioritized quality over quantity of ideas, requiring the group to thoroughly engage in the art prompts introduced by each member and consider all aspects of the user experience.

Following a thorough literature review and drawing from their educational knowledge, skills and practice working with clients in practicum, and personal experiences, group members began by individually brainstorming creative exercises that utilized one or more of the levels associated with the ETC. The full group would then conduct a workshop wherein each member engaged fully in each directive, allowing them to gain insight on the full user experience of the

proposed prompts and materials. After reflecting on each of their own experiences with the

directives, the group members analyzed and assessed each for quality, usability, accessibility,

completability, enjoyability, and sustainability, rating each on a scale of 1 to 5. Members then

discussed and came to a consensus as to which directives had the greatest potential and were

most effective and appropriate for the CRISP eBook.

Figure 2

Flow Chart of Brainstorm Workshop

Methods

Definition of Terms

The following terms appear frequently in this thesis and are defined here to aid readers in understanding their meaning within the context of this project.

Art Therapy. Art therapy is an integrative mental health and human services profession that relies on integrative methods of kinesthetic, sensory, perceptual, and symbolic expressions distinct from verbal expression alone to engage and empower the mind, body, and spirit (AATA, 2017).

Burnout. Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress or overwhelming work demands, often leading to feelings of cynicism, detachment, and reduced effectiveness.

Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC). The ETC is an art therapy-based theory developed by Kagin and Lusebrink (1978) and further supported by Hinz (2020). The ETC provides a practical framework for choosing art materials, media, and techniques to work toward particular therapeutic results. According to the ETC model, the art process, whether initiated or facilitated by creativity, enables three tiers of self-expression and self-reflection, identified as Cognitive/Symbolic (C/Sy), Perceptual/Affective (P/A), and Kinesthetic/Sensory (K/S). See Figure 1.

eBook. An eBook, short for "electronic book," refers to a digital publication that can be read on electronic devices such as computers, tablets, e-readers, or smartphones.

Everyday Creativity. As explored by Hinz et al. (2022), everyday creativity is the ability to generate new ideas, solutions, or expressions in daily life, often within one's routine. It involves the capacity to think innovatively, adaptively, and imaginatively within the context of

daily experiences and/or challenges. This can look like problem-solving, artistic expression, improvisation, or the creation of unique approaches.

First Responders. First responders are those who are among the first to provide aid in an emergency, crisis, or disaster. First responders usually have specialized training in their field and can include paramedics, police officers, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians (EMTs). Those within this group are specifically trained to address threats to life, property, and public safety. First responders play a crucial role in managing and mitigating emergencies, providing initial medical care, securing the area, and coordinating further response efforts.

Resilience. Resilience refers to the ability to adapt and stay malleable in the face of adversity or stressors. Resilience is a process and is a skill that can be learned; it varies from person to person and is maintained through balance, often bolstered by creativity and flexibility.

Savoring. As studied in the work of Klibert, Sturz, LeLeux, Hatton, Smalley, and Warren (2022), the act of savoring refers to the act of mindfully appreciating and enjoying positive experiences, sensations, or moments in life. This can look like fully immersing oneself in the experience of enjoying a cup of coffee, watching the sunset, spending time with a loved one, or any moment during the day that sparks joy or contentment.

Procedures

Participants

Six graduate students from the department of Marital and Family Therapy with specialized training at Loyola Marymount University worked as a team develop and design this project. The faculty advisor is a licensed marriage and family therapist and board-certified art therapist with a doctoral degree in Art Therapy.

Protection of Participants

The participants of this research group submiited an IRB application and received an IRB approval on December 13, 2023 (see Appendix A). Researchers created a structured safe space wherein every person could feel heard and understood during focus group discussions. Each meeting began and concluded with checking in with each group member. Additional steps were taken by researchers to minimize risk by practicing the art activities personally to maintain awareness of potential triggers. The researchers/participants were allowed to withdraw from any of the focus group meetings at any time without penalty. Participants were also aware of available campus resources that were within close proximity, including the crisis center, walk-in center services, and telehealth services. All members signed an informed consent form (see Appendix B).

Focus Group/Brainstorm Group

The project followed a timeline broken into seven phases, as described thus:

Phases 1-4

- December 2023: Researchers immersed themselves in various source materials from positive psychology, art therapy, and anti-racist approaches to mental health care to develop a comprehensive literature review.

