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**Using Expressive Arts Therapy to Develop Coping Mechanisms
to Manage Substance Use**

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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Expressive Arts Therapy

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Abstract

This paper examines past and current usages of expressive arts therapy in developing coping mechanisms for substance use recovery and explores possibilities for further integration in the adolescent and young adult population around the world. Abundant information is available on the effects of drugs and other substances on mental health, but more research is needed on how the integration of expressive arts therapy can enhance substance abuse programs for these populations. According to the CDC, elevated adverse effects on mental health occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic in the US with young adults reporting increased substance use (Czeisler et al., 2020). The integration of expressive arts therapy into programs can increase the awareness of its benefits and provide a wider range of options for coping with a substance use disorder (SUD). Current research shows a need for further investigation on how expressive arts therapy can be used to develop coping mechanisms for these populations. Research on the arts in action can be found separately but more information is needed on holistic integration of the expressive arts as many findings included dated short-term interventions utilizing one or two art forms on very narrow populations with little to no follow-up. This review examines existing practices and contributes toward a better understanding of developing coping mechanisms to manage substance use through expressive arts therapy.

Keywords: expressive arts therapy, substance use, substance use disorder, adolescents, young adults, dance/movement therapy, music therapy, drama therapy, art therapy.

Author Identity Statement: The author identifies as a straight, mixed-race woman from Trinidad and Tobago.

Using Expressive Arts Therapy to Develop Coping Mechanisms to Manage Substance Use

Introduction

The topic chosen for this paper is using expressive arts therapy to develop coping mechanisms to manage substance use. These two topics are significant as the combination of the arts and a substance use disorder treatment could create great movement towards more effective treatment and a wider range of options and approaches that can be used as a bolster for group therapy and medicated assisted therapy. A further understanding of the currently existing treatment programs was gained through looking at available research articles, videos, journals, and more which provided information on how expressive arts therapy has already been integrated into the therapy world as we know it and the ways in which it can be improved or explored. The importance of this topic lies within the research found on the growth of substance use over the years as well as the very innovative approach of the expressive arts available for exploration with a now striving wealth of information. A lot of information is available on the use of the arts in substance use treatment but only a small collection of information was found specifically on expressive arts therapy integration when looking at databases such as Google Scholar and the Lesley Library. Some search terms used to research this information include expressive arts therapy AND substance use, expressive arts therapy AND substance abuse, expressive arts therapy AND substance misuse, and creative arts therapy AND substance treatment. When utilized together the collection of resources utilized for this research became easier to find. Integrating expressive arts therapy into treatment includes multiple art forms tied together with theory to create a full program for coping. “Expressive therapy as a treatment modality is founded on the interrelatedness of the arts and takes an integrated approach to the use of the arts as a tool for psychotherapy” (Malchiodi, 2004, p. 183). Furthering the conversation in

new directions and compiling research and recommendations for improvement adds another voice to the field, contributes to current ideas, and offers opportunities for readers to reflect on the future of treatment for substance use disorders. Substance use is not an unfamiliar topic for me as I grew up in a country where alcohol consumption is a very frequent and regular family activity openly accepted and encouraged through the nightlife, culture, music, and daily habits of the people. I found the use of expressive arts therapy within the treatment of SUD's (substance use disorders) to be an interesting combination that might propel persons around the world to find new ways of coping and finding tools to navigate SUD's that will help them better understand themselves and their relationship with substance use.

The capstone option chosen for this paper is a critical review of the literature. This option was chosen as a continuation of the conversation about how the integration of the expressive arts can impact the way in which people with SUD's cope and heal along their journey. The following literature review first offers a brief history of substance use and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the drug prevention and treatment services industry then gives a breakdown of substance use disorders and their common treatments before diving into an examination of the past and current arts and expressive arts therapy treatment options available for persons struggling with a SUD (substance use disorder). The paper continues to explain the cultural biases associated with substance use treatments, treatment goals and the way in which expressive arts therapy can interact with these goals to further recommend and suggest improvements that could be made to further the discussion of using expressive arts therapy to develop coping mechanisms for persons with a substance use disorder.

Literature Review

Substance Use

Drug use dates back as early as 8000 BC with the chewing of betel nuts and the drinking of mead wine. Over the years humans have continuously used substances for many reasons such as community/religious practices, medicinal healing, and recreational purposes (Suzuki & Kober, 2018, p. 481). In looking at the etiology of SUD's, a complicated combination of biological, psychological, and social factors leads to addiction development (Feldman et al., 2022). Substance use and the culture behind it varies depending on the population therefore programs must be informed and tailored to the population at hand. Gilpin spoke to the effects of SUD's as a highly negative impact on the health and finances of individuals and societies who fall under the category of drug and alcohol addiction (Giplin, 2014) In looking at the latest global statistics, it was found that 5.5 percent of persons between the ages of 15 and 64 have at least used drugs once in the last year with 36.3 million people (about twice the population of New York) worldwide suffering from a drug use disorder (UNODC World Drug Report, 2021). According to the CDC, elevated adverse effects on mental health occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic in the US with young adults reporting increased substance use, elevated suicidal ideation and anxiety and depressive disorder symptoms up to three and four times more prevalent than the previous year (Czeisler et al., 2020). Thorisdottir et al., stated that research done on the impact of COVID-19 on adolescent's mental health and substance use is complex research due to the developmental stage they are at as mental health problems are expected to increase in this period. Thorisdottir et al., also stated that substance use has been increasing over the period of the past 20 years and theological and social changes are rapid in these age and gender-dependent variants calling for samples that compare same-age peers before and during and after the pandemic

