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The Value of Craft Art in Exploring Identity, A Critical Review of the Literature

May 21, 2022

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Expressive Arts Therapy

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Abstract

Craft has a diverse application history, from making bracelets at summer camp to making clothes for a family. This variety of uses offers a higher opportunity for exposure to this type of art-making. It is crucial to consider familiarity in art-making to implement effective treatment that recognizes client experience and meets them where they are. Expressive arts therapy does not often include craft art. It could be beneficial for the field of expressive therapies to evaluate the therapeutic potential of craft art, given craft art's cultural and social prominence. This study explores the therapeutic value of craft art within exploring identity, which is crucial in social justice-based practice. In exploring the current literature on craft art, researchers primarily focus on integrating craft art for the tactile experience of creation and stress management. This inquiry explores these prominent research findings and examines the literature involving craft art usage with more specific cultural populations and cultural craft art practice. This more culturally specific literature questioned and explored the overall creative value of craft art in self-expression, community building, and cultural transmission. This examination highlighted that craft art might require a particular skill or mastery to create. However, there is also an opportunity to explore the potential of craft art's connections to identity through accessibility, engagement in the process of making, perseverance in learning a skill, individual expression/choice despite a specific overall end product, representations of cultural heritage, pride in completion attributing to positive self-esteem, and community building.

Keywords: craft art, identity, literature review, expressive arts therapy, culture

The Value of Craft Art in Exploring Identity, A Critical Review of the Literature

A basic question for expressive arts therapists is the possibility and desirability of a single theoretical framework. Should there be one theory of expressive arts therapy or are the theoretical foundations of the field as multiple as its modes of practice? (Levine & Levine, 1999, p. 12)

The current ideology within expressive arts therapy (ExAT) thrives on the concept of “low skill, high sensitivity” (Levine & Levine, 1999, p. 12). ExAT incorporates modalities that can engage with the process of artmaking rather than the skill-based outcome. For example, a skills-based outcome would be to learn color theory and painting techniques to depict a landscape scene accurately. On the other hand, a therapeutic goal may incorporate painting a safe space to explore client resources and support, but the painting’s aesthetic quality is not the focus. Craft art challenges this view by having elements of skill and mastery through having a more specific and expected outcome; craft is an artform that is interested in creating functional objects like clothing or materials for dining (Tate, n.d.). Craft art has a broad range of types of engagement that for this inquiry, craft art will be considered quite broadly as the definition given above to examine best what research is currently available. Given the clear product of craft art, it is not widely used or taught within ExAT. It may be because craft has an expected outcome and involves artistic knowledge; thus, craft could inhibit creative expression and flexibility. The majority of the current literature situates craft art within relaxation and stress reduction topics due to the kinesthetic qualities of making craft art. However, there is also research that explores craft art within the activism and social justice framework that could be further investigated.

Craft art has many historical, cultural, and social implications, given that this functional and decorative art form is often a part of everyday life. Craft art can be a part of one's home

through furniture and decor, clothing, and objects to assist daily functioning. These implications that contribute to everyday living are an opportunity for the ExAT field to incorporate more identity-sensitive therapeutic interventions. Social justice and equity have been heavily scrutinized and explored within the media. Thus, ExAT has begun to incorporate more social awareness within the practice. A plethora of different psychological theories influenced the ExAT field. However, it is crucial to recognize that many of these ideologies and findings center around White and Western beliefs and standards. To make the ExAT field more social justice-based, clinicians need more opportunities to discuss identity and culture within the therapeutic space. Craft art could be a way to address this, and research should further inquire about the therapeutic qualities of engaging in a more skill-based art form. Especially the qualities that relate to its' historical, cultural, and social opportunities because they pertain to a client's identity.

Social justice theory centers on identity and offers an opportunity for ExAT to consider exploring identity in an individualized and relatable manner. ExAT examines identity from a holistic lens of "wholeness and self-actualization" (Levine & Levine, 1999, p. 14). One can consider identity through the ADDRESSING Framework, which includes various characteristics such as age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. Then, it examines the positionality and power within those identities (Hays, 2001). The social justice framework is flawed because of its singular perspective; However, intersectionality is a factor equally crucial to consider how "individuals do not experience discrimination along a single axis and that multiple systems of oppression intersect to perpetuate daily interactions and inequities" (Singh & Trepal, 2020, p. 265). Research should examine craft art by considering its relation to identity because of its presence in everyday living and one's environment. Particularly, viewing identity

from the perspective of power, privilege, and oppression can enhance our understanding of individuals and the cultures which shaped them. Thus, contextualizing the cultural and social components of craft has the potential to identify further ways a therapist can use it effectively. According to Wenger (2008, as cited in Gulliksen, 2017), “In making physical things... we communicate with others and make meaning together” (p. 3), which contributes to the definition of culture and how people make meaning together through communication (Gulliksen, 2017). This inquiry will explore the potential therapeutic components of making and using craft art by exploring craft arts connections to identity to understand better how the ExAT field could incorporate it.

