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Labyrinth Meditation as a Foundation for Photography with Adolescents

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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MA, Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Art Therapy

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Abstract

This capstone thesis paper analyzes how the use of meditation, finger labyrinths, and photography intertwine to strengthen reflection for the adolescent population. To further this community engagement project, the researcher observed two male adolescents in their work with meditation and photography. Results revealed that after the use of labyrinth meditation, participants felt calm and quiet. The photo-taking portion of this study was different than what they had previously experienced while taking images. Results also showed that meditation before photo-taking allowed for reflection, awareness, and personal empowerment to increase during the art making process. This study emphasizes the need for decreasing one's pace in relation to photography.

Keywords: art therapy, meditation, labyrinth, photography, reflection, awareness, empowerment, witnessing, adolescence

Labyrinth Meditation as a Foundation for Photography with Adolescents

Alongside experiential learning and mindfulness, hands on art experiences were included in a community engagement project designed specifically for a capstone thesis project at Lesley University. A small group of adolescents in the greater Boston area participated in a project that met to investigate labyrinth meditation alongside photography. After a guided meditation and a finger labyrinth, the youth took photographic images with the intention to capture the importance of a scene. The finger labyrinth is defined in this study as a picture of a spiral course printed on a piece of paper. In mindful practices labyrinths bring peace to individuals.

The artistic process in this study is intended to contribute to the clinical practice of art therapies by bringing mindful exercises that are known and applied in the field of therapy into a different environment, and studying what they teach present and future art therapists. What is learned and developed by engaging in mindful photography, influences the therapeutic practice.

This study and method was developed in order to meet several goals the researcher had for the participants. Goals incorporate, documenting personal snap shot experience, appreciating one's physical environment and space, and gaining a greater knowledge of labyrinth use in mindfulness. Themes, shared stories, and personal experiences from the adolescents were collected within this paper. Throughout art making and thoughtful discussion, topics of reflection, awareness, and personal empowerment were compiled by this researcher.

Literature Review

Photography

One's experience of photography is interlaced with their personal life and actions. Photographs are memories and representations of one's locations or viewpoint. Metaphorically, photos become a way to see oneself and their imagination in real life. Either way, this form of art

is the quickest and most accessible way to communicate a place to the viewer and to document realities.

A photograph has the power to place the viewer into its landscape through sounds and smells. As the viewer studies the photograph, their senses begin to engage and they are immediately transported into the moment the image was captured. When this happens, the viewer hears the rush of a waterfall or the smell of fresh lavender in a field. Even if the image was photographed years ago, the results are the same. A photo has the power to bring the viewer into the image and cause a new set of feelings to emerge (Weiser, 2014). Along with viewing the image, emotions are conveyed within the image and are present to the viewer.

Snapshot Photography

A snapshot essentially describes the action behind a photograph. If an image was taken quickly and without much of a plan for composition or photographic elements, then it is considered a snapshot (Thompson, 2014). In the beginning of photography, capturing images was a long and difficult process. It required heavy equipment and technical knowledge of the development process to develop one image.

With the introduction of the Kodak camera in 1888, photography changed. The accessible new camera, that allowed for everyday life and motion to be captured more easily, began the popularity of the snapshot technique that defined this era of photography. With 100 preloaded shots, Kodak photos were taken more often and with more leniency. Soon after, the Brownie camera was produced in 1900. This more affordable camera was marketed to the children and the adolescent population (Thompson, 2014). Due to the rise in popularity of the Brownie camera, it was seen in many households as an informal way to capture memories. By utilizing the snapshot technique, both cameras expanded photography for the amateur photographer.

Subsequently, the Kodak camera and the Brownie camera became so common that they were found in most every house hold in America. Just so, the smartphone camera rose to become a new technology that most every American owns. The snapshot movement, revolutionized by the Kodak and the Brownie, has been rejuvenated by the smartphone camera. Even though the aesthetics of an image are not prioritized, the goal of a spontaneous moment snapshot image remains (Thompson, 2014). Spontaneity continues in the present twenty first century as photography becomes dominated by the smartphone. This era in photography is defined by the camera attached to the smartphone. The smartphone camera has transformed photography by empowering individuals to once again use the snapshot technique to photograph their homes and everyday lives.

Phototherapy and Photovoice

Just as photography causes feelings to emerge, art therapy utilizes phototherapy to evoke emotions for hope, growth, and healing (Natoli, 2011). Though world is always moving and evolving, photography freezes a moment in time. Photographs give realistic yet unrealistic interpretations of realities from a given time and place. Judy Weiser (2014) connects photography to art therapy when she describes phototherapy as “a therapy practices that uses people's personal snapshots, family albums, and pictures (p. 162).” In addition to the physical image, phototherapy utilizes the emotional responses, such as “feelings, thoughts, memories, and associations,” to strengthen one’s understanding and communication (Weiser, 2014, p. 162). Every day images have immense power when viewed with phototherapy prospective. Where verbal communication may be a barrier, phototherapy is an interactive and unique form of counseling. It involves techniques that use photo imagery to contact emotional responses (Weiser, 2014).

Part of phototherapy utilizes self-identity and individuality in its objectives. Because phototherapy uses moments of real-life experiences and emotions, it helps clients “in remembering, confronting, imagining, and exploring complex parts of themselves, their lives, and especially their feelings” (Weiser, 2014, p.165). Every image that a person takes is a choice. Humans connect themselves to imagery so often that the photos they take and the images they respond to, become part of their self-identity. In a phototherapy discussion between client and therapist, details and emotional meaning of an image are examined. New thoughts regarding the individual’s once unconscious life are now brought to the surface. These findings act as a bridge for the client to open up different beliefs and opinions of their self.