(Thorisdottir et al., 2021). In looking at a study done on adolescents under the stay-at-home order in Northern California during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was found that control on the use of tobacco and cannabis was needed not necessarily due to a rise in the use of these substances in adolescents but due to an increase in substance use in the adult population and a significant decline in physical activity in adolescents (Chaffee et al., 2021). A study done on acute alcohol intoxication (AAI) in Dutch adolescents before, during, and after the COVID-19 lockdown showed that AAI prevalence among adolescents decreased by 70% when compared to the period before, while during the reopening phase prevalence significantly increased showing concern for alcohol policies after lockdowns were lifted (Pigeaud et al., 2021). Overall, the research above suggested that COVID-19 negatively impacted the mental health of various populations around the world, increasing the chance for the use of substances as coping mechanisms. With such high numbers of people suffering, innovative approaches and integrations are important to counteract the growth in psychological distress that came with the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic clearly changed the face of drug prevention and treatment services through access to more flexible models of delivery, as many countries have now involved telemedicine services at a larger scale offering healthcare workers the opportunity to conduct assessments over the phone (UNODC World Drug Report, 2021). With these changes, the implementation of expressive arts therapies into this format of treatment services can be useful and open a larger part of the audience to want to go for treatment and to find new tools that may appeal more to them.

Substance Use Disorder

According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013), substance use disorders can be seen in many forms and fall into several categories: alcohol, caffeine, cannabis, hallucinogens, inhalants, opioids,

sedatives, hypnotics, anxiolytics, stimulants, tobacco, and other substances. Drugs that are taken in excess commonly activate the system in the brain connected to rewards therefore the behaviors are intensely reinforced and individuals with lower self-control may become predisposed to the development of a SUD due to the addiction to these feelings of pleasure. With so many types of categories for substance use disorders, and an understanding that these substances are all different in so many ways, affecting lives of people in a variety of combinations, utilizing expressive arts offers a broader scope of coping mechanisms. Gilpin mentioned the DSM-5 compiled list of a single set of symptoms with regards to behaviors that are common to the abuse of all drugs. These symptoms include “compulsive drug use, loss of control in limiting drug intake, the emergence of a negative emotional state in the absence of the drug, and increased vulnerability to relapse triggered by stress or cues previously associated with drug availability.” (Gilpin, 2014, para. 1). The etiology of some substance use disorders includes adverse childhood experiences such as trauma, abuse, neglect, and instability within a household (Tsai et al., 2022). Many adolescents are dealing with not only their changing bodies and perception of self but their family situations and the experiences that they have come across in their lives due to parents who may also be struggling with substance use. Some commonly occurring mental illnesses in conjunction with SUD’s are anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, bipolar disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Substance use disorders hold back a substantial portion of a person's ability to function optimally if coping mechanisms are not being used. Other mental illnesses mentioned above may also affect the patient and require tools for coping. Within research on SUD’s in parents, it was been found that youth suffer a greater risk for substance use if they are exposed to both parental separation and parental SUD (Blake et al., 2022). In looking at substance use disorders it can be concluded that if the issue of substance use is not addressed, brought to awareness, and taken

care of in a way that is inclusive and broadly beneficial to a large scope of people then the cycle of children being exposed to parental SUD may continue to grow as a part of the issue of development of SUD's. Substance use disorders require a focused set of treatment goals and require different approaches for different populations based on their cultures and norms. Based on the information found on substance use disorders some common struggles for those suffering with substance use are emotional regulation and distress tolerance, connection to community and family, and embodiment and self-awareness therefore treatment should be inclusive of these kinds of goals.

Substance Use Treatment

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, a powerful tool proven to be effective in treating substance use is the existence of peer support and group therapy (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). Treatment approaches are medications, behavioral treatments, residential treatment, treatment within the criminal justice system, and outpatient behavioral treatments inclusive of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), multidimensional family therapy, motivational interviewing, and motivational incentives (contingency management) (Treatment Approaches for Drug Addiction, 2022). Other kinds of groups include relapse prevention groups, culturally specific healing groups, and expressive arts therapy groups. Some benefits of participating in group therapy according to St. Cyr's research are positive peer support, a decrease in isolation, peer examples of recovery, coping with substance use, and social skill training (St. Cyr, 2019). There seemed to be quite a large expanse of treatment options for SUDs (substance use disorders) with a high focus on cognitive behavioral therapy and work within groups for extra support yet somehow persons tend to take a long time to seek treatment. According to Holly, it is averaged that it can take up to six years for

people with substance use issues to seek treatment, causing an increased risk for harm (Holly, 2019). This showed an even higher need for early intervention in adolescents and young adults so that treatment can be received before the risk for harm is increased extensively going into adulthood.