Method

This review of the literature seeks to consider ways that the ExAT ideology and practice can incorporate more social justice. Craft art was chosen for examination due to its presence in daily life. Also, craft art’s characterization and usage depend on the context of the art form, such as the community in which it is situated. It is also of particular interest given its more limited use in the practice and training of expressive arts therapists, even though craft arts are widely used mediums. Through a critical understanding of the therapeutic goals of expressive arts therapy and the reasons behind the current choices of modality in intervention, this review considers the inherent therapeutic qualities of craft art that may align. It looks to seek more incorporation of social justice ideology through the incorporation of identity within the therapeutic practice.

The review of literature aims to incorporate research on therapeutic values of expressive arts therapy and the reasons for using various art modalities; the types of craft art; interventions that incorporate craft; the historical, social, and cultural values; usage of craft art with a variety of populations; and, identity formation. The search terms were: (a) types of craft art – craft,

handicrafts, craftsmen, artisan, folk art, sewing, pottery; (b) types of use – therapeutic, relaxation, generativity, generational use, culture, social, therapy, creative arts therapies, expressive arts therapy, expressive therapy, art/music/biblio/drama/dance/movement therapy, identity; (c) populations – women, older adults, LGBTQIA+, groups, immigrants, generational differences, artisans, craftsmen; (d) therapeutic goals/topics – identity, understanding self, intersectionality, cultural understanding, social support, relationship building, change in behavior or cognition, coping skills; (e) historical considerations– indigenous, western, eastern, modern, generational use; (f) social considerations – collective use, individual use, relationship building, community, activism; (g) cultural considerations – heritage, generational use, cultural appropriation, gender roles; and, (h) identity– identity formation, addressing model, intersectionality, ancestry.

I have sourced much of the material from Google Scholar, the Lesley University Library, and suggestions for sources from the Lesley community, specifically members of the community that have begun to integrate craft art into practice. My research consisted primarily of peer-reviewed articles and books. I sought out books surrounding foundational concepts within expressive therapies as well as collections of research on craft and social justice. Also, I sought more recent and modern articles suggesting new avenues for the counseling field and craft art. Given the broader nature of my inquiry, I also tried to include resources that reflected the most common areas of focus in regards to craft art and smaller samples of research that reflected unique communities that could diversify the scope of what else needs to be known. Beyond peer-reviewed articles, I sought out books surrounding foundational concepts within ExAT as well as collections of research on craft and social justice. To organize my information and research collected, I managed the research by keeping a digital journal on Google Docs. This journal

contains resources with citations and brief descriptions of the sources. These notes reflected the content of the research and initial thoughts or connections and further research areas. I also used some visuals, such as mind maps, to figure out what questions I may still have about my topic and need to further research, organize and synthesize information, and my general feeling about my progress and the topic itself.

After obtaining my research, I created an outline of the research and key areas of focus. I tried to organize my research into categories for each section to see what each source provided and what still needed more evidence or consideration. Through this, identifying concepts, such as defining craft art and its current positionality within research and comparing this to ExAT and therapy and social justice goals, became prominent. I then pulled concepts and research about how craft art is being used on a more cultural and personal level to cultivate further areas that could be explored that appear to be aligning with future progressions of ExAT practice in alignment to be more socially conscious.

Literature Review

This review of the literature explored various types of craft art. To evaluate the type of craft art being examined, the following was considered:

- What type of craft art is being done?
- Is it more traditional and/or cultural or more modern/abstract?
- When is the craft art form being used?
- What is the skill level required for that form?
- How is this skill acquired?
- Is the art completed?
- What is done with the final product?

- How is the art form being used, for leisure, work, or in practice?

Craft Art and Fine Art

Craft art and fine art have some key differences, as explored when Glăveanu (2013) claims “in terms of the sources they draw from (traditional forms vs. oftentimes a contestation of these forms), their audiences (the general public vs. a cultivated public), and their uses (related to the practical aspects of life vs. aesthetic enjoyment)” (p. 140). However, the most important difference between craft art and fine art is that one is considered to be more creative than the other. Glăveanu (2013) explored the amount of skill in craft art by looking at a form of craft art referred to as folk art, specifically an egg decorating tradition in Romania (p. 140). This article takes on another perspective of craft art and approaches it from more of a cultural lens of folk art. There is a lot of stigmatization of traditional art forms, especially those of craft because they are not often seen as creative, yet the findings to support that thought are not well-founded when Glăveanu claimed how “ordinary and constant production is instrumental for the life of human communities, contributing to local identities and the maintenance of social relations through processes of guided participation” (p. 141). Egg decorating was explored in this study because its qualities are similar to fine art in terms of creativity established by skill. Yet the research found that although the decorating has a “strong traditional basis on which it builds” (p. 141), there are “general rules of decoration and a wide symbolism associated with patterns and motifs, and the great diversity and highly aesthetic quality of its outcomes” (p. 141). The study investigated the preparation, work, completion, and outlined the various stages of egg decorating. The goal of the study was to conceptualize a pragmatist-inspired perspective with creativity which involves “‘impulsions’, (motivations) on the part of the creator and often faces a series of ‘obstacles’ or difficulties that require creative expression and ‘save’ the work from monotony” (p. 141).