Elements from phototherapy are found within the photovoice practice. Mizock, Russinova, and DeCastro (2015) described photovoice as “a community-based participatory action” that includes a written narrative alongside photographs taken by the contributors (p. 279). The emphasis of this type of phototherapy is on the community-based aspect that enhances involvement in the public. This action increases self-efficiency, reflection, awareness, and empowerment by bringing various people together for one action (Mizock et al., 2015).

Photography through photovoice is used in clinical and therapeutic settings as well. This intervention is often used within a therapeutic practice for individuals with mental illness, physical disabilities, unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and immigration. In addition to facilitating recovery, photovoice produces positive identity among individuals. (Mizock et al., 2015). The therapeutic effects of photovoice begin with dialogue between oneself and others. Writing alongside an artistic creation demonstrates power in expression and sharing. By this, photovoice brings engagement in active self-reflection (Mizock et al., 2015).

Mindfulness in Art Therapy

Literature and workshops linking art therapy and mindfulness meditation are increasing (Rappaport, 2013). When combining the expressive arts with meditative practices, “self-awareness, emotional regulation, compassion, empathy, self and social esteem” are fostered (Iris as cited in Rappaport, 2013, p. 157). Due to the expansion of self, art combined with mindfulness becomes the central topic for future studies. An example of connecting art and mindfulness was conducted in China.

A study of twelve participants took place in Hong Kong, China. Participants involved were refugees and asylum seekers who survived political violence and trauma as well as were linked to a nongovernmental organization (NGO). This study examined art therapy and mindfulness in a workshop studio name Inhabited Studio. The aim of the study was to analyze how art therapy and mindful meditation could benefit survivors of trauma with cultural relevance and resilience (Kalmanowitz and Ho, 2017).

Data for the study was gathered by art making, recordings, questionnaires, discussions, and reflective writings. When combining art therapy with mindfulness, a process-orientated approach was formed. This method engaged the participants in the here-and-now mentality that allowed for the exploration of expressing oneself. The united model not only gave way to advancing aspects of the participant’s trauma, but it also expanded their expressions of themselves. This was evident by participants’ feedback of learned skills such as emotional regulation, acceptance, and clarity in stressful moments (Kalmanowitz and Ho, 2017).

Mindfulness

Mindfulness has developed from the notion of detaching attention and giving notice to one’s own feelings and thoughts. This practice is informed by the tradition of Buddhist

psychology (Siegel, Germer, Olendzki, as cited in Didonna, 2009). From tradition, the term *sati* from the Pali language is translated to “mindfulness” or observations of the mind. This tool is used in order to decrease suffering while deepening wisdom (Siegel, Germer, Olendzki, as cited in Didonna, 2009).

Not only has mindfulness developed in traditional Buddhist practice, but it also has grown into therapeutic interventions. Fundamentals for positive and healthy psychological resilience in both the individual and the interpersonal systems are found in the seven foundations of mindfulness (Håkan Nilsson, 2014). Foundations to this reflective practice include non-judging, patience, beginner’s mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

The first foundation of mindfulness is recognizing judgmental thoughts without pursuing them. Individuals react strongly to experiences and values. Judgmental habits may not be made known to the individual. A second essential part to the practice of mindfulness is patience. While practicing patience, minds and bodies should not be rushed, rather they should be connected to the present. Kabat-Zinn (1990) explains the second foundation saying “patience [is] a form of wisdom” that is like openness and acceptance (p. 34). Third, a beginner’s mind is important to bring to a mindful practice because it is a way for the individual to experience things again for the first time. Experiencing life with this mindset brings the opportunity for new possibilities and free expression.

The fourth critical base to mindful practice is about trusting in one’s own power even when mistakes are made. This trust begins with the self and, when cultivated, extends to other people. The fifth foundation in meditation is the principal goal of intentionally constructing an outlook of non-striving. Acceptance is the sixth understanding in mindful practices. This practice

is receiving a thought or a feeling, acknowledging it, and not forcing an outcome before change is possible. Lastly, letting go is the seventh and last foundation of mindfulness. This base is about observing a moment and allowing that thought to pass in one's mind (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Whether or not one is able to successfully implement a foundation in their life, the practice is always around if the individual is willing to work to discover.

An additional way to separate mindfulness into focused points is through the four dimensions of mindfulness. They include the physical, the mental, the social, and the existential. Each dimension focuses on self and relational aspects. First, the physical is informed by the body's circumstances. Within this dimension, the individual is able to develop body awareness through "mindfulness yoga, body scanning, and sitting/walking meditation" that gives a "heightened sense of sensory presence and attention" to the self (Nilsson, 2014, p.163).

Next, the mental dimension tells the conscious mind to disregard thoughts, feelings, and desires that appear. During meditation, negative and impulsive thoughts and memories often surface. It is the practitioner's job to acknowledge these intrusive thoughts and to then let them pass. Third, the social dimension focuses the group of individuals who are practicing together. When empathy and inclusion are developed within a group, "personal exchange, self-reflection and growth" is possible (Nilsson, 2014). The first three dimensions to mindfulness are followed by the last and most theoretical.

The existential dimension aims to promote resilience and the search for meaning through epigenetic principle and logotherapy. Epigenetics is described by Erik Erikson (as cited in Nilsson, 2014) as a process formed by several forces and stages of psychosocial development. Viktor Frankl (as cited in cited in Nilsson, 2014) explains logotherapy as human life motivated by the search for meaning such as with meaning centered therapy. Nevertheless, mindfulness

brings together physical, mental, social, and existential views.