In looking at the treatment options available without the integration of expressive arts therapy and the length of time some substance users take to seek treatment, a broader range of approaches may allow tentative persons to open up to the possibilities of seeking treatment and make them more inclined to try new ways of coping that seem less intimidating. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is the most used treatment for preventing relapse and is an approach based on the principles of social learning theory. This approach proposes that those who use drugs do so through observation of others and that the initial positive effects of these drugs tend to lead to repeated use and develop cravings (Tam, Shik, and Lam, 2016).

According to Zamboni et al., CBT is focused on the link between thoughts and actions and works to change the verbal content of thoughts whereas the “third wave” behavioral therapies such as acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), and schema therapy (ST) are more geared towards the manipulation of the context in which thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations happen, to change the function of these unwanted experiences. In recent times, cognitive behavioral therapy is considered the standard criteria for SUD treatment, with the main aim being to reduce the impact of internal triggers to promote the training of patients coping skills (Zamboni et al., 2021). Wenzel offered information on CBT by going deeper into the phases of the session and breaking them down into a brief assessment of the client's experience in recent times, current concerns or issues, and any methods the therapist might want to introduce (Wenzel

et al., 2016). Gathering information about the client first is a wonderful way to begin compiling the information needed to tailor the session to the client. In expressive arts therapy, this might look like free writing or an activity that allows the client to express themselves without the need for just words. The next step of the CBT session, according to Wenzel, is engaging in the topics brought about by the client and offering exercises that can be used as tools in the client's day-to-day life to cope with the issues brought up which then leads to the final segment of the session where the conversation is reviewed along with the exercises given to offer feedback (Wenzel et al., 2016).

Cultural Bias and Stigma in Substance Use Treatment

When it comes to mental health treatment, stigma should always be taken into consideration. "Globally over 70% of young people and adults with mental illness receive no treatment from healthcare staff" (Thornicroft, 2008, Abstract). Thornicroft (2008) stated that evidence from surveys shows that treatment avoidance or delay can be attributed to a lack of knowledge about treatment, ignorance of accessing treatment, prejudice against people with mental illnesses, and expectations of discrimination due to the diagnosis of a mental illness. Over the years not much changed with regards to stigma, Trieber and Booyesen stated that American society shares the belief that drug use is a negative behavior and those who hold this opinion also deem illicit drug users as weak, immoral and a danger to society (Trieber and Booyesen, 2021). Atlam and Coskunol (2022) added to the more up-to-date information on stigmatization stating that mental illnesses continue to be stigmatized despite advancements in science and changes in knowledge. In their study they also made mention that mental illnesses are stigmatized at a higher rate than physical diseases with substance use disorders ranking first in the world. According to Atlam and Coskunol (2022), when stigma becomes an issue within the health

systems, treatment becomes more difficult to seek as individuals face discrimination and the social impact of stigma then leads to self-stigmatization and in turn builds feelings of guilt and shame. They stated that the development of these two feelings often causes individuals to become socially isolated and feed deeper into the vicious cycle of substance use. According to Treiber and Booyesen (2021), stigma encompasses behavior and allows for dominant groups to achieve exclusion and conformity creating marginalized groups. Understanding the struggle that people with substance use disorders go through gives a better perspective on what else might be needed in programs for treatment against this disorder. The treatment system sometimes misses key points that also require tools for coping when the focus is placed on behavior. Luoma et al., pointed to the idea that the treatment system may stigmatize people in recovery as even people with higher treatment visits reported stigma rejection. Intravenous drug users reported higher perceived stigma than non-IV users leading to secrecy being the method of maintaining drug use while people with recent employment issues also reported higher levels of secrecy (Luoma et al., 2007). The idea of secrecy within drug use is a complex one as it speaks to the methods of treatment needed to maintain progress as well as the way in which people might prefer to be treated within programs, especially if the stigma they receive might be higher. Expressive arts therapies when placed within the treatment system bring a new perspective on how coping and healing can look and may make room for secrecy within the work, as well as upliftment of self-image in a more multifaceted way as the use of the arts can be more symbolic and metaphorical than direct and straight forward like talk therapy might be. Though the information on stigma spans 2007 to 2021, stigma in mental health is still largely an issue with the idea of anti-stigma interventions coming up such as the network meta-analysis done by Eiroa-Orosa et al. to estimate the relative efficacy between diverse types of anti-stigma interventions for healthcare professionals (Eiroa-Orosa et al., 2021). These interventions were aimed at raising awareness

and were tailored to reduce stigma beliefs and attitudes toward persons with a mental health diagnosis among primary care and mental health professionals. The awareness-raising interventions consisted of four parts including a training workshop, a self-diagnosis workshop, a self-organized activity, and a follow-up session. The scales used to determine changes in stigma levels were The Opening Minds Stigma Scale for Health Care Providers and the Beliefs and Attitudes towards Mental Health Service users' rights scale developed by this group for the project. Results from the interventions were favorable but mild and Eiroa-Orosa concluded that "interventions with long-term follow-up activities must be implemented and evaluated using assessment systems that include the measurement of knowledge acquired and actual behavioral change to ensure the impact of the anti-stigma movement in healthcare practice" (Eiroa-Orosa et al., 2021, p.13). This study proved to be just the beginning of understanding the importance of long-term follow-ups and more in-depth research in the healthcare community on a general note.