Craft art is typically seen as an art form with a specific goal in mind and a clear set of steps leading to the completion. However, the results of the study deviate from this understanding by postulating that “final products are never ‘there’ from the start; they are developing projects, and this development takes place in the moment-to-moment interaction between creator and works in the broader context of a social and material world” (Glăveanu, 2013, p. 153). These adjustments lead to craft appearing more adaptable and flexible. The ability to adapt to unexpected changes is something worked on often in therapeutic space within concepts of working on executive functioning, growth mindset, cognitive flexibility, trauma responses, or anxiety.

This craft art form, which refers to egg decorating, is contextualized within a specific community’s culture, traditions, celebrations, while subsequent generations continue this practice despite how communities change and adapt over time (Glăveanu, 2013, p. 142). While the history and tradition of the art form may motivate the community to engage in the art form, the more process-oriented concepts of adapting to obstacles when creating are a large focus within the results of this study. The more aesthetic choices and skills required for the art form are not as clearly acknowledged within the results and discussion when Glăveanu (2013) expressed how there were subjective, personal reasons to participate in professional decoration, and most related to the “joy” and “pleasure”... there was also an instrumental side to making eggs, which had to do with financial motives, gaining prestige in the community, and being able to exhibit one’s productions. (pp. 144-145)

These positive motives show potential for craft to contribute to emotional wellbeing. This wellbeing is facilitated through a member of a community achieving the skills needed to engage in the craft art form. Through sharing the art made an individual can represent their identity

amongst the community. This is achieved through the traditional skill learned being adapted to the individual preferences. Learning the egg decorating art form required a lot of mastery; thus, this trial and error of learning the skills and then, once the skill is acquired, adapting it to uniquely represent the individual offers therapeutic opportunities. Through learning the skill, decorating the egg, and then sharing it with the community could be a chance to explore self-esteem, perseverance, resiliency, and purpose/role in the community. Especially for clients who have ties and familiarity with this art form. Self-esteem is influenced through gaining skills and being able to display work. Perseverance and resilience are incorporated into learning the skill, as well as working through challenges and overcoming the obstacles. Community and purpose are a part of the motive and intentions for wanting to be involved in the egg decorating and how the individual represents themselves through their unique designs.

Craft art is a categorical term for many types of art with similar attributes, such as creating something functional or requiring a certain learned skill (Merriam-Webster, n.d., entries. 1-2). Some researchers have attempted to further define or categorize craft art to better research it. Benedek et al. (2020) incorporated craft art into a concept known as everyday creativity and conceptualized as “creative activities taking place in one’s leisure time (i.e., the time off work and free from necessities like eating, hygiene, or household chores; Hegarty, 2009), and which involves creative activities of personal significance rather than publicly recognized accomplishments” (p. 610). Further, everyday creativity is valuable to individuals on a personal level rather than a public level. This definition of craft art is one of the more typical contextualization of craft’s purpose within current literature. Craft is seen more as a hobby or for leisure. Within this concept of everyday creativity, specific activities were derived to further explore motivations for creativity. Also, the article examines the overall positive effect from

engaging with these everyday creative forms, such as handicrafts, creative cooking, visual arts, literature, music, social, interior, and garden design, performing arts, science/technology (p. 614). The research further identified nine motives for creativity: enjoyment, expression, challenge, coping, prosocial, recognition, material, and duty p. 611). The results indicated intrinsic motives, such as “enjoyment, ... challenge and expression” were stronger than extrinsic motives, such as “material reasons and duty” (p. 614). Thus, craft appears to be typically more intrinsically motivated yet the article does not examine the components of one’s identity that contribute to motivation. In the discussion of limitations only career is addressed as a potential impact on individual motivation when Benedek et al. suggest “purely extrinsic motives...played only a very minor role for everyday creativity. They may be of higher importance for creative professionals, as their livelihood and reputation depend on their creative work” (p. 622). Age and gender, for example, could greatly affect intrinsic motivation. Developmentally a child is building their intrinsic motivation, thus children are more extrinsically motivated. Gender roles may also affect intrinsic motivation by creating perceptions of one purpose and ability in a community, and potentially altering motivation depending on gender. However, the scope of this research does not offer many specific cultural or other identifying factors that would influence what makes someone more intrinsically or extrinsically motivated besides consideration of professionals.

When considering craft as leisure, evaluating who has leisure time to be able to engage in craft activities is done to assess accessibility to the art form. Another article that looked at craft as leisure was Pöllänen and Voutilainen’s (2018) article on stay-at-home mothers in Finland, who were a part of a Facebook group, and engaged in craft activities as a hobby (p. 619). The study examined what influence craft as a hobby had on these mothers by looking at self-reported

