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Art Therapy as a Tool for Enhancing Adolescent Identity Formation, Self-Knowing, and Empowerment.

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Art Therapy as a Tool for Enhancing Adolescent Identity Formation, Self-Knowing, and Empowerment.

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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Abstract

Adolescence is a pivotally important developmental stage for individuals. During this time, adolescents begin the journey of discovering the many facets of their identities. This capstone thesis explores how the discipline of art therapy can aid adolescents in the formation of their understanding of specific parts of their identities. Workshops offered at a community mental health organization collected data via surveys, observable experiences, and art. These workshops offered clients a safe space to artistically express their identity. Results of the exercise provide indications that art therapy could be used as a positive aid in adolescent identity formation.

Art Therapy as a Tool for Enhancing Adolescent Identity Formation, Self-Knowing, & Empowerment.

Introduction

Art Therapy is used as a healing practice for many diagnoses, mental health challenges and in helping one understand themselves better. What role, then, does art therapy play in life's more common occurrences such as human development? While there are many differences amongst members of the human race, there are also many similarities. Every person goes through a variety of stages throughout the course of their life. Each stage serves a specific purpose and tends to provide the individual with specific lessons. Human development in and of itself has been widely studied and accepted. While each stage in development has its importance, many will agree that one's adolescent years serve as one of the most important life stages. Within this developmental period, adolescents go through the confusing yet profound process of developing their personal identity. During the ages of 13-18, individuals continually develop, change, and come to understand their place in the world and the things that make them who they are. This can be a time of confusion, but it is also a time of exploration. There are many ways for an adolescent to discover and form their identity. These decisions aid the adolescent in finding what feels right for them and how they want to "be" in our society and culture. This process may begin when an individual is around 13, but it can continue well into one's 20s. The author of this capstone thesis explored how art therapy can be used as a tool to enhance the experience of identity formation in adolescents. Subsequently, could an experience with art therapy increase one's self-knowing as they explore these parts of themselves? Do adolescents have a space in which they know it is safe to explore the parts of their identity that may feel scary or unsafe to share with family? When an adolescent is given such a space and opportunity, do they accept

such an opportunity and does it open their mind to exploring and understanding their identity, or is there no real change in the process of an adolescent's self-discovery?.

Adolescence has been a topic of study for many years, but most studies are based on original human development theories produced by well-known psychologists such as Erik Erickson, Jean Piaget and, of course, Sigmund Freud in the very early twentieth century. While their theories still hold merit and weight, it is easy to look at our current society and see that being an adolescent in the late 2010s is *vastly* different than any other adolescents' experience to date. Technology (which provides a wealth of human knowledge at one's fingertips), a more accepting and vocal society, and an intense focus on social justice are all focal points of today's adolescents. Social justice and acceptance had been main focuses of adolescent development, but due to technology, adolescents are able to be global informants far more now than in the past. This author wants to also be mindful in the design of this capstone thesis how today's adolescents are being viewed and being researched due to the information age. What sort of directions are therapists, psychiatrists, doctors and teacher exploring to better serve our next generation?

Literary Review

This author has explored a variety of studies and research regarding the topics of this thesis capstone. The studies included examining developmental theories, adolescent identity formation, the impact of social justice and technology on adolescents and art therapy's use within these contexts as well. As a mixed race, emerging therapist working in community mental health, the author understood it was important to examine a diverse set of studies and information to assure that the adolescents in this study are represented and viewed through their words.

Developmental Stages

Developmental theorists have all published similarly formulated theories regarding human development in that each theory includes stages of human development, what occurs in each stage, and what could happen if a stage is jeopardized in an individual's life. It is well understood that one experiences many changes between the ages of 12 and 18. Adolescents experience physical changes through puberty, emotional changes through hormones, social changes through school and identity formation, cognitive changes through brain development and future planning pressures. If one was to compare the adolescent stages of two prominent human development theorists, Piaget and Erickson, it could provide a more complete image of an adolescent's experience. Piaget's (1977) theory focused on child and adolescent decision making and development as it pertains to their cognitive development. Piaget (1977) outlined 4 stages in cognitive development: Sensorimotor (birth to 2 years old), Preoperational (2 to 6 or 7 years old), Concrete operational (7 to 11 or 12 years old) and Formal operational (12 years through adulthood). Each stage represented the way in which human beings learn through making mistakes and decision making. In the Formal operational stage, which begins in adolescents, Piaget (1977) asserted that adolescents begin to gain logical and abstract thinking. Through this new way of thinking, they are able to make different decisions compared to their previous thought processes and are able to analyze hypothetical situations. Neurologically, adolescent brains continue to develop in very specific ways between the ages of 13 and 18. For starters, during one's adolescent years, one's prefrontal cortex, or logic center, grows and shapes itself using environmental factors as agents of development. From this growth, Griffin (2017) proposed that adolescents are able to use logic and reasoning more prevalently to make decisions and assess situations. Erickson's (1968) theory focused more heavily on one's psychosocial development and how it affected attitudes and feelings towards one's self and others. Erickson posited that each stage had a series of 'crises' that an

individual must overcome and which have either positive or negative results on the individual.

Erickson's stages cover the entire lifespan. Their eight stages were: Trust vs. Mistrust (birth to 1 year),

Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt (1 to 3 years), Initiative vs. Guilt (3 to 5 or 6 years), Industry vs.

Inferiority (6 to 12 years), Identity vs. Role Confusion (12-20 years), Intimacy vs. Isolation (young

adulthood), Generativity vs. Stagnation (middle adulthood), Ego Integrity vs. Despair (late adulthood).