Not only can mindful meditation be considered for physical and mental wellbeing, but it also has the power to offer individuals personal balance and greater awareness in life (Didonna, 2009). Even a small amount of focused breathing or body scanning each day, may have the ability to help emotionally regulate the body and decrease negative thoughts (Nilsson, 2014).

Body Scan

Humans fixate their attention on appearance and body image, and yet at the same time, their information and knowledge of bodies is lacking. Social media has given society an ideal body image, that if not lived up to, may bring insecurity. Author Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) says “when we put energy into actually experiencing our body” then “we refuse to get caught up in the overlay of judgmental thinking about it” and transformation is possible (p. 76). One practices mindfulness through the body scan when they examine the self in relation to the body.

Meditation is an overarching label given to describe types of mindful practices. One central exercise in meditation is the body scan. The body scan involves breaths, focused attention, calmness, concentration, wellbeing, and timelessness (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). It is about moment to moment mind and body awareness and acceptance. The quality of one’s willingness to feel, is more important than trying to imagine the act of letting go tension and pain. The act of “letting go is really an act of acceptance” and empathetic support during a situation (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 88). This mindset allows the individual to see themselves as larger than their difficulties or pain.

Practicing the body scan is about the specific moment in time and not about motives, such as relaxation or purification. Rather, it is a “way of being with your body and with yourself” and “a way of being whole right now” (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 91). To practice the body scan, one

begins by either lying down on their back or sitting comfortably in a chair. As the individual closes their eyes or relaxes their gaze, direct attention is brought to different areas of their body. It is encouraged to practice this mindful method several times throughout a week (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Walking Meditation

In addition to the body scan, walking is a type of mindful practice. A body scan allows the individual to be present in their own body. Similarly, walking allows for the individual to be present in their body and clear their mind. Rather than walking to a destination, walking meditation is about the journey and the process of moving one's feet in contact with the ground. Because the destination is the present moment, the individual is more open to that moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2018). Here, attention is brought to controlled movements and changes in sensations. When the mind wanders away in thought, the individual may notice it, then return back to the current moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2018).

Walking is not only a physical activity, but a sensory experience as well. Kabat-Zinn (2018) suggests that walking back and forth on a designated path will lessen distractions. With walking meditation, one's eyes do not survey the environment, but rather softly focus on the path in front. With every step, the individual's breathing connects them to the world by placing them in a sensory moment. The individual's feet are connected to feeling the ground, their nose is attached to the smell of the air, and their ears share sounds of the environment. This reflective moment relates to mindful practices in one's environment.

Beginners Mind and Photography

Just as the body scan and walking meditation are subsets of practicing mindfulness, so is a beginner mind. This technique is founded by the Japanese Buddhism teaching. The term Zen

correlates with the phrase *shoshin* means “beginner’s mind” (Shunryu, 2010). The feeling of experiencing the world for the first time. Such as a young child may experience a new toy, so is the mindset of a beginner mind (Kim, 2015). Children playfully see their surroundings as unlimited and exhilarating. While children are curious, so are individuals with a beginner’s mind mentality inquisitive. This awareness brings compassion and originality (Shunryu, 2010). The purpose of this practice is to see an object or nature in the exact way it is being presented.

A balance of different techniques is essential in formal meditative exercises. According to Kabat-Zinn (1990), the beginner’s mind is a foundation to the practice of mindfulness. Practices such as sitting meditation, body scan, and yoga, all involve the individual and the beginner’s mind. When practiced, one frees their expectations and starts new without past thoughts and opinions interrupting present or future moments (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Mindfulness Photography

Mindfulness photography takes the beginner’s mind approach by introducing photography as a way to reflect on one’s inner thoughts. Both mindfulness and photography value the experience and the process rather than worrying about the product. This includes not stressing about photographic composition, framing, and lighting. Photographing with the beginner’s mind is about photographing for the joy and the love of the art form (Kim, 2015). This method allows the individual to photograph life in a more rich and vivid manner.

Daily life is made of speed. There are many choices and distractions that demand attention. Kim (2015) writes about embracing and appreciating slowness in a world of speed. He says that by simplifying choices in life, there will be more energy for important things. Mindfulness photography is looking for simplicity in objects and remembering that there are good photo opportunities everywhere. If one feels rushed they must stop to notice the feeling,

breathe, and continue to walk slowly onward. When photographing the environment, the end product nor the past or the future moments are of concern to the photographer. The photographer focuses on the present moment.

Resembling walking meditation, mindful or Zen photography occurs slowly. One may feel the ground beneath their feet as they gaze at their environment. Practicing mindful photography involves staying curious and enjoying the moment. It is also about listening, noticing, and remaining childlike, such as keeping the beginner's mind. This art form is not about forcing the image, but rather expressing one's inner spirit through the artistic journey (Kim, 2015). Though walking slowly takes patience, one will start to notice small details that may not have been noticed before. Giving notice to these as well as to one's internal feelings and breathing is an important piece to promoting patience in the inner spirit. Walking allows for the decluttering of the mind while simultaneously giving time to reflect and make connections with the world details.

Walkabout with Photography

Walking is a type of mindful practice. This practice has been made throughout history and within cultural backgrounds. Customarily, a walkabout is a rite of passage and a reflective time from the traditional perspectives of Australian aboriginal practice. Different cultural variations of the walkabout are referenced in movies, literature, music, and art. At the Abramson Cancer Center in the Pennsylvania Hospital, the "Walkabout: Looking In, Looking Out" eight-week long program was developed to connect the relationship between the traditional rite of passage of the Australian aboriginal walkabouts and mindfulness-based art therapy (MBAT). The intervention was designed for seventy-four adults who had been diagnosed with cancer.