In looking at cultural biases in substance use treatment, Babcock (2008) presents the issue of minimal research on reproductive issues due to father's substance use while extensive attention has been placed on the use of drugs and alcohol in pregnant women. Babcock states that these investigations have been focused on blaming mothers related to birth disorders with a lack of exploration on the role of both parents contributing toward our already combative cultural bias when dealing with substance using mothers. Research found from Seybold et al. (2014) a few years later showed progress toward reducing stigma toward pregnant women by choosing to focus on providing a framework for a training workshop to enhance health practitioners' knowledge about substance abuse treatment and to decrease this bias toward pregnant women in rural communities. The workshop consisted of a questionnaire completed by 52 of the 70 participants to self-assess knowledge level and confidence in skill related to substance abuse

management. Seybold et al. (2014) found that the conference was a success in increasing knowledge about gender difference and substance abuse among pregnant patients with mean scores significantly higher following the conference than 1 week prior. Other cultural biases within substance use treatment include lack of knowledge of the population being dealt with and therefore a misinterpretation of the seriousness of the case at hand. For example, findings by Swaim and Stanley (2018) found that American Indian students that are reservation-based are at elevated risk for substance use in comparison to youths in general in the US therefore making prevention efforts are critical. Swaim and Stanley (2018) stress the importance of understanding more about the cultural and value-based characteristics of American Indian populations to provide the best targets for prevention as there is little information available on how cultural factors work to prevent risky behaviors therefore American Indian youths are at elevated risk as these youths experience high rates of trauma and loss, in addition to other adverse childhood experiences. Parental substance use proves to be an important topic in the continuation of the cycle of substance use disorders, with their influence being prevalent through adverse childhood experiences or their own substance usage. Many other forms of cultural bias exist within the world of substance use treatment, the examples in this section are only two of many other concerning cultural biases.

Expressive Arts Therapies

In contrast to the format of utilizing individual applications of specific art forms, expressive arts therapy is an approach that utilizes the arts, imagination and play in an integrated way to conduct therapeutic work, meant to make space for addressing and healing trauma. The approach is very much somatic based, allowing the body to have an expressive experience of trauma in ways that no other methods can (Malchiodi, 2020). Expressive Arts Therapy can assist

with allowing clients who are less verbal to open up through expressing themselves in diverse ways and consists of eight foundational types including art therapy, music therapy, drama therapy, dance/movement therapy, poetry/bibliotherapy, play therapy, sand play therapy, and integrated arts therapy (Malchiodi, 2020). Some key figures in the development of the field of expressive arts therapy over the years are Natalie Rogers, Levine and Kossak. Rogers' approach to therapy focuses on the *creative connection* between the arts and how intuitive expression emerges through different media to support self-exploration and to connect to oneself through these therapeutic art experiences (Malchiodi, 2020). Rogers also preserves the idea that person centered expressive art therapy (PCEAT) therapists should fulfill the three core conditions of the person-centered approach, these being unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence (Rogers, 2011). According to Levine et al. "the events that are re-called or re-experienced in expressive arts therapy are not a literal summing up of the dead past. They are, like tragic performance, a creative elaboration of the past, one which may touch the truth of that past more closely than what is presented as a pure repetition. Here we can see the power of the arts to "set truth into a work" (Levine et al., 2004, p. 67). Kossak introduced the idea of attunement and embodied empathy bringing an understanding of how "therapeutic practices offer expanded ways of being attuned to emotional states and life conditions with individuals, relationships, groups, and communities" (Kossak, 2021). Overall expressive arts therapy is a new but quickly growing community with a wide spectrum of tools to assist with a wide audience and a broad range of mental illnesses and to meet treatment goals.

Expressive Arts Therapies in Substance Use Treatment

In looking at the effects and possibilities of integrating the arts into substance use treatment, many distinctive styles and combinations were found, some being clown therapy,

music therapy, storytelling, drum circles and more. Unfortunately, only a select few articles were found through the Lesley Library and Google Scholar specifically on expressive arts therapy in action with substance use treatment for the adolescent and young adult population under the search terms substance use AND expressive arts therapy, substance abuse, AND expressive arts therapy, substance use AND creative arts. “Expressive therapies such as art and dance therapy are often unexplored avenues in traditional substance use treatment approaches” (Cavallo et al., 2003) therefore, the following information will utilize the main treatment goals for patients and make connections to the possibilities of developing coping mechanisms through expressive arts therapy and other arts therapy articles. Findings revealed that some major treatment goals for SUD patients are emotional regulation and distress tolerance, the building of community and support of family, and embodiment and self-awareness. According to Battistelli, the dysfunction of addiction and success of recovery are rooted in the core concepts of the human condition including self, other and metaphysical phenomenon (Battistelli, 2019).