- December 2023: Developed a research proposal and submitted it to the faculty advisor.

- December 2023: Submitted the Institutional Review Board (IRB) proposal to the university's IRB approval board and received IRB approval LMU IRB 2023 FA 62-R on December 13, 2023 (see Appendix A).

- January (weeks 1 & 2) 2024: Attended two Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) art therapy experiential workshops on well-being provided by Dr. Choe. Student researchers, as

participants, underwent training on art therapy's ETC model, engaging in an in-depth exploration of art interventions with various materials, media, and methods. The focus was on using a diversity- and inclusivity-focused approach in art-making.

- January (weeks 2 & 3) 2024: Developed content for the CRISP program.

Phase 5 (Data Collection - Development of art therapy-based activities):

- January to March 2024: Upon receiving IRB approval, the team held weekly 2-hour meetings to develop art therapy-based activities. This process involved examining and assessing each activity's effectiveness based on experiential practice, past research, and population needs. Each researcher/participant pitched ideas, and the team tried out each activity, refining them as needed through an iterative process.

Phases 5-6 (Data Collection & Data Analysis):

- February to March 2024: Conducted simultaneous data collection and data analysis through team meetings.

- March to April 2024: Organized the art prompts, developed psychoeducation contents (e.g., savoring, protective factors, mindfulness, stress, benefits of healthy emotional expressions, developing a purpose, positive coping, identifying strengths, etc.), collaborated on eBook visual design including cover page, and finalized layout for trial online publication.

- April to May 2024: Final delivery of CRISP program in eBook format and uploaded on Wordpress.com platform (https://artaswellness.wordpress.com)

Phase 7 (Feasibility Evaluation):

- May 2024: An evaluation of the eBook by stakeholders (first responders) is not part of this creative research project. However, by offering the eBook for free via WordPress.com, the team is open to feedback from stakeholders and adjacent fields and will continuously modify

the online content as needed. Currently, the research team has close relatives and acquaintances who work as first responders that has reviewed and provided direct individual feedback to develop the program further.

Gathering of Data

The data gathered in this project consisted of a thorough literature review, notes about each art prompt, pictures, session notes, individual and group feedback, and design drafts.

Data Analysis

As the present research is a program development project, data gathering and analysis occurred simultaneously through an iterative process of exploring, experimenting, and evaluating the data. Data analysis was not a one-time activity, but rather a continual, iterative, and collaborative effort by group members of learning, refining, revising, and implementing ideas.

Trustworthiness of Data Analysis

This research group aimed to ensure the credibility of the research by first conducting a thorough literature review. In addition, the research team inquired and consulted with first responders for their experience and guiding opinions. Each member actively engaged in the brainstorming process at all times with humility, openness, and trust throughout the development of the eBook to ensure consistency in non-judgmental collaboration and input. Lastly, to ensure the trustworthiness of the research project, participants have all experienced the eBook by testing out the prompts first-hand, subsequently collaborating as a team to make adjustments and refinements..

Results

The CRISP team conducted this project from September 2023 to April 2024, during which they engaged in a thorough literature review, selective brainstorming of quality creative prompts, experimentation and evaluation of the prompts, and refining the final content. The study encompassed a series of six intentionally curated brainstorming sessions, incorporating interactive workshops, directive engagements, brainstorming dialogues, and comprehensive analyses of each proposed activity. Subsequently, following a thorough review of user feedback and experiential insights, the researchers synthesized a total of 18 art prompts employing diverse artistic mediums. These prompts were strategically designed to activate all six components and three tiers of the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) framework, fostering approachable creative engagement. Furthermore, the researchers rigorously evaluated each prompt across five dimensions: usability, accessibility, completability, enjoyability, and sustainability. If an art prompt did not adequately meet the expectations of these five dimensions, the team then brainstormed further to refine or revise the art prompt. Moreover, each art prompt underwent additional scrutiny, probing for potential oversights through inquiries such as "What challenges might arise?" and "Are there opportunities to modify or offer alternatives to enhance diversity and inclusivity?" These reflective inquiries compelled the research team to delve deeper into optimizing the user experience.