The program was created with three parts: mindful walking to create walking awareness

practice, photography exploration to bring art therapy to participants, and collage making to further reflective behaviors. Caroline Peterson (2015) writes about the program, saying that it “combines art therapy tasks and processes...with mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program” to strengthen participant’s wellbeing (p. 78). Walks were taken close to the medical complex. They incorporated breathing exercises at the beginning of session, and loving-kindness meditation (LKM) at the conclusion of each session (Peterson, 2015).

Loving-kindness meditation has a foundation in Buddhism and kindness-based meditation (KBM). It aims to not only improve one’s health and wellbeing, but to engage the self in a non-judgmental manner. This structured meditation begins with directing caring feelings toward oneself, while then spreading that feeling to loved ones, to acquaintances, to strangers, to enemies, and then to all of humankind. During meditation thoughts are often accompanied by the repetition of uplifting phrases, such as mantras, and visualizations, such as inviting environments (Galante, Galante, Bekkers, and Gallacher, 2014). In addition to LKM, members of this study were also encouraged to use meditation at home in the form of awareness, breathing practice, and the use of a mindfulness meditation tape.

Along with the physical act of walking, participants contributed in art making by taking digital photographs of what they saw as pleasant or unpleasant. Following the act of mindful walking and photography, participants constructed a collage with their collection of images they photographed throughout the eight weeks. Collage making invited an “open ended creative expression and community culture” to the art table (Peterson, 2015, p. 79). The walks led to creative expressions. Participants describe being actively involved in relationship building, art making, and breathing exercises. The multiple step counseling intervention based on traditional

walkabouts, calmed, focused, self-regulated, and engaged the participants not only with nature, but also with each other.

Mindfulness and Art Therapy with Adolescents

Art alongside mindfulness deepens adolescents self-compassion, inner wholeness, and emotional regulation. It works to strengthen one's resiliency, cognitive attention, and well-being (Weiner & Rappaport as cited in Rappaport, 2014). This hypothesis was tested through clinical application by many authors.

Diana Coholic studied art combined with mindfulness in 2010. Coholic (2010) established a children's arts based mindfulness group connecting art, creativity, and the human spirit. This looked like holistic arts-based method and art activities for young people who were in need of counseling. This group served eight to thirteen-year-old children who had been impacted by loss, trauma, or other difficult life event. Discussion with the youth took place during the time of art making. Discussions during art making allowed children to share their art process more easily. Following her research, Coholic (2010) found that art alongside mindfulness not only expands children's self-esteem skills, but also increases their emotional expression and understanding of themselves. Art alongside mindfulness benefits other studies as well.

At a teen summer camp in 2012, Emily Tara Weiner and Laury Rappaport developed and led a five-day mindfulness art program in with seven youth, who were ages fourteen to seventeen. The experience began with a mindfulness exercise of focused-oriented arts therapy (FLOAT). This practice was developed by Rappaport in 2009 to expand personal mindful experiences. (Weiner & Rappaport as cited in Rappaport, 2014). First, the youths took part in a five minutes seated meditation. As a reflection to the meditation, the youth produced visual art journals and poetry. As a closing, participants shared with the group their art explorations and

processes of creating art. Following the five-day experience, participants identified, in a self-report questionnaire, their decrease in stress and increase in relaxation. In addition, after the mindful activities youth self-reported their self-compassion had increased as they displayed less self-judgment and more self-acceptance behaviors (Weiner & Rappaport as cited in Rappaport, 2014).

Researchers Weiner and Rappaport established that art is used as a tangible and expressive way to introduce children and adolescents to mindfulness practices. Because visual art is a physical art form, learning is changed so that mindfulness practices become easily seen through color and form (Weiner & Rappaport as cited in Rappaport, 2014).

The History of a Labyrinth

A labyrinth is a twisty course with one pathway that leads from the outside of the form to the inside center. Some may see this path as a chaotic journey, while others may see it as a calming passage to one center point (Doob, 2019). Labyrinths appear throughout history and are found on diverse ancient symbols and structures. They have been used in meditative practices, as well as in prayer. It is unclear when the first labyrinth was created. The most famous medieval labyrinth is made of seven folds and dates back to 1260 (Sternberg, 2009). The folds indicate the course has seven overlapping twists. This labyrinth is found on the stone floor of the Chartres cathedral near Paris, France. Whether it is from France or Europe, Scandinavia, North Africa, or in petroglyphs from 3000 B.C.E Bronze Age, Sardinia, each labyrinth is interlaced with historical, interwoven design, and cultural significances (Sternberg, 2009).

The Myth of a Labyrinth

Depending on the observer's perspective of the course, a labyrinth could be complex or simple. These designs have been seen throughout history and are entangled in myths. The

labyrinth myth at Crete begins with the king, Minos leaving his city after the death of his son. While away, the queen, Pasiphae falls in love with a bull, but unable to love this animal, commissioned a replica of the bull for herself. The myth continues to say her actions created the minotaur (Doob, 2019). This creature displayed the head of a bull and the body of a man. Upon the king's return and the discovery of his wife's actions, a labyrinth was commissioned to imprison the creature. Every nine years, the king fed a youth who had been sent as tribute, to the minotaur. One year, the king's daughter fell in love with the youth intended for sacrifice. She planned and was successful in helping the young man kill the creature (Doob, 2019).

This ancient account of the labyrinth is one that evokes fear and confusion. It is a tangle of paths made to trap and imprison another creature. Unlike this ancient account, labyrinths are not fear inducing, but rather created to communicate unity and lower stress responses (Sternberg, 2009).