stories of how craft attributed to meaning within their lives. The results found that themes of meaning surrounded many concepts such as personal growth and identity. The organization and planning of their time was especially important for engaging in the leisure activity of their own choosing. Pöllänen and Voutilainen conclude, “Thus, the concrete act of making and the time they got to think in peace enabled the participants to see things in a different way or set larger goals for their lives” (p. 625). This sense of time to plan and organize their lives and their goals was mirrored through making craft art and played a critical role in identity formation through personal growth and goal setting. The researchers also found that this growth occurred in conjunction with family, allowing stay-at-home mothers “to escape their daily worries, to craft as a way of enjoying their family-centric life, and to enhance self-realization, without the added stress of having to do so while negotiating their family’s needs, especially those of their children” (p. 626). This research further identifies the influence of craft art by family and the roles individuals have within their familial structure. Setting time aside to engage in craft allowed these mothers to have time to process their view of self and self within the family. This self-reflexivity through engaging in craft art showed that the craft art form was not particularly important for self-reflection. The results found the act of setting aside time to engage in a more detailed and craft art process allowed mothers time to themselves, and “highlighted the importance of planning and thought, because crafting required them to organize their time and was a continuous process of designing and making” (p. 625). This leisure form of craft is giving these mothers time to process the challenges they are facing and create something they can share with their families. ExAT could use a similar format when incorporating craft art into a session. This could be having an individual focus more on the act of making through the skill of a craft

form and not necessarily completing a project. Artmaking can serve as a means of representing a specific time to reflect on oneself more aligned with an act of self-care.

Craft and Movement

The research that is prevalent on craft art discusses the kinesthetic qualities of craft art activities and stress management. Gandon et al. (2020) inquire about craft from a more physical and movement perspective and ties that into how different cultures use various hand movements and sequences to create pottery. Shiraiwa et al. (2020) investigate the brain activity occurring while engaging in craft art and how a “relaxed-concentration state is achieved” (p. 5). These two studies lead to craft art’s similarities to the kinesthetic and sensory levels of the expressive therapies continuum (ETC; Lusebrink, 2010, p. 171) and begin to show possible ways in which therapeutic ExAT interventions may be able to use craft. The research incorporated cultural craft art forms through the acquisition of the craft art skill and the role of importance in learning the skills in that community. Grace and Gandolfo (2014) continue this theme of bodily involvement and briefly explores the concept of embodiment within their study on the narratives of crafting women in Australia. The resulting theme leads to a better understanding of how craft influences identity construction. Grace and Gandolfo (2014) wrote, “This research adds to the understanding of identity construction—not just as an internal project of the self, not just as socially constructed, but also constructed in embodied interaction with the material world” (p. 61). This idea of craft art being a more embodied approach is one that may allow ExAT to consider how to use craft art. As an embodied medium it may perhaps be well-suited for more intermodal work. Then craft art can use multiple levels of engagement and levels of the ETC—thus there is an opportunity to consider incorporating visual arts of craft art with dance movement therapy. Intermodal work can offer more perspective for a client to express

themselves. The different modalities may also align with different components of identity thus be better suited for intersectional motives in the therapeutic space.

Gandon et al. (2020) quantified the different techniques and sequences of making pottery through identifying “the transcultural constraints of the wheel-throwing task, the cultural constraints induced via the cultural transmission, and the individual constraints inherent to each potter” (p. 4). By observing a sample of five Nepalese potters, examining the potters when they made three different types of pottery, and recording the hand movements and sequence of the movements used to create the pottery, the results found that cultural markers had the most significant influence on the way the vessels were made (pp. 3-5). Gandon et al. (2020) also found that there were transcultural and individual markings that should be recognized (p. 13). Gandon et al. (2020) claimed that the learned skills of creating pottery are passed down through cultural concepts that transcend over multiple cultures (pp. 11-13). Thus, the results indicated a connection between craft art and culture through the making of pottery on an individual, communal, and global scale. These results begin to create quantifiable evidence for measuring connections between craft and culture and set precedence for ways to quantify other craft art forms. These connections between craft and culture also could contribute to an evidenced-based practice in a therapeutic context given their measurability. However, the research also narrows in the scope of types of craft art and does not suggest other types of art or techniques that could be used to explore other craft art forms with quantifiable evidence. The sample size is so limited that the generalizability of the results beyond generational craftsmen is difficult, and more research would be needed to see if this would be true for other traditional craft art forms. It is also not clear whether or not having so many cultural constraints is reflective of a positive or

negative transmission of culture for the individual. Further research could examine self-reports of the importance of generation craft skills to the individual.

Shiraiwa et al. (2020) researched “changes in frontal midline theta rhythm (Fm θ) and autonomic nervous responses during craft activities, ... to explore the physiological mechanisms underlying the therapeutic effectiveness of occupational therapy” (p. 1). The population was a small group of young adults. The activity chosen was a form similar to weaving, known as canvas craft, used to make bookmarks. To measure the results a control measure was used. This control measure was a rest period looking at an image, and the study used EEGs and ECGs to monitor results (pp. 2-3). Monitoring the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous system in correlation Fm θ results showed a “relaxed-concentration state is achieved” (p. 5), induced by the craft making. This sense of calmness and focus allowed for it to be a more effective activity “without being self-conscious” (p. 5) for the client. This relaxation state has the potential to be used in a therapeutic context for self-care or perhaps as a coping skill.