Within the realm of expressive arts therapy and SUDs, the idea of decentering is explored. This is a concept where clients decenter from ordinary life and enter their own world of imagination as a part of a process that allows for their return to reflect and learn (Levine, 2019) The concept of decentering would be useful for those with SUDs as their ordinary lives are something they are coping with using substances, but with a new means of coping available, decentering with the arts can be implemented and eventually used as a means of continual work towards becoming less dependent on substances. Expressive Arts therapy is a viable option for connecting to a wider audience of persons suffering from a SUD with so many styles of expression to choose from therefore the combination of expressive arts therapy within substance

use treatment programs would be an integral part of the journey toward a larger portion of the population finding better or new ways of coping.

Emotional Regulation and Distress Tolerance

Emotional regulation and distress tolerance are key treatment goals for clients with SUDs. Momeñe stated that adolescent substance use is a serious social issue that may be connected to emotional dependence, attachment styles and difficulties in emotional regulation (Momeñe et al., 2021). “Emotion regulation has been broadly defined as the ability to modify an emotional state in an adaptive, goal-oriented manner and involves processes of modulating reactions to stressful and emotional situations, as well as returning to baseline functioning afterward” (Margherio, 2021, p. 773). Research by Momeñe showed that in a sample of 1,533 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 22 years old, there was a positive relationship between substance use and emotional dependence and difficulty with emotional regulation and attachment styles of, “parental permissiveness, self-sufficiency, and resentment against parents and childhood trauma and negative relationships with security, family concern, parental interference and value to parental authority” (Momeñe et al., 2021, p. 129). According to Shillington, distress tolerance is the ability to perceive one’s environment without wanting to change it; to be present within one’s emotional state without pressure to change it and to notice one’s own ideas and behaviors without trying to stop them (Shillington, 2020). People who find it difficult to tolerate distress may tend to make their situation worse by not being able to emotionally regulate as seen with people who have SUDs, substances are used to aid in emotional regulation when distress is present. Emotional regulation and distress tolerance are therefore important at the beginning of finding coping mechanisms, the following works found will be geared toward understanding how the expressive arts can be used to assist with this.

An example of a combination of expressive arts therapy and Person-Centered Therapy is looking at how Ono speaks about the way in which body awareness aided in participants of a Person-Centered Expressive Arts Therapy (PCEAT) training in Japan. The research was conducted on seven Japanese participants (whose ages were not mentioned) through semi-structured interviews. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was conducted on the data of the three of the chosen participants who were able to recall and explain their experiences (Ono, 2018). “Interpretative phenomenological analysis is composed of a series of sets of factors that aim to interpret the accounts of people of their personal lived experience and explicate an underlying structure in these accounts” (Demuth & Mey, 2015, para 1). In the interviews, participants were asked to speak about their experiences in the person-centered expressive arts therapy environment, their perceived psychological growth, and the way in which this environment impacted them. After doing an individual and group IPA for the three participants, Ono cross-compared and examined themes for psychological growth/becoming oneself, some of which were preparation stage, being in the present, body awareness, better relationships with self, better relationships with others, contact with feelings and positive traits. Under these themes, the themes that facilitate changes or growth in these individuals were safety/support, sense of connection, nonverbal expressions/exercises facilitating body awareness, repetition, and residential setting. The research found that body awareness allowed participants to contact their feelings and nonverbal artistic expression activities encouraged participants to get in touch with their bodies and by extension their emotions. This showed that a safe and supportive person-centered therapeutic environment is pertinent to psychological growth (Ono, 2018). From this research, it can be said that Person-Centered Therapy alongside Expressive Arts Therapy could be a great combination that will aid in meeting treatment goals of self-growth, self-awareness, and emotional regulation.

Boals et al. (2015) compared the effects of combining expressive arts therapy, CBT, and ACT on reducing event centrality through the utilization of a modified expressive writing intervention. “Event centrality is the degree to which people see a stressful life event as central to their life narrative or identity” (Bellet et al., 2018 p. 4). The Boals et al. study is particularly relevant as people with substance use disorders suffer a higher risk of having PTSD and vice versa and an SUD could be related to PTSD development, following exposure to a traumatic event (Stewart and Conrod, 2003). Boals et al. mentioned that Participants in this intervention were assigned at random to learn about the core elements of either ACT, CBT, or baseball (control) via audio analogs. After this, the ACT and CBT groups applied what they learnt to two expressive writing sessions and the baseball group wrote on a neutral topic. The results showed that participants in the ACT and CBT group conditions showed significant decreases in event centrality, when the writing instructions were followed correctly, in comparison to the control group (Boals et al., 2015). According to Boals et al. (2018), “these results suggest that principles of ACT and traditional CBT expressed using a modified expressive writing intervention hold great promise to help individuals recover from stressful experiences” (Abstract). Results support an expressive writing intervention for a decrease in event centrality which can be incredibly useful in the treatment of substance use and attaining treatment goals of emotional regulation and distress tolerance. A further look at the benefits of the combination of CBT and Expressive Arts Therapy will be explored later.