Erickson asserted that in one's adolescence one was faced with decisions that offered a path forward into one's future, solidified one's identity, and laid the base for future relationship in adulthood.

Identity Formation in Adolescents

There are several theories, including Erickson's centered entirely on adolescent identity formation. Regardless of the theory, they all consist of basic decision-making as the staple of adolescent identity. One's adolescence is a series of questioning, analyzing, deciding and reflecting on those decisions. These decisions could be about almost anything including friends, romantic relationships, style, sexual orientation, interests, career prospects, political views, moral understandings, etc. According to Erickson (1982), the process of identity formation in one's adolescence is "...an evolving configuration—a configuration that gradually integrates constitutional givens, idiosyncratic libidinal needs, favored capacities, significant identifications, effective defenses, successful sublimations, and consistent roles. All of these, however, can only emerge from a mutual adaptation of individual potentials, technological worldviews, and religious or political ideologies" (p 74). Erickson asserted that in order for one to discover their identity, they have to participate in two things; exploration and decisions. One must engage in exploring options, exploring 'masks' as it were, in order to discover what feels right to them. Additionally, there are points in which adolescents must make decisions while being fully aware that these decisions will feed into the next decisions and may

have lifelong consequences. Without these two pieces, Erickson proposed one would not feel individual satisfaction and solid identity.

Another model of identity formation is Hays' (2001) ADDRESSING model. This model posits to present the different areas of one's life that make up their identity which includes **A**ge, **D**evelopmental and acquired **D**isabilities, **R**eligion, **E**thnicity, **S**ocioeconomic status, **S**exual orientation, **I**ndigenous heritage, **N**ational origin, and **G**ender. This research has been used as a tool specifically for those in the helping professions to better understand client identity formation through the context of power and privilege. Each letter of the ADDRESSING model represents an area of an individual's identity in which there are always power dynamics that can have a direct effect on the individual. The sense of empowerment felt by adolescents in these different areas could be affected positively or negatively by which side the individual resides on. Additionally, identity formation could be hindered by the fear of not being within the powerful side of any given section of identity. This author of this capstone thesis has chosen to use the ADDRESSING model as a foundation for this thesis study because it can be beneficial to discuss the power dynamics within one's identity. Further, this author agrees that this model offers a relatively well-rounded explanation of identity since it is a more modern framework with more modern research subjects.

Technology's Influence on Adolescents

Technology has changed rapidly and exponentially over the last decade. Almost all technology has transformed before our eyes. The importance in our daily lives and the ways in which technology informs us has also shifted. Computers, cell phones, emails, software, and countless social media applications have all changed from additional supports for businesses to being intertwined in the average person's life more than ever before. Technology connects the world, and allows the world's

knowledge to be at almost anyone's fingertips. A common concern regarding this immediate access to knowledge and communication is how it influences adolescents today both positively and negatively. To examine some of the negative impact of technology and social media on adolescents, studies have been conducted on cyber-bullying and societal pressures that accompany social media presence. Ditch the Label, a prominent anti-bullying organization, found in their 2017 annual survey of over 10,000 adolescents, that up to 42% report being bullied on Instagram, 37% report being bullied on Facebook, and 31% have been bullied on Snapchat. Of the adolescents surveyed, 81% admitted to being the perpetrator of bullying on social media. While connectedness is one side of the technology coin, the new avenue for bullying is the other. Hunt (2018) discovered that decreased use of social media of adolescents with depression and anxiety, decreased symptoms of their diagnosis. This was mainly attributed to the pressures the social media are associated with. Adolescents report feeling pressure to make their real life more appealing on social media as well as find importance personally in the number of likes, comments and followers they have on any given platform. While these pressures are evident, there has also been evidence that adolescents find comfort in the connections social media offers. In a study conducted by The Pew Research Center (2018) 81% of surveyed adolescents felt as though social media allowed them to be connected and get support from peers when they needed it. They also felt they were able to connect and befriend a more diverse and geographically widespread set of individuals and in this felt more compelled to engage in social justice actions.

Empowerment/Social Justice in Adolescents

Social justice movements and participation have always been an important part of many adolescents experiences. Fighting for what one believes in can become a part of one's identity and lead to college majors and career paths that reflect this passion. In the Cold War era, it was common for

adolescents and young adults of The United States of America to make their voices heard. In the civil rights movement many sit-ins, marches and rallies were attended and organized by youth. The same can be said of the protests in opposition of the Vietnam War. While social justice is not a new piece of an adolescent's growth, it seems that today's youth have found a strong passion for fighting for themselves and the survival of humanity. This insurgence could be credited to adolescents' cognitive development, social development, the prevalence of social media and news availability, the new age of acceptance, or all of the above. Many human rights movements of today are led by adolescents. Black Lives Matters, which began in 2013 as a movement opposing police violence and wrongful deaths of multiple young, black males seemed to redefined how social justice movements start and grow. What started as a grassroots movement by a few young adults grew quickly to a national movement of rallies, social media posts of support, celebrity speakers, professional athletes speaking out and recognition by major national news outlets. Another example of adolescents leading the charge is the Parkland Students and their fight for gun regulation. On February 14, 2018, 17 students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School were gunned down inside classrooms by someone using a semi-automatic weapon. According to Astor (2018), these students have gone farther than marching in the streets, and they have spoken with legislators as well as speaking with the 45th President of the United States of America about the importance of gun laws. There are many more youth led movements worldwide that have adolescents refusing to let their age stop them from fighting injustices. The largest commonality in these movements is the use of social media as a platform for spreading the message of movements, organizing rallies, sharing supportive videos and messages, and allowing for people to show their support through other shared content of the movement. Hwuang and Kim (2015) analyzed the ways in which social media and the increase of knowledge in today's society have

influenced and supported social movements in the recent past. Castells (2012) wrote “In a society based on information and networking, social media is the logical form of communication” (pg.74)