Labyrinths and Mazes

Unlike the myth at Crete, a labyrinth is not associated with a maze. In a maze one's senses are blocked by the high walls. Because of this, there is no guide for sight and no distinctive sound for hearing one's way out of the maze (Sternberg, 2009). Like the myth at Crete, a maze evokes fear and realities become distorted. Because labyrinths have no walls, the individual is able to see the start and end of the path at the same time. A labyrinth has only one way in and the same one way out. It is a predetermined destination, but what the mind discovers is up to the individual. Additionally, mazes require a choice to be made while labyrinths do not involve choice. A labyrinth is a symbol that communicates unity and wholeness. It is made up of a purposeful path of twist and turns to the circle's center. This path is a metaphor for the focused journey inward to the self that does not invoke a fear response.

Being in a maze versus being in a labyrinth have two different effects on the physical body and feeling manifestations. In 1934 a study by Walter B Cannon, who was a physiologist, discovered that animals produce adrenaline when put in stressful situations, such as in a maze (Sternberg, 2009). The results indicate physical environment affects body responses. Two years later, in 1936, Hans Selye published writing using the word “stress” as it is defined as of today. Selye developed Cannon’s work further to determine how hormones produced by stress response effect the body in lasting ways. He discovered how specific hormones are released under stress and how these chemicals directly affect the immune system (Sternberg, 2009). One’s surrendering have the ability to alter and warp reality.

With every step of the walking labyrinths, the individual is invited to relax. Labyrinths are soothing because they force the individual to focus their attention and meaning inward. Breathing and body relaxation are connected. Rhythmic breathing is found in all walking meditations (Sternberg, 2009). Walking a labyrinth allows and gives time for a steady pace and breath to develop. It also may give a slow and balanced rhythm to one’s breath. A steady rhythm helps lower stress responses. Walking meditations stimulate the vagus nerve. This nerve connects the brain to the body. It combats the sympathetic nervous system responses such as adrenalin (Sternberg, 2009).

Labyrinths and Art Therapy

Integrating labyrinth work into art therapy is intentionally practiced. Vanya Hanson (2015) writes about her personal experience with arts-based research and labyrinths. Through this exploration, she describes how heuristic inquiry informs an arts-based study of labyrinths with art therapy. Hanson’s (2015) study is recorded using specific interpretations of known labyrinth work, documentation of herself, and spontaneous art creations based off of personal

experience with a walking labyrinth.

Human experience and information are collected through different forms of art. First, the author set up a walking labyrinth within her classroom. Next, Hanson (2015) explored labyrinth walking through art responses and spontaneous collages. The art materials she used influenced her creative process. Directly following art making, the author created a poem for each work of visual art she created. The writing process began a phase of witnessing. Conclusions were formed and intentions were gathered. The six overlapping themes of the work included “materials (beginnings), space (scale), ritual (sacred and liminal), play (pleasure), myth (story), and transitions (endings)” (Hanson, 2015 p.18). Of these themes, other subjects included natural elements such as animals, and shape symbols such as circles and spirals.

Not only did the author discover themes within her artistic responses, but also within herself. Hanson (2015) reports feeling a “shift in [her] emotions” as her body physically walked the labyrinths (p. 33). Not only did her emotional state begin to alter, but changes were seen in her body sensations as well. She felt the boundaries of the labyrinth to present a therapeutic sensation that allowed for the increase of insight. Lastly, Hanson (2015) describes a shift in her thoughts about what an art therapy environment should look like, sharing that emotions and body sensations help transform the setting.

Art Therapy in the Community

Practicing art therapy in the public is a way to link with the community and to provide healing and hope. Shared neighborhoods and institutions are a constant source of community engagement. These communities are supportive structures where people connect by hearing individual voices. In 2011, Art Hive association started as a way to bring voices and empowerment to community studios (Timm-Bottos, 2017).

The project provided spaces for creative community engagement, such as studio art workshops, classrooms, and group work to happen. These welcoming and safe spaces were formed by 30 art therapist who worked together in 20 different Art Hive locations throughout Canada (Timm-Bottos, 2017). Even though locations that look like “storefronts, libraries, social service institutions, museums, schools, religious facilities, and universities,” are not therapeutic, they all allow for connections to build and inspiration to develop (Timm-Bottos, 2017, p. 95). Art in community links people with their own expression of self and the creative space.

Creative Space and Role of Witnessing

Creative space is not stagnant, rather it is a place where change is always occurring. Shaun McNiff (as cited in Rappaport, 2014) reports that creative space has room for mindfulness, expression, and encouragement. Even though the creative space is largely influenced by what is physically in the space, such as environmental factors, it is not the only feature that effects healing and change. McNiff (as cited in Rappaport, 2014) continues to says a core to art therapy processes is witnessing consciousness and bringing mindfulness into each session and space. Witnessing is done through the act of watching and truly seeing another person in action. The observer holds the energy of a space. They become participants in the journey of the present moment. The one who is being seen then may spontaneously express themselves without the fear of judgment.

When witnessing is brought alongside mindfulness, intentions and attitudes change. Intentions are observing and following through on one’s aspirations. The process helps the individual develop and gain self-awareness. Expanding to say that to “witness, in the context of mindfulness, refers to paying attention to the contents of one’s own mind and one’s art” (Allen as cited in Rappaport, 2014, p. 55). Not only this, but through observing, one gives attention to

the deepening of a relationship with another person and within a space. Witnessing, mindfulness, and intentions are “key [elements] in creating a collective space that is safe and allows multiple truths to unfold” (Allen as cited in Rappaport, 2014, p. 55-56). Because of this, witnessing and the creative community space are closely connected.