According to Hinz (2019), in reviewing the investigations of utilizing clay in art therapy, it was found that working with clay had a significant impact on relaxation, access to historical trauma, altering cognition, and improvement of emotion regulation. It was also mentioned that emotion regulation showed a substantial reduction in self-rated anxiety in university students and

comparable results were found in psychiatric patients working with therapists. Tam, Shik, and Lam stated that art therapy is an approach that has proven to be effective within the scope of relapse prevention and avoidant drug-abusing teenagers. The arts play a vital role in treatment as they offer the option of detached communication where the artwork is the main focal point. Moving the focus from talk therapy to a safer more comfortable method builds an atmosphere that may feel less abrasive allowing clients to express, feel and reveal metaphorically. Other forms of creative art such as painting, drawing, sculpting, collage, or clay making have proven helpful in allowing clients to express shame, guilt, or loss in drug use in the recovery process. Creative expression through art has also shown a great increase in clients' abilities to review their internal strengths in emotional regulation (Tam, Shik, and Lam, 2016). Art activities that include kinesthetic experiences are a terrific way of integrating emotions and emotional work into expression without the use of words, for example, Hinz (2019) spoke to the connection of the external experience of pounding clay to the internal state of anger.

A combination of art therapy and styles of cognitive-behavioral therapy can be a successful recipe for recovery and coping in the lives of those with SUDs. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Los Angeles (2020) stated that “emotion regulation treatment typically is comprised of four sets of CBT interventions” these interventions include mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion regulation training and interpersonal effectiveness. These CBT interventions can be easily executed through utilizing the arts in therapy for example, Rappaport mentions that mindfulness can be accessed through the inner witness and the ability to be completely absorbed into present-moment experience (Rappaport, 2013). Therefore, activities like using materials to doodle or paint, playing an instrument or taking up a role as a character can be used as a chance to focus on the action or witnessing the act of creating and how this can bring about the inner

mindful witness. Internal and external sensations require distress tolerance and Hinz mentions the ability of art therapy to teach skills that would reduce depending on poor coping mechanism through the provision of external sensations as a means of practicing management. (Hinz, 2019) “It has been my experience that many clients continue creating art after discharge from in-patient drug and alcohol treatment programs and long into recovery because they find it sensuously fulfilling and rewarding” (Hinz, p. 64, 2019). According to Hinz, a structured perceptual approach can prove as a non-threatening starting point for patients when representing emotion through color, line, or form (Hinz, 2019).

In reading about the Literacy-Free 12 Step Expressive Arts Therapy curriculum created by Zambian professionals, Lorenz stated that, “that art, drama, singing, storytelling, music, dance circles and more were imperative in substance use decrease and created an increase in motivation to change and participate or openly share with large groups. The expressive arts therapy curriculum created utilized the cultural aspects of Zambia and integrated the already growing wealth of the arts available there. Some of the activities included in the curriculum are using art to map out significant life events and bring awareness to the powerlessness and unmanageability of life, drama to teach and review short- and long-term effects of substance use, and dance and drumming circles to encourage embodiment and social commentary on expressions of joy, sorrow, and satire (Lorenz et al., 2022). Lorenz et al. showed the power of intrapersonal theory in the healing process of substance use treatment. Intrapersonal theory considers the cultural and biographical environments influencing clients' responses towards the art modalities and supports the idea of not necessarily needing skill in the arts but a high sensitivity to it. Therefore, clients are encouraged to be aware and open to express rather than focus on their skill level (Knill, 1999). The Literacy-Free 12 Step Expressive Arts Therapy curriculum is an evidence-based

group curriculum manual for substance use treatment that incorporates CBT and rational emotive behavioral therapy (REBT) to explore 12 Steps and psychoeducational topics through Zambian art forms. “Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy is a form of psychotherapy that helps you identify self-defeating thoughts and feelings, challenge the nature of irrational and unproductive feelings, and replace them with healthier, more productive beliefs” (“Psychology Today,” n.d.). Lorenz et al. stated that this curriculum was developed as a need was seen by the Zambian drop-in center for culturally appropriate SUD treatment. “The curriculum seeks to dismantle barriers of stigma by encouraging open sharing through Zambian art forms as therapeutic metaphors to connect with peers. Embracing local art forms helps substance use treatment to be community-owned and culturally appropriate” (Lorenz et al., 2022, para 2). Part one of the curriculum included training the Zambian professionals with an expectation of pre to post training improvements in the perception of substance users and the value of offering SUD treatment while part two examined the effectiveness of the treatment using the curriculum within organizations. The hypothesis that frequency in substance use would decrease significantly and motivation to change and participate or openly share would increase was accurate and mirrored previous research on the importance of motivation and engagement in treatment for success. (Lorenz et al., 2022)

In looking at the research provided above, it can be said that emotional regulation and distress tolerance in the SUD community can be addressed through utilizing many art forms in correlation with a person-centered expressive arts therapy approach and aspects of CBT/ACT to aid in allowing participants to grow psychologically, reduce event centrality and PTSD and even aid in lessening feelings of shame, guilt, or fear of the need for talking in therapy. Some options for the arts in emotional regulation and distress tolerance were clay therapy and other forms of

kinesthetic experiences, expressive writing, speaking about experiences through storytelling, movement for body awareness, character play, mindfulness in art creation, and dance and drumming circles.