Art Influence on Identity Formation

Identity formation and artistic expression of adolescents appear to complement each other well. This is partially due to the characteristics of an adolescent’s brain during this developmental stage. Adolescents begin to form and understand a more abstract thinking in this stage and, therefore, art can engage these changes in their brain. Forrest-Banks, Bassett, & Ferrarone’s (2016) quasi-study documented that expressive arts interventions in the form of poetry offered in an after-school setting for low-income urban youth showed a statistically significant higher academic efficacy, and social competence, in the youth after participating in the poetry workshops when compared to a group of youth who had not yet received the intervention. This indicated that an expressive therapy approach could affect youth in other areas of their academic and social lives. Research has also shown how identity formation can occur in an external way.

Fletcher and Lawrence (2018) examined the influence of art making on identity formation in children and adolescents they noted that identity is impacted by social environment, desired occupation, and creativity. They discovered this through offering an art exercise to three focus groups followed by a questionnaire to gather data of the impact of art making. Students reported that the sessions in which they used art when forming their identity offered them enjoyment, freedom and relaxation. The art activity presented to the focus groups invited them to create a chimera, which is a mythical creature composed of different aspects of multiple creatures, which represented them. The exercise was followed by each participant answering ten questions after presenting their chimeras to the group. Fletcher and Lawrence (2018) created their survey questions with influence from Harter’s

(2012) Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents. After the questions were completed, Fletcher and Lawrence (2018) used grounded theory coding, in which themes and common words are assigned numerical values to create data by Charmaz (2006) to quantify commonalities within the responses from the adolescents. The results of this study heavily imply that art and creativity can be very beneficial to adolescents to exploring their identity. Identity is formed based on several factors and exploring those creatively had a positive impact.

There are limitations to this study. First, all participants of this study had expressed an interest in art or were already involved in art expression in some capacity. Second, this study's researchers carried credentials of occupational therapy and fine arts. There was not adequate art therapy representation in the framework of the study which could implicate that details during the discussion were missed or that the directive was given in a way that informed their research rather than the art expression itself. However, these limitations don't discount the impact the art exercise had on the adolescents forming their identities. It is evident that art and creativity served as catalytic tools for these adolescents to explore their identity and all that impact it.

Ridley (2015) conducted a study centered on mirrors that were decorated in an expressive arts therapy group and their use as a tool for self-reflection on identity and a metaphysical bridge to one's inner consciousness among high school freshmen. Ridley (2015) created a one-day art exhibit in a hallway of the high school. Freshman students who chose to participate in the study were then asked to complete a questionnaire consisting of eight qualitative questions and two quantitative questions. The quantitative questions utilized a 2-point Likert scale of yes or no and agree or disagree with an open-ended question prompting further information asking them to reflect on specified mirrors. Ridley (2015) was able to identify a variety of themes that students identified as meaningful in the mirrors.

The four main themes that emerged in the responses from the students were expressing oneself, inner feelings, the social norm, and hope for the future (pg. 135). The second part of this study asked these same students to answer the question of what they see when they look in the mirror. Again, Ridley's (2015) research revealed four themes in students' self-reflection: (a) image of self, which included positive or negative images; (b) hope embodied; (c) multiple self(ves); and (d) lack of identity (pg.137). Through this experience, students reported that it was helpful for them to explore the question of identity. There was a sense of validation for the teens about their experience of finding their identity.

In an arts-based research study conducted with homeless/street involved women in Victoria B.C., Clover (2011) explored the power that visual arts have on self-esteem, communication and healing of the pains that caused the participating woman to become homeless to begin with. A sense of accomplishment, identity formation and community were all emerging themes that stemmed from this project. Clover (2011) wrote, "Identities are both self and socially defined and confined" (pg. 20). There are parts of one's identity that were imposed upon them from others. It is sometimes difficult to discern what parts one chooses for themselves and what parts are chosen by those around them. Adolescents can be especially susceptible to these outside influence. When one is still technically and legally a minor it can be easy to have others define your identity for you. Although the focus of this capstone thesis is on a different population, the similarities that exist among marginalized populations will be explored.

Method

Anticipated Outcome

In the summer of 2016, the course entitled "Examining Power Privilege and Oppression" was offered as part of this author's graduate studies at Lesley University. One of the assignments in this

class was to artistically express our racial identity. As a half-black individual, the experience of being given the space, safety and freedom to define my race on my own, was never offered before. The feeling of inner awareness, safety, understanding and freedom from having this opportunity was profound. This experience drove the desire to explore topics like this further and present opportunities like these to clients, especially those who are part of marginalized populations that are often misunderstood or misrepresented. This lens began to influence my work as an art therapist through creating the space for individuals to define themselves on their own terms as opposed to what society or others have defined for them.

The feeling of empowerment, safety and being heard when given an opportunity to share, express, and define my identity was powerful. The goal became to allow others to feel the same way. This project is a map of how to allow a client this opportunity. It is anticipated that clients may have a similar reaction to mine, but it is also anticipated that clients will choose an identity that they already understand within themselves well, resulting in less of an increase in self-knowing. That said, a high percentage of people feeling empowered and safe in an art therapy session to express these identities artistically is a likely result. Lastly, an increased level of understanding of one's self will hopefully be a result. The opportunity to define an element about ourselves without being confined to society's definition allows for one to truly understand their identity.