Method

This community engagement research project examined ways that mindfulness with labyrinth meditation could translate into photo-based work with adolescents. Photography acted as a way to invite standard therapeutic practices and art making outside and around the community. Mindfulness based labyrinth work was used as a guide to photographic exploration.

Experiential learning worked as a guide and allowed for hands on photography experiences to happen. Photos were taken of what moved the participants to take action or what grabbed their attention during their mindful walk. When this occurred, the participant was encouraged to not hesitate, but rather to confidently capture the image. Images were created with the intention to appreciate what resonated in or about a scene. This methodology was used for the participants to document their personal snap shot experience, to appreciate their physical environment, and for them to gain a greater knowledge of labyrinth use in mindfulness.

Additionally, it should be noted that furthering her own exploration of mindful labyrinth and photography work, the researcher tried this method before asking the participants in the study. This looked like two explorations. In the first research, photography followed as a reflection to a guided meditation and identical finger labyrinth as the participants. The second area examined photography as a reflection to a guided meditation and a large outdoor walking labyrinth in Boston. From following each pathway, this researcher hoped to gain her own perspective on self-reflection and awareness of the surrounding environment. Before each

labyrinth course, an intention was set for the journey. The intention expanded the researcher's thoughts and photography by giving a motive and direction to the art making.

Participants

The participant's artistic journey began with a finger labyrinth meditation followed by mindful walking and photography. With every snap shot from the camera, the participant's lives were documented by a narrative-based inquiry. The participant's snap shots looked like photographs of objects in their environment. Through mindfulness based interactions, participants inquired about their own experiences and represented them in a narrative form.

Two adolescent participants, both who identified as male, were recruited for this thesis study. Their ages are fourteen and sixteen years old. One participant had taken a photography class, and could be described as having more experience using a camera. Both individuals live in the same small suburb of Boston, Massachusetts. Other experiences to note include previous labyrinth and meditation knowledge or experience. Prior to this study, both adolescents had seen a walking labyrinth made of stones, however neither had engaged with it or knew about its use. Additionally, the participants each had experienced body orientated meditation at their schools. At the time of the study, there was a limited access to people due to the unpredictable Covis-19 crisis. Because of this, the researcher recruited two adolescents who she knew were likely to contribute to an engagement study, and to feel safe while participating.

Materials

Generally photography is a low cost, simple to replicate, and easy to share art form. Smartphone cameras were chosen for this study because of their simplicity and accessibility. The smartphone camera is light, small, and compact. The general population owns smartphones with some type of camera, making it easily accessible to participants. Lastly, smartphone cameras do

not require much previous photographic knowledge to operate. This means that all abilities and all ages can engage with photography. Because of this, readers may find the study easy to replicate.

The down side to using the smartphone camera is that, unlike analogue or digital cameras, smartphones access the internet. This includes a vast range of applications and social media platforms. Because of easy access to online information, the participant may become distracted from the mindful photo taking. As a result, the participant may not think deeply or critically about capturing an image before actually shooting the surrounding scene. Nevertheless, the goal with a smartphone camera was for participants to focus their mental energy on the moment.

Other materials that were used in this community engagement project include two finger labyrinth print outs. A finger labyrinth is like a walking labyrinth, except that it is smaller and the individual uses their finger to trace the course. Participants were shown by the researcher how to use a finger labyrinth. Following this, the adolescents traced the labyrinth image that was printed off from a computer on a standard 8.5 X 11 copy paper. The labyrinth chosen was a simplified path so that participants would not feel overwhelmed by a larger more complicated path. The smartphone application Instagram was used to collect data in the form of photos. Instagram acted as a way to anonymously upload, collect, and easily view images that the participants took.

Procedure

Labyrinth mindful meditation was followed by a photographic exploration of a small Massachusetts neighborhood. The labyrinth technique invites standard therapeutic mindfulness

meditation outside of a typical therapeutic room. It then becomes a base for a walking and photography exploration.

Because awareness of breath is a foundation to meditative techniques, the project began with practicing this technique (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). A breathing technique similar to a body scan from Kabat-Zinn (1990) that focuses on the current moment, was first introduced to the participants by the researcher. The researcher directed the adolescents to bring their attention to the belly and to the mind. While inhaling through the nostrils and taking a long exhale through the mouth, the participants centered their thoughts on their breath. Once this breathing technique was practiced, participants were ready to begin the two minute meditation.

Starting the workshop, participants sat on a chair with both feet flat on the ground and their backs up straight. The researcher guided breathing meditation began with observations of the present moment. The adolescents were invited to notice their breath and what their body felt like in the current moment. This included observing their body's weight and shape, as well as any sensation involved with sitting in the chair. The researcher then encouraged the participants to relax any body part that held tightness or tension. Next, the adolescents took the time to notice their thoughts, identify them as simply thoughts, then observe the moment without becoming committed to any conclusion (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Following this two minute meditation, participants were asked to open their eyes.

Participants were given an 8.5 x 11 paper printed with a simple finger labyrinth. Starting at the labyrinth outside opening, participants used their pointer finger on their dominate hand to follow the course of the labyrinth. When they reached the center, participants were encouraged to stop and take a moment to think or ask a question. Then, without lifting their finger, participants used the same finger to follow the labyrinth path back to the start. When this was complete,

participants were asked to repeat the same path, but by using their non-dominant hand. When using their non-dominant hand, the participant's non-dominant brain hemisphere and memory is activated (Umfleet, Ryan, Morris, & Pliskin, 2013). While each action was taking place, the researcher guided participants through a series of questions and reflections to inwardly contemplate.