Shiraiwa et al. (2020) offer some evidence for craft in occupational therapy. While this is not ExAT, there are similar core therapeutic values, such as increasing a client’s ability to function effectively throughout the day. However, this study had a rather small and limited sample size, making generalizability limited, and perhaps different populations depending on their familiarity with the craft may react differently. It focuses on one craft form, so it is difficult to justify the indirect claim that this applies to all craft activities. This article does not focus on culture in regards to the craft. However, states of relaxation and concentration are referred to as “flow” (Chilton, 2013, p. 64) in ExAT, which has shown benefits for clients in conjunction with creating. Thus, this study could be applicable to ExAT.

Craft in Context

As explored in prior sections, craft art forms can reflect one's community and desire to be part of that community. However, craft is also a form of work and professionalism for many, so exploring its roles in identity formation with respect to one's career could offer a different perspective. Understanding the context of specific craft art forms is crucial to better understand how to possibly implement them within a practice. Just as theory and knowledge are subjugated to White and Western perspectives, these perspectives have also influenced craft. The origins of an art form can hold meaning if connected to a tradition within a community or if it represents an aspect of that community as a whole.

Moore (2011) explores some of these underpinnings of craft through a discussion of the role of ceramics in Ireland, as it became an independent nation (p. 225). Moore references Barringer and Harper and their conceptualization of the "applied" or "decorative" arts as a broader category of functional, or non-representational three-dimensional objects ... [that] has largely been ignored in the context of debates about colonialism. There is a certain irony in this since the circulation of goods and the increase of trade was a primary underlying motivation for imperial expansion. The absence of considered accounts of the relationship between colonialism and the object is hardly surprising given the dearth of publications in general devoted to material culture when compared to the seemingly inexhaustible literature on the fine arts of painting and sculpture. (Barringer & Harper, 1998, as cited in Moore, 2011, p. 226)

This perspective postulates that not all art forms are relatively positive or socially aware by today's standards. Knowing the context of the art form being implemented could have the potential to open up the conversation to culture and the change of culture and identity over time. As denoted above functional objects communicate power through their perceived value

delineated by their historical underpinnings (Barringer & Harper, 1998, as cited in Moore, 2011, p. 226). Having certain types of finishes on dishware and silverware, home decor, furnishings, clothing, and textiles within the home can communicate a lot about one's identity as well as their power and privilege. Certain items could represent one's style or personality, but they also hold monetary value and associations that communicate status within the community.

Craft has many historical contexts even within similar communities. Brük (2017) explored the experiences of people of Irish descent and the craft art occurring in Irish internment camps, Brük (2017) examined the role of craft amongst prisoners, stating the art made “an expression of intellectual freedom and personal capacity (Dusselier, 2012), [and] was intimately bound up with the construction and expression of changing concepts of selfhood, including individual and collective identities both within and beyond the boundaries of the camp” (p. 150). Within this more extreme historical context, craft still offered an opportunity for those who engaged to have something to construct and build with their own choice, helping them to develop their concept of self in such a restrictive environment. Brük (2017) described the importance of craft art for the prisoners of Irish internment camp by claiming that craft art's “materiality provides a reference point and creates a sense of ontological security as the traumatic events of war transform familiar bodies and landscapes; at the same time, the looming spectre of loss heightens the emotional charge of personal belonging” (p. 150). This may show what sorts of populations beyond ones that can engage in leisure activities could benefit from craft art. Ones who may be in more restrictive or oppressive environments or dealing with trauma may be a population worth considering for more research to engage with craft art.

Craft and Environment

Environment and identity are constantly interacting together since “identity is socially constructed in response to our myriad experiences with others, how we are recognized by others, and who we are in relation to others” (Stapleton, 2015, p. 96). Experiences occurring in one’s environment are in response to others, such as family, friends, and community. The therapeutic potential is considered in this section through the use of craft art as means of interaction between individuals and the community and through how craft is displayed and shared with others.

Härkönen and Stöckell (2019) examine the Living in the Landscape (LiLa) summer school in the Komi Republic of Russia. The purpose of the study was to see how making art representative of communal experiences in this region and how the art-making process contributed to a model that examines: cultural heritage on a subjective, personal, and shared interactive spectrum (pp. 640-641). The camp involved students who studied art education, fine arts, social and cultural anthropology, and nature sciences (p. 639). The purpose of the program was to consider culture and heritage within the communities of the Komi Region (pp. 639-640) over 2 weeks. The research examined artistic processes, artworks, and final exhibitions (p. 639). The results found that when these arts-based works that “examine cultural heritage in different ways are put into the same exhibition, they become multi-layered and allow a dialogue of interpretation and recreation to take place” (p. 647). This collective experience of sharing art allowed for the process of sharing and witnessing to be constructive amongst members of a group. This group experience could be replicated in a therapeutic context that would allow for members to share their identities and cultural experiences with other members. This would provide an opportunity for members to create connections through shared experiences, thus creating a supportive environment.