After discovering the ADDRESSING model developed by Hays (2001), it became clear as to how the art directive and workshop could be designed in order to guide clients into an expressive representation of their identity. From this initial idea, before and after surveys were constructed with data collection in mind. As part of the workshops, clients would complete the survey questions to explore art therapy's influence on one's self-knowing of identity and empowerment in expressing such

identity. Additionally, this author's internship placement offers a great opportunity to serve our clients through art therapy while also inviting them to participate in my study.

Participants

The community mental health organization in which this study took place is called Sound. With over 14 locations in the Seattle metro area, Sound serves Medicaid and Medicare populations. The location in which this study was conducted is located in Auburn, Washington, southeast of Seattle proper. This location is in a low-income, high homelessness, high drug use and high racial minority area. The intern coordinator runs an LGBTQA group on Friday afternoons and offered the opportunity for this author to lead the group and do my experiential. On October 5th, this thesis capstone was presented to the participants in the LGBTQA group and this author facilitated an hour and a half session with two clients and two fellow clinicians participants. To gather more data this author planned and facilitated a second workshop on January 3, 2019 which had six client participants and two clinician participants. For the purposes of this capstone thesis, only the eight student participants' results will be included.

Materials and Environment

The author of this capstone thesis played instrumental music during the art making, and offered clients a variety of art materials including, pens, pencils, colored pencils, markers, crayons, Cray-Pas, many types and colors of paper, collage materials, glitter, glitter pens, sharpie markers, tissue paper, Mod Podge, water color, acrylic paint, found objects, and shape cutters and scissors (both straight and patterned). It was important to this author to offer a variety of art materials to encourage art making and expression from a variety of individuals about a variety of identities.

Procedures

The experiential included an introduction to my topic, and the signing of an agreement to participate which includes a space for a pseudonym of a client's choice. All client names used in tables and reflections from this point forward are pseudonyms. The facilitator invited clients to introduce themselves one by one. Then as a group, the clients and the facilitator discussed and agreed upon guidelines to follow for the session. The guidelines included:

- 1) This is a safe space. What is said here stays here.
- 2) No judgements toward self or others. None of us are Picasso.
- 3) Share to your comfort level.
- 4) Have a fun, creative time!

Once these expectations were clear and agreed upon, the facilitator then moved into a discussion of Hays' (2001) ADDRESSING model. The group discussed and analyzed each piece of the ADDRESSING model, who holds the power dynamic in each. The facilitator invited clients to reflect internally how it felt to sit on either side of the power dynamics. After presenting and discussing the ADDRESSING model and power dynamics that are present within each area of identity, clients are invited to choose one of the letters to explore and express artistically using the provided variety of materials. Before art making, the clients complete a before survey which includes both qualitative questions and Likert (1932) scaled, quantitative questions regarding self-knowing, safety, art therapy experience, and empowerment in expressing this part of one's identity. Clients were informed they will have 50 minutes for "expressing artistically the part of their identity they've chosen." After creating, this author invited each client to share their images and their experience with the group to the extent of their comfort. Lastly, each participant was invited to complete the after survey which also included both qualitative questions and Likert (1932) scaled, quantitative questions that mirror similar questions

from the before survey. The facilitator informed clients that they were allowed to keep their art or turn it over to the facilitator. For those who wanted to keep their art, the facilitator asked the clients if they approved of the facilitator taking a picture of their art. All surveys are returned to the facilitator at the completion of the workshop.

Results

All participants completed a survey before and after the art activity. Both surveys included quantitative Likert (1932) scale questions scaled from 1 (low) to 5 (high), and qualitative, narrative answered questions. The qualitative questions and answers are provided below in a narrative form. The quantitative questions and answers from all participants for the before survey are provided within Table-1.

Of the 8 student participants, 1 participant chose to artistically express age, 3 participants chose to artistically express religion, 2 participants chose to artistically express sexual orientation, and the last 2 participants chose to artistically express both sexual orientation and gender. When asked in the first survey why they chose to express that area of their identity, 4 of the participants stated that this was an important part of their identity and the other 4 stated it was a part they wanted to understand more. When asked if the participant has had a safe space to express this portion of their identity 6 participants answered “yes” and 2 answered “no” or “not really”. When asked how well the participants think they know this portion of themselves, the average answer was 3.75 on a 5 point Likert scale. Participants were asked how safe they feel expressing this part of themselves and the average answer was 3.44. When asked how empowered the participants feel in openly expressing this portion of their identity in the world, the average answer was 3.375. Only 2 respondents said they had

participated in art therapy before. The after survey included questions that mirrored those in before survey, in order to attempt to determine what sort of impact the art activity had on the participants.

In the second survey, completed after the art making, the average answer from participants about how well they know this part of themselves was 4.125. This is an increase of 0.375 from the before survey average. Seven out of the 8 participants answered 'yes' when asked if their knowledge of this part of themselves grew from this experience. The last participant did not answer the question. In a later question, participants were asked if they learned anything new about themselves in which 5 participants answered "no" and 3 participants answered "yes". The average answer when asked how empowered the participant feels expressing this portion of their identity after the art activity was 3.625, which represents a 0.25 increase from the before survey. When asked how safe participants feel expressing this part of their identity now, the average answer was 3.625 representing an increase of 0.1875. The average answer for how the participants enjoyed the art therapy activity was 4.5.

Before and after survey questions mirrored each other and were aimed to explore the shifts that may have occurred in the participants experience as a result of the art therapy activities. These three questions were concerned with measuring one's safety, one's empowerment and one's self knowing about this part of their identity.