Following the labyrinth work on paper, participants then walked around the building and outside neighborhood to begin their photographic exploration. Participants were encouraged to use their previous learned breathing technique on their walk to remain mindful. Twenty-minutes of walking time was given to each participant to take photos. While on the walk, participants took pictures with their smartphone cameras. Participants were told not to use other smartphone applications while taking pictures. This was so that they remained present in the moment and not distracted by social media or other smartphone applications. In the moment photos were taken of what excited the participants to take and capture the image or scene.

All photographs hold a purpose. Though it may not be clear to the outside viewer, the photographer made a choice in the creation of their image. Participants chose to photograph a scene or object because in that moment, it was visually or emotionally compelling. Following this, participants were asked to upload at least three images to a private and specifically made Instagram account for this project.

Creating and captioning photographs allowed for self-disclosure to be revealed. Following the meditation experience, art making, and image uploading, a 10-minute discussion about the participant's experience took place. The conversation was voice recorded so that the researcher could listen back and gather data through themes and individual experiences. Participants as well

as a parent or guardian, gave their signed signature on a permission to auto tape form prior to the project.

Words Alongside Technology

Photo sharing applications and social media allow for easy access to millions of images. When someone uploads an image to social media, not only are they sharing a photo, but also a part of themselves (Natoli, 2011). With every image taken, so is a piece of the photographer captured. They are sharing their past, their present, and their hopes for the future. Because youth are familiar with social media posting as an outlet of expression, images posted to an online format may be less threatening than printed images.

During this project, using a shared Instagram, allowed for the participants to upload an image and image description anonymously. Titles, descriptions, and comments all guide the viewer to see what the photographer felt. Written language acts as an expansion to the image. Sometimes, language attached to an image may sway or help determine how the image is perceived (Natoli, 2011). Participants were encouraged to write a title or description for every image posted to Instagram.

Expressive writing alongside an image allows for the participant to share their feelings, thoughts, and memories anonymously. In addition to image descriptions, participants were encouraged to comment on each other's images. Comments may range from complements to how the image personally resonated with the other individual. Reading and rereading positive comments may bring self-confidence and feelings of acceptance to the photographer.

Results

Data from participants was collected through photography. Images that were taken during the study, were uploaded to Instagram and then discussed in the larger group. A total of eight

images were posted to the online sharing application. The researcher kept an open mind for themes to develop in the data and in the art. From artwork and discussion, themes involving awareness, reflection, and empowerment, were revealed to the researcher.

Awareness

Following discussion and photo viewing, awareness in space and breathe was a key point from this process. Participants described that when they typically took photos, they only took pictures of what they saw as being cool. After this project, participants noticed that they thought more about what to take pictures of, as well as noticed more individual parts of the environment and the room.

Participants also made note that having a camera allowed for more awareness to occur. The camera helped the adolescents notice things that would not have been seen before. Picture taking forces the individual to look beyond what their normal eyes see, and to recognize smaller things to focused on.

Participants noted becoming more present than they did without the meditation. In addition to space and image, participants both mentioned that they do not normally notice their own breath, but that they did with this project. Before image taking, participants partook in a short meditation and finger labyrinth that focused on breath. Because of this, with every step during image taking, participants noticed their breathe more fully as it became part of the artistic process.

Reflection

In addition to helping participant become more present, reflection was revealed as a meaningful process in this project. During and at the conclusion of discussion, it was noted by the researcher how the participants took their time to reflect and review. They examined how

their body felt after the meditation and described it as calm and quiet. Just as the meditation was calming, so was walking around while image taking. Participants reflected saying that taking photos was very different after a meditation than ever in the past. This may be due to the meditation blending into the image taking portion.

The ideas the participants thought about during the meditation was the same stuff they thought about while photographing. For example, it was noted that during meditation, one participant began thinking about finishing his homework, however with the meditative prompts, felt like he didn't have to put his energy into worries outside of the present moment. His energy was better fit for remaining in the present moment. In addition, these present orientated thoughts also permitted him to remain present while image taking.

Personal Empowerment

Not only was reflection a significant portion of this project for the adolescents, but so was personal empowerment. Following the meditation and art making, the participants noted that they felt happy, calm, focused, alert, and confident in their photographic skills. As they discussed, the adolescents shared that they felt self-empowered to take and share photography. Both individuals became excited in discussion as they talked about their produced images and what it felt like for them to see these images posted anonymously to social a media account. This experimental project gave participants affirmation to continue photography and to see it in a new style.

Discussion

Mindfulness photography is deeply looking at the world and allowing oneself to experience average objects and forms with a new and exciting approach. Photographic opportunities are everywhere. Allowing oneself this mindset permits the individual to listen, to

notice, and to keep images simple. This community engagement project allowed for adolescents to use photography in a new way. Though photo-taking felt different, the youth disclosed to the researcher that they enjoyed the process and would do it again.

Group Discussion with Adolescents

Rather than speaking, photography allows for a deeper way of communication through images. Whether one is “creating, viewing, or sharing photographs within therapy,” thoughts and feelings are communicated (Natoli, 2011, p. 2). Though they communicate on their own, photographic expressions are most often shared through verbal language. In this community engagement project, words assisted the art making. In addition to words being used to caption photographs, they were used in discussion following the art making process.

From discussions with the participants, the author gathered that this activity expanded awareness, reflection, and empowerment for the youth. In this study, the process and product inform each other. Mindfulness used a breathing technique and a finger labyrinth to process and inform how photography was produced and developed.