Härkönen and Stöckell (2019) offered insight into ways art can contribute to defining and understanding culture, and thus more avenues of research and models used for “cultural sustainability” (p. 640). However, the research did not specifically utilize craft methods, so this article may better discuss how culture is discussed through artistic means. This article also lacks a clear methodology section, as it does not clearly identify the population and their connection to the land used in this research or how many participants were examined, making this study challenging to replicate. By clearly identifying the populations connections to the Komi region the discussion could have further discussed the role of culture and heritage in individual expression and how it may or may not deviate from the learned skills of art-making within that community.

Congdon (2006) explored the creation of an interactive website called *Folkvine.org* examined “issues of representation, translation, learning processes, and ethnography” (p. 36). The website’s subject primarily focused on seven folk artists from Florida and their art and community. This was done by creating a collaborative team that worked with this community of artist to build the website representing their artistic style. The collaboration reflected representations of the artists and the web designers’ experiences creating while creating the website (p. 36). The website offered new perspectives on topics such as the role of technology-based arts and how technology can offer a new perspective on culture given its malleability (pp. 48-49). Choosing culturally relevant materials and approaches is important when taking clients’ identities, and access post-intervention into consideration. Technology may increase access to materials and allow for clients to connect to others who have similar experiences. *Folkvine.org* considered this when choosing to display art on a website. It made it accessible beyond the space in which it was created, which increased the audience that could experience it.

Congdon (2006) offers a new way of interacting with traditional art forms through technology, which demonstrates website creation as a way to view something from multiple perspectives, which is an important therapeutic goal. While this is not specifically creating craft art, it demonstrates how to present and witness craft art. This article uses the researcher's first-person point of view, which offers transparency to the motivations, challenges, and research outcomes. However, this also makes the results seem more subjective, and that could make the study's transferability more challenging.

As discussed briefly above when discussing stress reduction, Garlock (2016) references Collier and von Karolyi and their research findings that resulted in a persisting positive mood after craft art engagement with textile making, as seen by when they claimed that "working with textiles could be a way to alter a negative mood long-term, rather than just in the moment. They used the term 'rejuvenation', and specifically textile rejuvenation, to identify an improved mood that continued after participation" (Collier & von Karolyi, 2014, as cited in Garlock, 2016, p. 61). While this demonstrates that textiles can create an improved and continued sense of positive mood, it does generalize to other craft art forms. The research could continue to explore the specific attribute of making textiles that contribute to the lasting effect of increased mood. Perhaps, this further research could inquire about more of the kinesthetic qualities of textiles as well as the more specific population demographics and identifying information to consider some of the possibly confounding variables within the research that could contribute to this resulting effect.

Craft and Roles

Garlock (2016) explores the use of story cloths and their ability to work with trauma through narrative in communal art-making settings and found that "Fabric has been used, and

continues to be used, for expression of identity, social status, secrets, and stories” (p. 59).

Garlock (2016) explored different cultural understandings of textiles and their role through the making of *arpilleras*, a form of story cloth to process trauma through the narrative, and the opportunity to create and shape one’s personal narrative on the textile (Garlock, 2016, p. 58).

The article contextualizes different textile craft art uses amongst many different cultures to show how ingrained textile making plays a significant role in people's lives. It references how across many different cultures textiles have been used in similar contexts and the importance of making textiles. For instance in Greek mythology, Athena would weave stories about the gods while Guatemalan villages use textiles to show social status and origin (Garlock, 2016, p. 59). Bedouin and Palestinian employ symbolism of their cultural values through embroidery, and Navajos explore their origin through their depiction of Spider Women who “created the entire universe through her weaving” (Garlock, 2016, p. 59). This shows how deep-rooted the cultural and heritage ties are for many about textiles' role and importance. However, many had similar craft forms, such as weaving their connection to it varied slightly based on the cultural context. The combination of craft textiles with narrative gives an example of how craft art can work in an intermodal manner with modalities already present within ExAT. It also shows ways craft art can be more expressive because the participants use the learned skills of cutting, sewing, and assembling the story cloth but are using their own self-expression in choosing a narrative to depict. Also, showing expression in how they depict it still results in the desired goal of a story cloth, but the group as a whole shows the variety of ways the cloths can be made to reflect more personal meanings.

Royster (2021) explores communal art-making as a form of activism and healing for communities. The article centers around the project Dolls4Peace, a project where dolls are

created in remembrance of those killed as a result of gun violence, primarily within the Chicago area (p. 2). The project highlighted the potential uses of craft in group settings and how it can work with trauma and found that “The project increased solidarity, allowing participants to become active agents rather than passive subjects, increasing their sense of belonging, and empowering communities to work together to enact change” (p. 4). While the focus of the group was trauma-informed processing and expression of the violence in the community and bringing attention to it, the research also offered more avenues of consideration for craft art’s potential. The results demonstrated an increased sense of belonging (Royster, 2021, pp. 15-16). This sense of belonging could be used in a therapeutic context with identity formation. Sense of belonging is developmentally aligned with the adolescent and the young adult population. These populations are developmentally looking for peer interaction and place a lot of value on shared experience, so this form of craft art may be better suited for them. The research emphasizes the component of communal craft making since it is largely responsible for the project results. So perhaps, rather than solely making craft art individually with others present, Royster suggests that the act of sharing and witnessing is an essential component of the results, claiming

this process of public exchange extended the role of audience beyond spectator to that of participant, extended the role of student and teacher to that of artist/activist, and extended the role of public space to that of memorial and social collaborative art action. (p. 4)

This also demonstrates the opportunity to discuss identity through the roles one has. In this case, it would be exploring an individual's role as witness versus participant. Exploring one’s roles is an important part of exploring identity and identifying client strengths for a strengths-based approach to empower the client.