Comparing the questions about the feeling of safety when expressing this portion of one's identity 5 participants' answers increased from before to after, and 3 stayed the same. In the questions regarding the participant feeling empowered 3 participants' answers increased, one participants answer decreased and 4 participants' answers stayed the same. All questions and answers comparing the mirrored questions in the before and after surveys are provided in Figure-1, Figure-2 and Figure-3.

Qualitative Results

The before and after surveys included both qualitative and quantitative questions. To provide the reader with a more rounded image of each participant and their answers this author has provided a description of each participant. The biographies of each participant includes a description of the participant and any relevant orientations, a description of the art they created, how they interacted with the group, their survey responses, and any verbal responses they offered the group.

Danni is a 17-year-old white female who chose to express her religion in an artistic way. Danni chose religion because she reported some of her family hates her for her religion, which is Wiccan. Danni reported that yes, she has a safe space to express this identity with her close Wiccan friends who she feels safe around, but they also do questionable things with Wicca. In the after survey, Danni reported that she felt she had grown in her understanding of this part of herself but she was not sure how. During the art making activity Danni appeared engaged, using watercolors on a white piece of paper to paint an image of a tree with her Wiccan symbol in the center of the trunk. The background of the image was purple with metallic dots. She explained to the group after art-making that she likes making art about herself. Danni reported that she feels close to nature as part of her religion.

Espen is a 14-year-old gay, genderqueer person. They chose to examine their sexual orientation because, as they reported, "it represents me." Espen reported that they have a safe space to express this part of their identity and it is the LGBTQA group at Sound that they attend frequently. Espen chose a black piece of paper and used watercolors to create a rainbow pattern representative of the gay pride flag. Espen made their piece of art into a symmetrical square. Espen used patterned scissors to cut the edges of their paper leaving a scalloped edge. Espen was open to sharing their artwork with the group and spoke about how they loved their piece they made and plan to hang it on their bathroom mirror.

Katarina is a 16-year-old Caucasian bisexual female. Katarina also identifies as a Christian. She chose to artistically express her religion because it means a lot to her, she reported. Katarina reported that she has had past romantic relationships and friendships in which she has found safety in expressing this part of herself. Katarina used yellow, red, blue, pink, brown and purple markers to create an image of a figure who Katarina later reported was her with wings, a halo and seemingly floating on a yellow background. Katarina drew throughout the session continually adding elements to her image. Katarina finished her first image early in the session so she chose to draw a second image of a single eye large enough to almost fill the whole page. She used the same color markers to make a bright, colorful and seemingly chaotic eye. The iris of the eye was pink and around the eye was a variety of lines and colors all interchanging with one another. Katarina engaged in conversation with fellow participants throughout the workshop. In the after survey Katarina reported feeling less safe about expressing this part of herself in the world, "because people might treat religious people as things not actual beings." As she was sharing her art at the end of the exercise, Katarina reported verbally to the group that as she was drawing she began to realize how possible it is for people to hate her for her religion. She reported that this gave her some anxiety.

Leslie is a 13-year-old bisexual female. Leslie originally couldn't decide between artistically expressing her gender or her sexuality. She chose to express her gender in the end because she reported that there's a part of her that "feels confused or lost about why I'm female." Leslie reported that she does not have a safe space to express this part of her identity because she doesn't not trust easily and never really spoke openly about her feelings regarding her questioning gender identity. Leslie chose a white piece of paper and pink, blue, red and black markers to create her image. Leslie created an image of a figure that was split down the middle and pink and red on one side and blue and

black on the other. The figure's hands appear as dripping paint and surrounding the figure was more dripping and sunray like patterns. The pink side had blue as the background and the blue side has pink as a background. After Leslie finished her art making she chose to cut off the additional parts of the paper she did not draw on. Her page became 4 inches by 7 inches after eliminating the additional paper. Leslie reported in her after survey that she "kinda learned something" about herself but her response to the question of what she learned she reported "I learned that I'm more of a" and did not finish that sentence. Leslie was engaged in conversation with fellow participants throughout the workshop. Leslie reported verbally to the group that she felt like the image she created is important right now and will continue to be important to her as she explores her gender identity.

Cat is a 13-year-old Caucasian female who also identifies as straight and "other" as her religious affiliation. Cat decided to choose religion as the piece of her identity to artistically express. Her reasoning was because "it's not completely fleshed out." Cat reports that she has felt safe expressing her religion identity at home all the time. Cat interacted primarily with her individual clinician who was in the workshop to support the main facilitator. Cat chose a 13" by 18" piece of paper and used acrylic paints to create her image. The image showed a sun and a moon with rays shining downward. The sun rays are pink and shining on a large, daisy-like flower and the moon is shining down unfilled rays on a medium uncolored flower. In the middle is a small, uncolored flower and stem. The top of the image has a black background. The client chose to cut the top of her image into a arched shape. She reported that she was attempting to make her image look like a stained glass window because they remind her of church. She reports that "this is how religion looks like in my head, two sides trying to work together. Light and dark, good and bad." Cat said she did learn something new about herself, but she doesn't know what.