Community and Family

“Expressive Arts Therapy can help connect individuals with a sense of self and a sense of community as well as build coping skills” (Battistelli, p. 30, 2019). Many options for building community and supporting family are available when it comes to the expressive arts, some options include dance, art, and music. Group work is all about what is learned in the process, therefore group-based expression can aid in allowing clients the freedom to create a connection and appreciate the work over the result (Battistelli, 2019). Creative expression through art has shown a great increase in client's abilities to review their internal strengths in building support systems and re-formulating their goals and hopes for their life in the future (Tam, Shik and Lam, 2016). Community and family are integral in the healing process for some, as mentioned by Tam some had no choice in being victims of a lack of guidance and loneliness in family issues and divorces. Care of the family, love, and support were key motivations for remaining abstinent and therefore the integration of arts-based activities and family within programs is highly recommended (Tam, Shik and Lam, 2016). When compared to commonly used verbal therapies, music therapy and music-based interventions provide numerous opportunities for self-expression, cooperative group activity, imagination, and synchronized sensorimotor experience (Homann et al., 2017). Music tends to bring people together while creating space for expression of self. Snead mentions that music tends to provide a culturally relevant space and create familiarity for a safe starting point for engagement and connecting (Snead, 2015). Utilizing familiar music for example, Soca music with Trinbagonians or K-pop with Koreans may allow

for an easier flow of community within the group. Music creates space to relate and create bonds for example, group drumming bridges feelings of isolation and provides a secular approach to the concept of a higher power and spirituality (Battistelli, 2019)

In looking at ways of integrating family and community support and expressive arts into the recovery and development of coping mechanisms for persons with SUDs, Tam, Shik and Lam gave insight into two groups in a six-month follow-up trial designed to compare the effectiveness of an arts-based relapse prevention group to a cognitive-behavioral group tailored for young psychotropic substance use patients in a community-based environment. The programs varied but aimed to assist in identifying situations that are high risk and allowing for enhanced strength of support for coping with these situations (Tam, Shik, and Lam, 2016). This research took place in Hong Kong with participants between the ages of 15 to 30 years old who had a history of psychotropic substance use and intended to remain abstinent after recently completing a substance abuse treatment program. Some of the activities used in the arts-based group that connected to support systems and communities included, making finger puppets to symbolize people who fall under their support system and working in a group to create a mural. Group activities are great ways to start opening up and feeling less alone in your experience. Results from the study showed that the art-based program was effective, particularly for male participants as they were more likely to be open to being verbal or were inclined to feel guilty or inadequate about their behavior. Relapse tends to occur due to failed coping mechanisms in high-risk situations. Family was imperative in the growth and development of participants as they bore the loneliness of their position while at the same time felt the motivation from the care, love, and support of their family members. This showed that the combination of art and family-based interventions proved highly favorable. Overall, the research done by Tam Shik and Lam

showed that art therapy is effective in preventing relapse in substance users who might be resistant, defensive, and unexpressive (Tam, Shik, and Lam, 2016).

Embodiment and Self Awareness

Embodiment and self-awareness are two main goals of treatment for persons with SUDs as people with substance use disorders tend to be difficult to reach due to sometimes being neglectful in sharing because of shame and self-stigma. This shows the broad benefit range that dance/movement therapy (DMT) can have with regards to the treatment possibilities. The American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) states that DMT is “the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive and physical integration of the individual” (ADTA, n.d., General Questions section, para. 1). Levy reported that “Dance is a means of direct communication, expression and interaction with those whom others could not reach” (Levy, 2005, p. 21). While the information regarding the use of DMT with substance use has sufficiently grown over time, it is still a small pool when compared to its other uses and few dance/movement therapists are found to be working with SUD diagnoses. In reading Barton (2011), it was found that an evaluation was done during a 20-week period combining DMT and body-based yoga/mindfulness interventions to focus on self-regulation and self-awareness. Barton’s program assisted individuals in developing insight, changing lifestyles, and becoming aware of difficulties in relating to others and expressing or accepting themselves. The project took place in a suburban county psychosocial rehabilitation facility in the Midwest region of the United States and included 8 participants. Participants were Caucasian women while the other participants were 2 men and 2 women of African American descent. Participants ranged from ages 20 to early 60’s and all were dually diagnosed with a substance use disorder. The program began with an emphasis on basic yoga activities and then gradually branched out into more