Art Prompts Development

The CRISP research team has designed and developed 18 art prompts, which are all featured in the CRISP eBook. Each art prompt is accompanied by a detailed description and directives and materials were collaboratively agreed-upon for each art prompt. Additionally, the research team has conducted thorough evaluations and ratings to assess the effectiveness of these

art prompts in targeting burnout and their usability for the population. All of the art prompts were designed to be completed within 15 minutes to accommodate the busy schedules of first responders and be easily integrated as part of *everyday creativity*. Choe (2023) found that short art prompts 15 minutes or less can effectively produce positive emotions, self-awareness, tolerance of uncertainty, and experiences of play and personal discovery. These personal discoveries can address diminished self-efficacy. Various therapeutic and user experience factors were considered during the brainstorming sessions (see Appendix C).

eBook Art Prompts

All art prompts have accompanying pictures that show an example of the art prompt with art materials. In addition, detailed psychoeducation content prefaces each art prompt.

Art Prompt 1

Title: What's in Your Head?

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. Using the provided template, draw lines, shapes, and colors to represent your feelings regarding the anticipation you may feel for an upcoming shift.

2. Once you feel satisfied with your piece, use a second template to draw how you feel once your relief arrives and/or immediately after your shift.

Art Materials: 2 profile outlines of a head (optional: outline of body if you experience full body symptoms) and oil pastels.

Time: 3 minutes per drawing

Reflective Questions:

- What similarities and/or differences do you notice between the two images?

- If you used the head outline, do you feel that using an outline of a body would've been more or less meaningful?

- If you participated in this prompt within a group, do you see any similarities with others' depictions?

Psychoeducation: About acknowledging and honoring emotions

Art Prompt 2

Title: EKG Timeline

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. Create a timeline of your day, including work shift and time at home, using the EKG template.

2. Following the concept of an EKG, indicate when your alertness, stress, and/or heartrate rises above the baseline and when exhaustion or dissociation dips below baseline.

Art Materials: paper, pens or pencils, downloadable template.

Time: 5-10 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- Looking at your timeline, does it depict what you expected?

- Do you notice any patterns?

- What elements that positively affect your baseline can you implement more often?

Psychoeducation: About self-reflection and personal growth

Art Prompt 3

Title: Burnout Transformation

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. Using color, shape, and/or lines, draw your experience of burnout.

2. Cut or tear the paper in a way that feels right to you.

3. Reassemble the drawing in a way that depicts something more manageable to you.

Art Materials: paper, oil pastels, tape or glue, if desired.

Time: 5-10 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- What feelings can you identify in the colors, marks, or shapes in your drawing?

- Do you notice any patterns?

- How did cutting or tearing your initial experience feel?

- How did reassembling your creation into something different feel?

Psychoeducation: About ....

Art Prompt 4

Title: Ring of Supports

Art Prompt Steps:

1. Select a key ring or carabiner that feels comfortable and durable to you.

2. Choose two or more colors of cord, twine, or string to symbolize different levels of support, such as family and close friends, neighbors, communities, colleagues, etc.

3. Tie the strings onto the ring or carabiner, keeping in mind the individuals or groups represented with each knot as it is made.

Art Materials: Key/book rings or carabiners, cord/twine/string in miscellaneous colors and scissors.

Time: 5-10 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- Reflect on the supports you have on your ring. Do you reach out to these trusted individuals when you find yourself facing difficult and stressful situations?

- What other sources of comfort in your life that may be inanimate objects (e.g. a hot beverage and a warm blanket) or activity-based (e.g. exercise, meditation/prayer, a hobby, etc.) support you in times of stress?

Psychoeducation: About ....

Art Prompt 5

Title: Origami Strengths

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. Recall a difficult experience you managed to overcome, and pinpoint a strength that emerged during that time.

2. Write down this strength on the inner side of the origami paper.

3. Proceed to fold the paper into a symbol that holds personal significance and represents the identified strength in a meaningful way to you.

4. Optionally, you may refer to an origami tutorial for assistance if necessary.

Art Materials: origami paper (11" X 11"), pen or pencil, instructions via diagrams or YouTube videos

Time: 10 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- What strengths did you identify?

- What symbol did you choose, how does your symbol connect to your strength?

- What did the paper folding process feel like for you?