Shadow is a 14 year old African-American female who identifies as demisexual. Shadow chose to artistically express her sexual identity and did not specify why she chose it. Shadow reported that she only has one friend in which she has shared this part of her identity with. Shadow reported she has shared with him because they are close friends and he identifies as gay. Shadow asked the facilitator if she could look up the colors that represent demisexual on her phone, which the facilitator allowed. Shadow chose a piece of white paper and using purple, black, and grey markers drew a sphere that was split into four quadrants. Each quadrant was filled in with one of the colors of demisexuality: purple, black, grey, and white. On top of the sphere is a spiraled lint the traveled around the sphere and underneath it, ending in heart shape. The heart also had all four colors of demisexuality. Shadow interacted minimally with fellow participants, although she still appeared engaged. In the after survey, Shadow reported she grew in her understanding about this part of herself. She said “Yes cause I feel there are people who can help me come out about stuff I never thought I could.” Shadow reports she still doesn’t feel safe about expressing this part of herself in the work but “Even though my experiences can be scary there are other people who understand.” As seen in Table 1, Shadow did show a marginal increase in her reported safety from a 1 in the before survey to a 2 in the after survey.

Adri is a 12-year-old Latino-American female. She identified as religious and straight. Adri chose to express her age because she knows a lot about it and has done a similar exercise in the past. Adri reported that she has felt safe in expressing this part of her identity among her family. Adri chose a white piece of paper and a regular pencil to draw with. She took another piece of paper and used it to cover the parts of the page she had already drawn on. Adri drew very small vignettes across the page of stick figures representing herself, her friends and her family. Each small image was accompanied by narrative descriptions explaining the image and its impact it has on her identity. Adri used

approximately 60% of the page. Adri did not engage in conversation throughout the session. She engaged nonverbally, however, through laughing at jokes or nodding in agreement to a statement made by other participants.

Star is a 14-year-old straight female who is part of the Jehovah Witness religion. Star chose to express her straight/female identity in the workshop. Her reasoning was simply "Because I am." Star reported that she has had safety in expressing this part of herself at home and at the suicide ward at a nearby hospital. Star chose a white piece of paper and used yellow, blue, pink, black, purple, green and pink markers to draw an image of a songbird. Star's image included a blue bird with music notes coming out of its beak perched on a thin branch with roses blooming from it. There was also a sun in the top left corner of the page, clouds in the sky, and grass at the bottom of the page with a few flowers growing and blooming. Star stated in her after survey that she did grow in her understanding of this part of herself, but did not specify how. Star interacted with fellow participants regularly throughout the workshop. She shared her passion for singing and how it is an important part of her identity. Star reported verbally that she was happy this workshop was offered.

Common themes seen within the qualitative results are those of safety, reasoning for choice of the piece of their identity to express and increase in self-knowing of the part of themselves they chose. As far as safety, all of the participants had at least one individual in which they have felt safe sharing this part of their identity with. Four of the individuals reported that they chose to express their part of their identity because it is either important to them or comfortable to explore. One participant did not explain her reasoning for her choice. Two participants chose their piece of identity because it is not quite clear to them, so they'd like to explore it more. The last individual reported her choice was based

on interpersonal challenges she experiences because of it. All participants reported an increase of self-knowing after the art activity implying the art has an impact on an individual's self-knowing.

The quantitative answers are shown in Table-1 below. All questions were asked with a Likert scale of 1 to 5 in which one is the low option and 5 is the high option. The average scores of specific questions are provided in Table-2 and Table-3.

Quantitative Survey Answers

Table 1- Before and After Questions, Compared

Participant	How well do you think you know this part of yourself?			How safe do you feel expressing this part of your identity?			How empowered do you feel speaking openly about this part of your identity?		
	Before	After	Difference	Before	After	Difference	Before	After	Difference
Danni	4	5	1	2	4	2	3	3	0
Espen	5	5	0	5	5	0	5	5	0
Katarina	4	5	1	4	3	-1	5	4	-1
Leslie	3	4	1	3	4	1	4	5	1
Cat	3	5	2	5	5	0	4	5	1
Shadow	3	5	2	1.5	2	0.5	1	1	0
Adri	4	3	-1	3	2	-1	2	2	0
Star	4	3	-1	4	4	0	3	4	1

Summary Statistics

Table 2 – Before and After Questions Averages

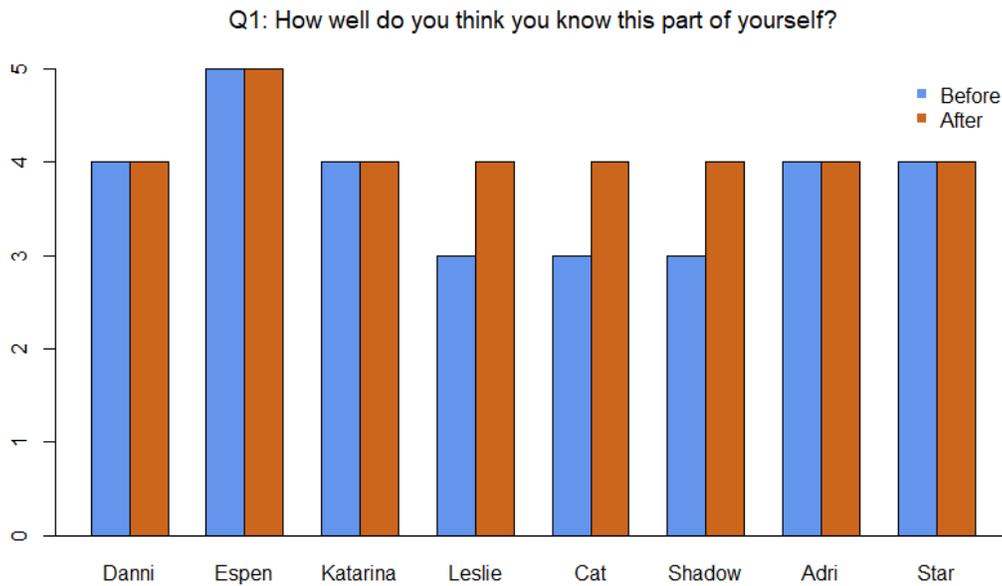
Before and After Questions	Average of Before Responses	Average of After Responses	Average Change
How well do you think you know this part of yourself?	3.75	4.125	0.375
How safe do you feel expressing this part of yourself?	3.4375	3.625	0.1875
How empowered do you feel to speak openly about this part of your identity?	3.375	3.625	0.25