When looking at the end photography, one is able to depict themes of slowing down. This was seen in noticing the participant’s physical walking pace shift as well as their progression in their images. Participants first appeared unsure about their surroundings. As time evolved, they were seen slowing down and looking deeply at objects. Participants began to photograph smaller more obscure objects, such as needles in a cactus or chipped paint on an old fence. The adolescents began to notice things that they may have never seen with their regular sense of awareness.

Witnessing with Adolescents

There are many forms and methods that contribute to relationship strengthening in therapy. To witness is the act of seeing an event or person. To bear witness is to share an experience with another human (McNiff as cited in Rappaport, 2014). This is understood in therapy as communicating past and future experiences to the other individual. Both the clinician and the client share a space that holds the ability to be understood wholly while not being judged.

In the community engagement project, the researcher witnessed both the participant's meditative labyrinth practice, as well as to their photo-taking walk. The researcher being a constant observer and contact, established a safe space for the participants to fully express themselves freely without judgment. Genuine experiences were developed by having a holding space where full attention was given to each participant and their actions.

Reciprocal benefits to bearing witness developed throughout this project as well. Not only did observing deepen the relationship between participants, but also between the researcher and each participant. This process allowed the researcher to become part of each participant's individual and collective journey. Because participants observed the researcher as a group facilitator, it gave the researcher a personal meaning in her own life as well. Overall, being acknowledged and validated benefits in providing meaning to both clients and clinicians.

Relevance of Research

Art therapy benefits from this study because photography is being seen, accepted, and serviced in an innovative way. The potential contribution of this topic to clinical practice of expressive arts includes the use of technology alongside photography. In an age where photography is largely moving away from bulky camera equipment and to the more compact and

slim smartphone, this engagement project and research is relevant. The project utilizes smartphones and social media. Because of this, it may be more appealing with adolescence than with other age populations. Though this may be a factor to consider if replicating, the smartphone has developed to be used intergenerational and with all abilities.

Alternatives that may make this engagement project more intergenerational include, the camera and the image viewing. One can exchange the smartphone camera for a disposable camera. Though this option would be more expensive, it would involve less technology. The participants in this project could use their printed pictures to create a collage or other form of artwork as an additional response to their mindfulness experience. This would require several days to complete and could be developed into a treatment plan over multiple weeks.

Boundaries, Reliability, Limitations

Boundaries in the study were established to focus the community engagement project. First boundaries in age population was determined. The researcher chose the adolescent population to examine in this study. This population was chosen because of the researchers past experience interning in a community setting designed to advocate for youth. Other boundaries set included having open ended questions opposed to using a premade scale. It was important to include open ended questions that allowed for more detailed information to be shared, as well as the possibility of the researcher learning something new. Additionally, this was set to encourage a more creative discussion around feelings and self-expression.

Next, to enhance the reliability the researcher kept the environment and the instructions consistent for each participant. During the discussion section of the project, there were six questions asked to each participant. Each individual was given a chance to answer the questions without judgment. Having enough questions allowed for the researcher to assess for knowledge

and how the experience felt for each participant.

The limitations of this study included sample size and access. First, the number of participants was small. A smaller sample size doesn't necessarily mean less information. Though having two participants is a relatively small number to gain a variety of insights from, significant outcomes were discovered. Both adolescents share common factors of gender, age, race, culture, and neighborhood. Because there were few participants, not a large distribution of the total teenage population was represented in this study. In addition, this study depended on having access to youth willing to contribute to a community engagement project. At this time, there was a limited amount of access to people due to the unpredictable Covid-19 crisis. However, limited access to the teenage population did not prevent the study from being completed.

Moving Forward

During group discussion, both adolescents mentioned that they would be interested in using finger labyrinths in the future. They continued to say that they would use the labyrinth in connection with photography for future imagery. As a conclusion to the community engagement project, each participant received two printed finger labyrinths to take home with them. The first was the identical labyrinth used in the study, and the second was a more complicated seven folded finger labyrinth. There has been no follow up regarding if the adolescents have used either labyrinth since the time of the project.

Bringing this community engagement project to a larger group is of interest to the researcher. The researcher's original intention was to meet with a group of twenty-eight adolescents from a local youth center. Moving forward, the researcher has made plans to continue her exploration of labyrinth meditation and photography with adolescents at this youth

center. Though all prospective participants attend the same youth program, they come from a more varied background as they are not all the same race nor gender, as well as are not all from the same neighborhood, nor attended the same school. Increasing the number of participants and including a more diverse group, may improve the limitations of the study. It will be interesting to compare and contrast the findings of the recent engagement project with that of the future project.

Following this study, further areas of research to explore may include examining adolescents utilizing a walking labyrinth before the use of photography. This opportunity would have the adolescents involve their entire body in a labyrinth path rather than just their finger. The future project would measure how adolescents feel in relation to walking the labyrinth and body movements. The researcher would examine if the collected feeling of empowerment remained a large presence in the adolescent's reflection.

Conclusion

This community engagement project explored labyrinth meditation as a foundation for photography with the adolescent population. Two male adolescents were recruited by the researcher to participate in this project. The study not only tracked what photography looked like after the use of a guided labyrinth meditation, but also the participants experience and feelings after the meditation, labyrinth use, and photo-taking. A group discussion on the experience of mindfulness from the labyrinth directive revealed topics of reflection, awareness, and empowerment. These themes were analyzed and collected by the researcher. Each theme contributed to furthering the exploration of labyrinth meditation alongside photography and emphasized the need for decreasing walking pace in order to become more aware and present.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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Student's Name: Corrie VanderBrug

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

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Ara Parker