Psychoeducation: About ....

Art Prompt 6

Title: Thought Bubble Collage

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. Find an image or two of a person or an object that feels representative of how you feel

   when experiencing burn out.

2. Glue the image(s) onto a sheet of paper.

3. Draw a thought bubble to depict what the person or object might be thinking

Art Materials: Collage materials, paper, scissors, glue stick, pen or pencil.

Time: 10 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- Why did you choose the image(s)?

- How did you relate to the image(s)? Did anything resonate with you?

Psychoeducation: About the symptoms of burnout including avoidance and numbing.

Art Prompt 7

Title: Clay Tension

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. Follow a body scan meditation from start to finish.

2. After the scan, use model magic to depict what your tension may look like.

3. Explore the feelings of tension through the clay-like material.

Art Materials: Model magic or similar clay-like material.

Time: 5 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- Notice how your body felt before and after the body scan. Did you notice any differences?

- Did you experience any discomfort or release?

- Did you find the practice difficult? Why or why not?

- Where did you find that most of your tension lies?

- How would your art response look if you sculpted "relaxation" instead?

Psychoeducation: About exhaustion and body awareness.

Art Prompt 8

Title: Nature Walk

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. Invite yourself to take a 10-15 minute nature walk and collect small objects that bring you joy.

2. Consider wrapping a piece of packaging tape around your wrist, sticky side out, mimicking a watch to easily attach items. Alternatively, you can collect items in a small reusable bag or your pocket, or you may simply take photos.

Art Materials: Tape, plastic sandwich bag, smartphone or camera.

Time: 5 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- Is there a common theme that you noticed among the objects or elements to which you were drawn?

- Which elements did you notice engaging with your five senses?

Psychoeducation: About savoring to enhance overall well-being by increasing positive emotions, improving mood, and building resilience against stress.

Art Prompt 9

Title: Anxious Half

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. Select two colors of pens or pencils, with one representing anxiety or distress, and the other representing support or calmness.

2. Divide a sheet of paper into two sections. In one section, using the first color, list things that trigger feelings of anxiety and distress. In the other section, use the second color to list things that bring you calmness and support.

3. Take a moment to reflect on both lists.

4. Tear or cut the paper in half, separating the lists.

5. Destroy your anxiety list by ripping it up, crumpling it, or throwing it away as needed.

Art Materials: Colored pencils or pens, paper.

Time: 10 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- Reflect on how the process of destroying the trigger list of anxiety and distress was for you. What feelings came up for you during that process?

- Reflect on your list of calm and support. How can you intentionally integrate these aspects into your day-to-day life?

Psychoeducation: About everyday creativity.

Art Prompt 10

Title: Safe Space

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. Using found objects, create or build your "safe space."

Art Materials: Found objects (ex: keys, paper, cups, tape, bags, paperclips, pens, rope, bottle

caps, thimble, receipt, crayon, playing cards, battery, spoon, tweezers, eraser, dryer sheet,

rocks/pebbles, or anything else) or collage materials.

Time: 10 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- Consider the integrity of your space. Is it permanent or flexible?

- Where is it located?

- Who is allowed inside?

- How does it stay safe?

- Are there any weaknesses?

- What colors dominate?

- How do textures contribute to your comfort?

Psychoeducation: About sense of safety with use of boundaries and self-compassion

Art Prompt 11

Title: Career Story

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. Using the following prompt, write whatever response that comes to your mind for three

   minutes or until you reach a natural stopping point.

   a. Start the sentence with: **I chose to become a [career] when...**

2. Reflecting on what you've written, use the air-dry clay to create a symbol of what your

   story represents.

Art Materials: Paper, pen or pencil, air-dry clay.

Time: Part I: 3 minutes // Part II: 10-15 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- Do you recall if there were any outside influences to your decision to pursue this career?

- Did multiple memories come up for you, or was there one that stuck out?

Psychoeducation: About how sense of purpose can result in increased job satisfaction, motivation, and overall well-being.

Art Prompt 12

Title: Colorful Reflections

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. Use markers to create scribbles and patterns on the plastic bag, choosing colors that represent feelings of stress and burnout.