Table 3 – Receptiveness to Art Therapy Activity

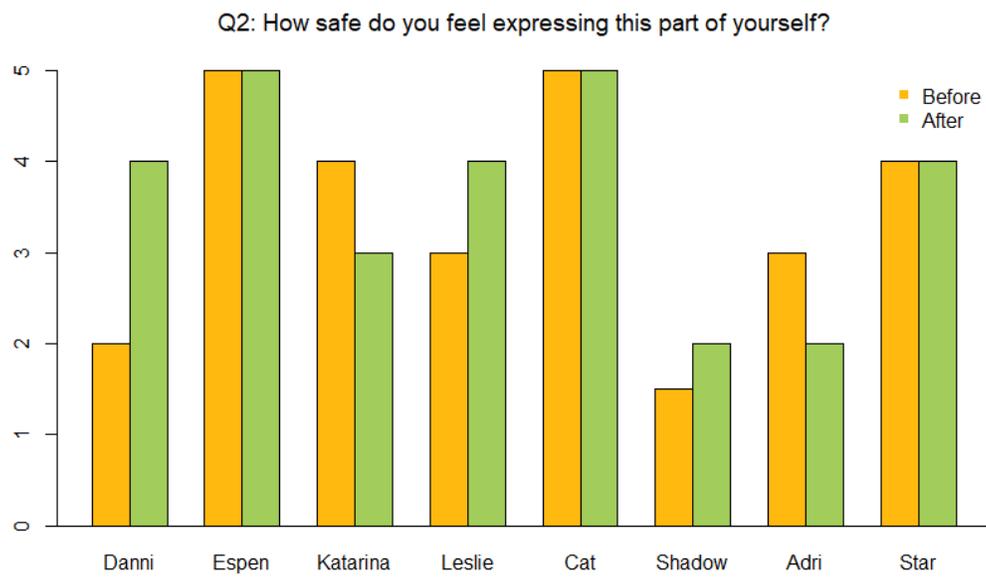
Enjoyment of Art Therapy Activity	Average Response
What was the experience like for you?	4.5
How safe did you feel expressing this part of your identity in this environment?	4.375
How likely is it that you would want to do something like this again?	4.375
How likely is it that you would suggest something like this to a friend?	4

Comparative Answer Graphs

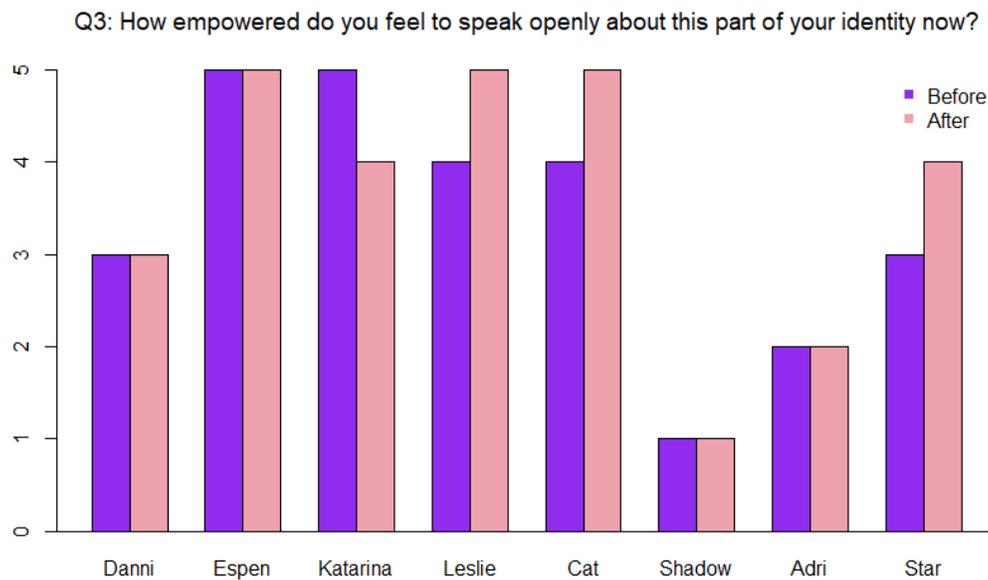
Graph A



Graph B



Graph C



Observations

This author was the facilitator for both workshops in which participants chose a piece of their identity to express artistically. This allowed for this author to directly observe affect, communication among participants, verbal responses and other observable responses throughout the workshop.

Initial interest in the workshop was difficult to obtain. This was mostly due to the nature of the site in which the workshop was held. This site did not have ongoing groups, and when it did it was not often an open invitation. This author held three different workshops; one had zero attendees, one had two attendees and one had six attendees. At the last workshop this author spent multiple days calling clients to invite them to the workshop and remind them of the workshop. Once the word was out after the first workshop, the enthusiasm seemed to grow.

Within the workshop, the atmosphere was positive in nature. Clients appeared engaged and open to the activities in the workshop. Some clients were more vocal than others, as is expected in a group setting. During art making, the facilitator played instrumental music on their phone. Clients

spoke in soft voices during art making. Client discussed various topics during art making including, but not limited to, school, relationships, dating, the process of their art, family, religion, positive and negative experiences in their lives, and being in therapy. Clients were able to self-navigate conversational lulls and topical discomfort. When clients needed help or had a question they were polite in getting the facilitator's attention. Clients followed the guidelines of the group that were discussed at the beginning of the session. When an individual began violating a rule, clients were respectful in approaching the infraction.