Boerema et al.'s (2010) used secondary analysis of interviews done by the Migration Museum in South Australia for an exhibit on sewing in the lives of immigrant women in Australia (p. 78). A sample of the 11 female participants' interviews was used from the exhibit (p. 79). All participants were from non-English speaking countries, who answered questions about sewing and its relevance within their lives in both individual and group interviews while the responses were video-taped then transcribed verbatim (pp. 79-80). This secondary analysis focused more on sewing as an "occupation" (p. 79). The results led to eight interrelated themes that were condensed into four themes that centered around the idea that

women perceive sewing as an enduring part of their lives, a means of expression, keeping their culture and very useful. Sewing had been valued across their lifespan... to cultural traditions and providing opportunities for creative expression, employment and contribution to family life. (p. 78)

Boerema et al. (2010) offers insight into how culture connects to sewing with first-person accounts, yet the specific questions asked in the interviews were not listed, which may offer more insight into participant responses. The intention of the research, as well as the authors' interest in doing a secondary analysis of the information, is clearly stated, which offers more insight into the interpretation of data. The study also uses a broad definition of what types of sewing are being included. This means that it may be difficult to incorporate the results from this study if the aim of examining this article is to use it to look specifically at the value of functional craft specific for the ExAT field.

Liddle et al.'s (2013) study examined how craft activities contribute to well-being in later stages of life for women (p. 330). The study examined data from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (p. 331). This study examines women in their 80s in Australia, 114

surveys open text comments on health changes, and then a follow up of the study where 23 phone interviews were done with participants who had responded in the survey about using crafts (p. 332). The results of the study concluded that for “women in late life, participation in art and craft activities may act as a psychological antidote to these stresses by offering a symbolic wholeness, where it is possible to complete items, help others, be valued, and enjoy the moment” (p. 337).

Liddle et al.’s (2013) data offered a plethora demographic information about the participants yet is flawed in not organizing this information into a meaningful result that could be used to examine individual difference in experiences with craft. This article does not directly discuss culture in terms of ethnicity, race, or place of origin but more the idea of craft contributing to culture in a social way. The social benefits of craft could offer a broader concept of what could be beneficial when using it in ExAT and to possibly consider social aspects in intersection with culture.

Grace and Gandolfo (2014) explore identity and role of craft in a small study in which they interviewed amateur craftswomen in Australia about the stereotypes and judgment within craft art. Participants stated that

craftmaking challenged other aspects of their identity... One of the participants... identifies as a feminist and deliberately addresses feminist concerns that craft may lead to the “dumbing down of women”. The second participant... refers to popular culture and media references to craftmakers as “freaks” and as “nannas” in her narrative. (p. 58)

This offers insight into the contemporary concerns about making craft art, for women in particular. It suggests some of the ingrained gender roles and stereotypes associated with craft art such as the concept that historically, “craft was considered to be a lesser form of art than painting

and sculpture because the objects made had a domestic function... creative techniques that tended to be practiced by women, which contributed to their lesser status” (Tate, n.d., para. 2). Thus recognizing the identity experiences of the client should be considered before implementing craft art since there is an oppressive history that accompanies craft art. Working with a client to better understand their experiences and familiarity with different art modes both positive and negative will help to inform the therapist on how to incorporate certain craft art mediums. A client may be more hesitant to try craft art if they do not feel they fit the perceived identity of someone who makes craft; or, they may be resistant to engaging with craft due to association of these roles with more oppressed identities. When considering exploring aspects of identity to be integral to making ExAT more social justice-based, it is essential to examine the perceived identity of those who make certain art forms and how it is represented to avoid stereotypes or appropriation.

Talwar (2019) offered insight into the realm of craft art that is not often discussed within the ExAT field, this being selling art. The selling of art is not usually discussed because the art produced within therapy is more for expression and to explore the process of making for offering another perspective versus developing a skill and selling art made. A chapter in Talwar’s book focused on a group called The Creatively Empowered Women (CEW). This is a program for refugee and immigrant women in Chicago with “a dual purpose: first, assist the members to overcome language barriers and build communication skills to develop social capital and, second, enjoy the benefits of crafting for health and wellbeing” (p. 183). This sense of economic gain serves a purpose; it creates, supports, and builds social skills, which are important aspects of stabilizing clients, especially those with trauma in a new environment like these women are experiencing. Talwar (2019) explores economic power to be more conscious in consideration of

reclaiming identities through “questioning the impact of globalization, capitalism, and neoliberalism means understanding the colonial histories that have exploited labor and marginalized knowledge and practices” (p. 181). Craft can have the potential for clients to reclaim these narratives and selling their work can be empowering. Selling their work also builds client strengths not only in providing more support but also a sense of mastery and pride which has a lot of therapeutic potential in regards to self-esteem and positive regard.