2. Spray the bag with water, then lay it onto the paper to transfer the colors.

3. Repeat this process to layer additional feelings and colors as desired.

Art Materials: Watercolor paper, water-based markers, spray bottle with water, plastic sandwich bags (*sustainable alternatives: parchment paper or other non-porous surface).

Time: 10-15 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- What feelings can you identify from the colors?

- What do you see and feel when you look at your artwork?

- Write a blurb about how you want to keep or transform the image.

Psychoeducation: About emotional expression to relieve negative emotions.

Art Prompt 13

Title: Shield of Defenses

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. Using the provided shield outline, explore your coping strategies or defense mechanisms that you use to get through your day.

2. Use symbols, colors, shapes, or images to illustrate your shield.

*Tip : If you feel stuck, conduct an image search for "family crests" for inspiration and to find symbols that correlate to your values or represent traits that resonate with you.

Art Materials: Paper, markers, colored pencils, or oil pastels, optional shield template (see page 33).

Time: 10-15 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- What feelings can you identify from the colors?

- What do you see and feel when you look at your artwork?

- Write a blurb about how you want to keep or transform the image.

Psychoeducation: About stress as helpful and unhelpful.

Art Prompt 14

Title: Mindful Mandala

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. After building your understanding of the mindfulness aspect of mandalas and setting your intention, craft your own using shapes, colors, or patterns that resonate with you.

Art Materials: Paper & material of your choice: markers, pencils, oil pastels.

Time: 5-10 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- How did it feel to focus on the present moment?

- What came to mind while making your mandala?

- How can you bring these feeling of mindfulness into the rest of your day? Week?

Psychoeducation: About mindfulness as a way of calming and grounding.

Art Prompt 15

Title: Stress Response

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. Create an image that depicts the feelings that come up for you when you are called to an emergency or urgent situation.

Art Materials: Paper & materials of your choice: markers, pencils, oil pastels.

Time: 5-10 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- Does this drawing you created feel bigger or smaller than....How often do you feel this way?

- How does this feeling serve you?

- What steps can you take after an anxious moment to tend to your mind and body?

- What are additional things you might use to combat stress?

- How do you prepare beforehand when in a crisis response?

- How can you alter this image to represent a more productive and containing experience?

Psychoeducation: About physical and psychological reactions of stress response.

Art Prompt 16

Title: Strengths & Safety Collage

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. Create a collage using magazines or other visual materials that evoke feelings of protection, joy, or positivity.

Art Materials: Paper, scissors, tape or glue stick, magazines or pre-cut images.

Time: 10 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- What symbols came up? Did you notice any common themes?

- What emotions or feelings in your body came up as you collaged?

- How does it feel to reflect on your protective factors?

Psychoeducation: About personal protective factors that mitigate burnout.

Art Prompt 17

Title: Capturing the Moment

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. After understanding savoring, capture a daily moment of peace and appreciation with your phone.

2. To take it a step further, create a digital album to store these photos of daily "savoring."

Art Materials: Smartphone or alternative camera.

Time: 3-5 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- What did you identify as things you'd like to savor?

- Is there a common theme in what you're savoring?

- What are some feelings in your body that come up as you savor? How does it feel to know you can always come back to these images?

Psychoeducation: About savoring to enhance overall well-being by increasing positive emotions, improving mood, and building resilience against stress.

Art Prompt 18

Title: Planting a Purpose

Art Prompt Instruction:

1. Invite yourself to choose a word, mantra, or phrase that symbolizes personal growth to helps combat feelings of dread and cynicism.

2. Add soil and plant seeds or cuttings in a planter of your choice.

3. On a small piece of paper, write your selected word, mantra, or phrase and fold it to the size of a dime.

4. Plant this paper in the soil alongside your plant.

5. When watering your plant, repeat the word, mantra, or phrase, either aloud or in your mind.

6. Use the plant as a tangible reminder of your chosen words and observe how it contributes to keeping you grounded and empathetic towards others.

Art Materials: Planter/recycled jar/tin can, soil, paper, plant seeds or plant cutting

Time: 10-15 minutes

Reflective Questions:

- What does this phrase mean to you? Where did it come from?

- How can you extend the care you offer to the plant towards yourself and/or others?

- What quality or purpose are you looking to grow?

- What can this plant mean to you?

Psychoeducation: About depersonalization.