Post Workshop Responses

Each participant in the workshops is a client at Sound with an individual clinician that is separate from the workshop facilitator. Each participant sees his or her individual clinician regularly and the workshops were offered as an additional service. In the weeks following the workshops, this author was approached by three separate clinicians with reflections from their client who attended the workshops. The first clinician informed me that her client (Shadow) disclosed her sexual orientation to her in session, and cited this author's workshop as the reason she felt empowered to disclose this information. The client also shared her fears about sharing this portion of her identity with her religious family. The clinician also informed me that the artwork this client made in the workshop has continued to be used to process and develop her identity with her clinician in session. The second clinician informed me that her client (Cat) has expressed on several occasions how the author's workshop was a place in which she felt heard and respected. The clinician reported that the experience of the workshop has become a base from which the client has begun to build additional self-esteem. The last clinician informed this author that their client (Adri) has shown and reported a decrease in

their social anxiety symptoms. While their anxiety is still a challenge they face, they felt as though the group offered a positive outcome from which they can continue to grow.

Discussion

This thesis capstone sought to examine the ways in which adolescents form their identity, and the ways in which art therapy can be a tool to assist them in this process. This researcher facilitated two different workshops to offer a safe space for adolescents to use art materials to explore their identities. Data was gathered through before and after surveys of combined qualitative and quantitative questions, as well as verbal reflections from participants after art making. At the end of the workshop, time was offered for the clients to share their artwork and any reflections they had about the workshop. Most participants only stated that this experience was fun and they'd like to do it again. One of the participants, Shadow, stated, "I feel like I've seen myself in a different way now that I look at this art piece. It's like a secret that's being revealed." There were no clients who reported not liking the exercise or workshop experience.

Keeping in mind that this sample size is quite low, the results do imply a positive effect on the participants. All average answers increased from the before survey to the after as seen in Table-3. This positive trend was evident through all of the numerical and verbal conclusions made by participants. This exercise, while only offered in a one-time setting, had positive impacts after the workshop itself as evidenced by participants feeling empowered by the workshop to disclose important information about themselves with their clinicians. One could infer that these workshops created a foundation or springboard for participants to continue to grow in their identities.

The results of the workshops aligned with this researcher's expectations. Additionally, it appeared that many of the participants had an observably positive experience. Participants reported

that the workshops allowed for a safe space to express themselves which is a pivotal part of this research. Although all participants reported that they have trusted people in their lives in which they can express this part of themselves, the average answer to the safety within the workshop, provided in Table 3, was 4.375 out of 5. This researcher agrees with participants that the space to create was safe, welcoming and transformative as intended by this researcher. This researcher was satisfied with the results of these workshops. Overall the results showed a positive increase among almost all the participants. The enthusiasm showed by participants after the workshop was a confirmation to the researcher that it was important to offer these workshops for this group of adolescents. The addition of a method such as the one offered in this capstone thesis could fit as a continuation to human development theories. Even with a small sample size one was able to see how art therapy aided clients in growing in their identity.

Recommendations

As discussed, the subject of adolescent identity is ever changing. It would be beneficial to further research and understand adolescent identity formation in the context of the modern age. A longitudinal study that follows a similar methodology as this thesis study could also result in important findings. If participants were able to artistically express each part of their ADDRESSING identity pieces over an extended period of time, how would that affect their overall understanding, empowerment and safety regarding their identity formation? It could also be done allowing participants to recreate a single piece of their identity multiple times. What sort of impact would doing the exercise multiple times have on participant's identity formation and understanding them? Additionally, how would a client be affected if they artistically expressed every piece of the ADDRESSING model? If results of one exercise were positive, it would seem reasonable that continued work toward artistically exploring

identity would have a further positive effect on adolescents. One major factor that is a reality for most individuals is intersectionality in which multiple identities within the individuals contribute to discrimination, challenges and confusion. When marginalized identities are layered, how does that change, or not change, how understood, comfortable and safe these identities are? It would also be important for the furthering of this study to have a larger, more diverse pool of adolescents to survey. In addition to more adolescent participants, more questions to gather and compare data should be added, specifically quantitative questions which can allow for the measurement of change between the before and after surveys. A larger data set would also allow for more statistical formulas to be applied resulting in clearer results.

Conclusion

Today's adolescents face additional challenges and different distractions as a result of increased technology, globalization, and increased social justice involvement. Forming one's identity is a vital part of one's adolescence, but in a society driven by technology and social justice, how is this formation changed? Art therapy is used to aid clients in healing from many different diagnosis and challenges, yet it is also a powerful tool in helping one better explore and understand themselves. How do these two worlds collide? How can art therapy be used with adolescents to help them in their most formative years? Through this thesis capstone, this researcher was able to explore this concept. This has provided just a slight view into how art therapy had a positive impact on a group of adolescents. It is easy to see the ways in which this research can continue, at a more complex scale, to provide clearer evidence of the importance of art therapy as a tool to aid adolescents in their identity formation.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

**Lesley University
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Expressive Therapies Division
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Student's Name: Victoria Force

Type of Project: Thesis

Title: Art Therapy as a Tool for Enhancing Adolescent Identity Formation, Self-Knowing, & Empowerment.

Date of Graduation: May 18, 2019

In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor: Kelvin Ramirez