Hadjiyanni and Helle (2010) considered craft art’s direct impact and effect within one’s environment through interviewing Native American members of the Ojibwe tribe in Minnesota (p. 57). Hadjiyanni and Helle explained how

The Ojibwe lost almost everything that had traditionally been associated with home after they were forced to relocate into reservations by the White European settlers.

Disconnected from their ancestral understandings of family, community, privacy, security, ownership, control, as well as a physical setting, the Ojibwe must reconstruct new sets of material/immaterial connections to establish a sense of belonging and define their identity. (p. 60)

This identified a theme of reclaiming one’s identity through craft art. However, the focus is more on displaying pieces within the home and how they can have important meanings. This article regards how craft started as more “utilitarian” (p. 65) but shows how the new context of resettling has given these traditional art forms more significance. This article referenced not only the space in which the crafting was occurring but also the role the making had:

By “cutting,” “sewing,” “gluing,” “storing,” and “displaying,” these Ojibwe embodied knowledge, establishing both space and body as bearers of cultural memory. Making the invisible visible, they were dynamic players and active agents in the re-creation of their

history, spatiality, and sense of continuity, skillfully innovating, negotiating, and reinterpreting their living environments (be those kitchens, living rooms, closets, etc.) as they safeguarded their culture and traditions. (p. 78)

This acknowledgment of honoring work, displaying it, and making it to keep culture alive and present is reminiscent of the concept of transitional objects within Winnicott's theory. Malchiodi (2007) described this as

Art expression is believed to be somewhat of a 'holding environment' within which object relations between therapist and client can emerge and develop. Additionally, art products can become transitional objects that may become imbued with meaning beyond what they actually are. (p. 25)

Craft art could serve as a transitional object as seen by it having important meaning when displayed in Ojibwe homes (Hadjiyanni and Helle, 2010, p. 78), it is likely that other cultures may have similar displays of self and family within their homes. Thus more decorative craft art forms may be of value to explore further in regard to their usage therapeutically.

Discussion

This inquiry's purpose was to evaluate the therapeutic qualities of craft art through contextualizing it historically and socially, and examining how it integrates identity and culture. This was done through reviewing the current and prevalent research regarding craft art that focuses on the tactile engagement and skill and then examining craft art research that focused on specific populations that utilize craft art and their individual and communal experiences of making it. These findings demonstrate that craft art experiences often examine different facets of identity and intersectionality. This was done through inquiring about craft art in connection to heritage, tradition, community, environment, family, gender, gender roles, career, age,

stereotypes, oppression, historical origin, context of the time period and accessibility (Benedek et al., 2020; Boerema et al., 2010; Brük, 2017; Congdon, 2006; Gandon et al., 2020; Garlock, 2016; Glăveanu, 2013; Grace & Gandolfo, 2014; Hadjiyanni and Helle, 2010; Härkönen and Stöckell 2019; Liddle et al. 's, 2013; Moore, 2011; Pöllänen & Voutilainen, 2018; Royster, 2021; Stapleton, 2015; Talwar, 2019). These connections to identity begin to provide ways to incorporate identity into the ExAT field broadening not only theoretical frameworks with incorporating more social-justice conscious practice but also expanding the modes of ExAT with craft art.

The scope of this literature review is quite broad intentionally to see what the current research offers on craft art. Given the broader scope, much of the research reviewed is often less generalizable given many articles use small sample populations and culture specific art forms (Boerema et al., 2010; Congdon, 2006; Gandon et al., 2020; Garlock, 2016; Glăveanu, 2013; Grace & Gandolfo, 2014; Hadjiyanni and Helle, 2010; Härkönen and Stöckell 2019; Royster, 2021; Shiraiwa et al., 2020). While this is important for considering diversity and representation it also limits the overall applicability. In order to use craft art within ExAT more evidence-based research would be needed; this would mean more quantifiable evidence would be useful in asserting its usage. Also, many cultures have adapted certain craft art forms to their particular interest and needs creating a wide variation within even a particular domain of art. Given this, areas of future research could further consider how craft art evolves and adapts as cultures and communities become more layered and differentiated in identity. This would further address issues of intersectionality within identity. Another recommendation for further research would be to ethically look at the amount of potentially beneficial therapeutic applications and challenges of using craft art. Rather than just suggesting potential usage as this literature review does, this

would allow for future studies on the application of craft to investigate its effectiveness in treatment.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of the literature on craft art, findings suggest a therapeutic potential for utilizing craft. Craft art research has demonstrated connections to identity, thus increasing the potential to incorporate within a social justice framework in ExAT practice. Thus, it would be beneficial to continue craft art research to evaluate effectiveness in treatment. This could be explored through examining more populations and types of craft art to gain a broader applicability and evidence base. Incorporating more art modes within the ExAT field can increase the number of tools a therapist can use to meet the client where they are at. Craft art in this review illustrates a prospective social-justice oriented medium that incorporates a more individualized approach that is cognizant of a client's power, privilege, and oppression.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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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.

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