Evaluation of the Art Prompts

The art prompts were designed to target the three primary signs of occupational burnout, including exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of self-efficacy. They were tested and ranked based on usability for the population, accessibility, completability, enjoyability of the art process, and sustainability (See Appendix C). These prompts were created to promote resilience and mitigate burnout through the art process. The researchers particularly took into account the complexity of the art prompts, striving to ensure that individuals with no prior art experience would feel capable of completing each task. The researchers utilized ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2024) to collaboratively revise art prompt instructions to reflect plain language that was accessible and relevant for the target population. An art prompt inviting a participant to "create a symbol that represents your feelings of stress," for example, was altered to read "create an image that depicts the feelings that come up for you when you are called to an emergency or urgent situation."

Psychoeducation Topics

Burnout, as it exists in the occupational sphere, is marked by cynicism, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of accomplishment (World Health Organization, 2019). Everyday creativity is used to describe the daily, ordinary, individual expressions of creativity that can occur during work or leisure time and has been linked to well-being (Brook, 2021). Everyday creativity is defined by originality and meaningfulness and is linked to self-actualization, as the creative process enhances personal growth. These comprise the primary concepts that informed the eBook creation and selection of art prompts for the finished eBook.

Layout and Content

The final eBook (see Figure 3) details psychoeducation around resilience and burnout, as well as key factors when looking at this topic from a lens of DEI. Following these, the eBook

includes information on how to use the prompts and some details around the materials included.

A predominant portion of the eBook follows various art directives as they share examples,

instructions, and the "why" behind each one; some also include templates, which are provided in

the end pages of the text. All directives include a section on reflective questions that users can

engage with following the art-making. Overall, the eBook invites users to explore their own

burnout and resilience factors in an accessible and approachable way. In addition, the eBook

includes mental health resources specific to first responders.

Figure 3

Cover Design of CRISP eBook

Discussion

This research project's resulting eBook provides an integrative and creative approach to counter burnout through arts-based activities and psychoeducation. Here, we further expand on the key concepts highlighted in the CRISP eBook (https://artaswellness.wordpress.com).

eBook Content and Art Prompts

Within the eBook, many themes were focused on in order to explore burnout and resilience among first responders. The art prompts within the eBook focus on the utilization of creative expression, which serves as a powerful tool for meaning-making and self-awareness in the context of the ETC model. Through an integrative and holistic approach, first responders can process their experiences in a safe and nonverbal manner, tapping into their subconscious thoughts and emotions. The process of art-making and achieving deeper self-understanding allows them to be observers of their responses to stressors, enhancing the self-awareness and insight that may help reduce adverse effects of long-term exposures to job stressors. By engaging in art-making activities, first responders can access their emotions and physical sensations through the developed mind-body connection. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of mental, emotional, and physical health, leading to a more holistic understanding and treatment of their experiences.

Inclusivity and diversity are other integral aspects of the eBook for first responders and are reflected in both the materials suggested and interventions used. The creators strove to create an informative tool that celebrates the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the participants. The brainstorming process made it clear to the researchers that not every prompt was going to be received the same way; each individual comes from a diverse amalgamation of experiences and connects to creativity in different ways, and cultural backgrounds play an important part in the

development of these connections. Similarly, while in the midst of experiencing their own signs

of burnout during the study, the researchers found themselves connecting more empathetically to

some of the concerns of first responders. The former drew on somatic exercises, mindfulness and

grounding exercises, and free creative expression in order to combat the exhaustion,

depersonalization, and loss of feelings of self-efficacy that the end of an intensive graduate

program can bring. This more holistic focus on taking care of the self and promoting resilience

learned through the literature and experienced during the creative exercises made a difference for

the researchers, and so we believe in its power in assisting first responders in their efforts to

resist the symptoms of burnout.

Overall, the creative approaches within the eBook offer first responders a transformative

space for healing and self-discovery. By embracing creativity, inclusivity, and a holistic

approach, individuals can embark on a journey of self-exploration that harnesses resilience and

cultivates feelings of empowerment, ultimately fostering greater well-being and emotional

resilience in the face of adversity.

Lessons Learned

The primary guiding principles in the creation of the eBook were the cultural context and

considerations of the targeted population, which informed decisions around imagery, language,

and themes. We aimed to reach a wide range of users while embracing diversity and cultural

sensitivity, allowing space for users to reflect on their individual experiences and identities in

meaningful ways. For instance, we considered how a person who works in a male-dominant,

hierarchical culture may perceive certain art materials and media. The team also thought about

the how bigger sized hands and fingers may experience art materials differently than smaller

hands. Found objects and art processes familiar to first responder culture such as carabiner and

knotting were introduced in one of the prompts. Thus, developing an art prompt requires a thorough literature review including demographical culture as presented in this study.

Central to the design process was the recognition that art could serve as a pathway to wellness, distinct from psychotherapy but still deeply impactful. We heavily considered the prevalence of clinical symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and trauma among the target population and kept these in mind while crafting interventions, which were done so with sensitivity and mindfulness. Much of this was informed by both what we learned in the literature and the added empathy grown from our own experiences with signs of burnout, as previously noted. For instance, as first responders have a high prevalence of mental health issues such as depression, PTSD, and anxiety (Carbajal et al., 2021), many of the art prompts were thoughtfully designed to be used by those who may have experienced these symptoms. We intentionally created directives that contained accessible language, emphasizing psychoeducation and containment to provide a sense of safety and structure for the participants who were navigating their emotional landscapes without the facilitation of a mental health professional.

Limitations

Creating an eBook from a limited perspective creates many potential limitations. Accessibility to the eBook is one limitation and consideration; having an exclusively electronic book without physical copies may limit the accessibility and outreach of the eBook, as well as potentially limit the users' experience for those who may prefer an alternative format. As the authors, there are limits to our personal experiences in the way we may relate to the first responders who may utilize the eBook. All creators of the eBook are female identifying, which poses a limitation regarding the gendered perspective behind the creation of the eBook. As creators who have pursued a graduate degree in Marital and Family Therapy with specialized

training in Art Therapy, our perspectives also may be biased in regard to educational and

occupational experience. The researchers all identify as artists as well and are thus well-versed in

art-making; we therefore had to be mindful when considering skill, culture, inclusivity, and

accessibility for the eBook's intended users. The eBook was not designed by a professional

designer, which could also pose limitations.

Conclusion

Resilience is an ever-evolving process, a versatile skill capable of mitigating burnout symptoms and addressing intense external and internal stressors. Viewing resilience as malleable, the way we harness it and bolster it becomes more accessible, especially when working with populations such as first responders who experience intense chronic external stressors. Resilience can be molded by creativity informed by neurobiology and somatic processing; growing evidence shows that resilience is dynamic and trainable and suggests that creativity plays a pivotal role in its cultivation. Creativity and arts-based interventions open avenues for creative problem-solving and provide a space for diverse meaning-making that can be an effective tool in professions where burnout is prevalent. Consequently, through engaging in creative practices, resilience is learned and nurtured in the process. Thus, utilizing arts-based interventions can serve as an effective tool in mitigating burnout and enhancing resilience.

First responders often encounter immense stress and trauma in the line of duty, which can contribute to burnout and emotional exhaustion. The therapeutic avenues provided by creative practices like collage, sculpting, drawing, and savoring offer opportunities for self-expression, reflection, and stress relief. By incorporating such interventions into their wellness routines, first responders may effectively explore their emotions, process difficult experiences, and cultivate resilience. Ultimately, initiatives like CRISP have the potential to empower first responders to take proactive steps towards managing their well-being, thereby fostering a supportive culture of mental health awareness within their community. Further research is essential to evaluate the long-term impact and scalability of these interventions in enhancing the overall mental health and resilience of first responders.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

Appendix B

Informed Consent and Guidelines

Appendix C

Art Prompt Evaluation Factors Form

Art Materials	Time	Target Burnout Signs	ETC Components	Reflective Questions	Psychoeducation Content	Group or Individual	What could go wrong? Any modification or alternative suggestion to be more diverse and inclusive?

Ratings

Usable for Pop (How likely would target population engage in this? Is it client-centered?) 0-5	Accessible (Are the art materials easily accessible?) 0-5	Doable and Completable (Was the task not too simple or complex?) 0-5	Pleasurable (Is the art process fun and enjoyable?) 0-5	Sustainable (Can this be used multiple times or shared with others?) 0-5