dance/movement therapy techniques including the defense or dimensional scale and the diagonal scale. Barton mentions that the diagonal scale was developed by Rudolf Laban and is a full-bodied movement sequence that explores an individual's diagonal reach within a self-contained invisible cube. In other research done by Barton (2011), it was mentioned that she found reference to increased self-esteem in adolescent girls through the combination of yoga and dance/movement therapy when reading about Williams-Kief's development of a treatment model. Barton looked to this research for future applications of the model. Other great mentions from Barton include the discussion about embodiment and the way in which it is often a difficult concept for those suffering from severe mental illnesses and SUDs and the positive effects of the combination of yoga and DMT found were improved stress management, relaxation, decreased anxiety, an amplified understanding of self and others, the ability to connect more deeply to the inner self and in turn express more effectively. It can be said that DMT and other movement modalities can enhance social and emotional well-being in those diagnosed with SUDs (Barton, 2011).

Research into drama therapy brought about the topic of clown therapy as a means of treatment for people with SUDs. Gordon et al. 's research showed that a drama therapy approach to working with addiction allowed participants to discover their inner clown. The project took place in a day-treatment/rehabilitation center and the group consisted of 8 to 12 participants of mixed genders between the ages of early twenties to late fifties with a cultural mixture of Israeli born Jews, immigrant Jews, Muslim and Christian Arabs, Druze, and Bedouins. According to Gordan et al. all participants underwent physical withdrawal from substance abuse and were monitored to ensure no relapse. Using drama techniques, participants were taken on a journey towards discovering their key/dominant and oppositional personality roles and brought the two

together through embodiment leading to the birth of the clown. The treatment was divided into three stages, setting the process in motion, giving birth to the clown, and integrating the clown's role in everyday life. Throughout history, clowns have been known to reflect and confront our human weaknesses and vulnerabilities safely while offering us a good laugh. Through their fails, falls and ridicule personal experiences of feeling embarrassed or disempowered are transformed into humorous incidents resulting in viewers taking back to their sense of control. Laughing at clowns is us laughing at ourselves releasing tension around issues of power and powerlessness and more. Clowns are the perfect option for relief and counsel (Gordon et al., 2018). At the end of the treatment program, a total of 70 clients from 9 different treatment centers attested to positive results from their exposure to clown therapy, stating that it improved their relationship with their family (particularly with children), enhanced life balance in order in order to move past constant conflicts with self, authority and others, greater emotional flexibility, ability to cope with life changes, an increase in creativity when coping with life challenges, a sense of achievement, increased self-awareness, self-esteem and openness to others without judgment. (Gordon et al., 2018) Clowns offer up the chance to embody ourselves in a completely unique way to access parts of self that may have been pushed away due to shame. The use of clowns in substance use treatment brings about a larger understanding of self, giving clients the opportunity to see themselves in a way where they remove judgment and begin to accept who they are.

In looking at the way in which music can be incorporated into healing, it was found that adolescents who were delinquent had disruptive behaviors stemming from disruptive parenting, child abuse, neglect, peer relationships and the school system. These delinquent behaviors change the way in which adolescents see themselves and lead to possible negative choices such as substance use, vandalism, and gang membership (David Ko, 2014). Analyzing song lyrics can

be a wonderful way of understanding the values and beliefs held by adolescents as well as their decision-making process. Song lyric analysis offers up a chance for adolescents to see themselves and find coping mechanisms to change their negative habits through a space that is familiar and comforting. Ko mentions that lyric analysis has been found to bring about discussions of values, ideas, confusing emotions, insight on self-concept and self-expression for positive coping mechanisms (David Ko, 2014). In addition to the discussion of the importance of utilizing the arts in developing coping mechanisms it was found that patients sometimes refuse to speak about their substance histories even after safety and trust has been established. Some patients may not feel safe or in control when working in the body or using movement. Kirane mentions that to inspire safety and encourage participation, music can be used to stimulate movement like being under the influence, providing a chance to address behaviors. (Kirane, 2018). Embodiment of the behaviors of being under the influence can open the mind to options for control within the experience for the patient, giving them the opportunity to create balance in their responses and practice what it might be like to make a progressive choice.

In other research, Snead's literature review on the use of creative writing interventions in the treatment of adolescents and adults with substance abuse issues looks at a total of six articles describing multiple inpatient programs and summarizing a knowledge translation plan. Snead mentions the great links between creative writing and improvements in self-confidence, self-esteem, social skills, social/emotional, self-awareness and more in this population (Snead, 2015). Some articles reviewed focused on treatment, preventative techniques, and therapeutic application. In one study reviewed by Snead, clients were asked identify interventions they used for improvement of coping. Writing and listening to music came out on top as the main responses showing connections as to why these two modalities are frequently combined. In

concluding Snead mentioned that “a variety of evidence-based writing activities can be explored including both individual and group poetry writing, the use of poetry magnets, expressive writing, freewriting and combined music and poetry sessions including lyric analysis (Snead,2015) Snead’s review showed the effectiveness of expressive writing for substance use treatment and the possibilities for progress within combinations of writing and other art forms for coping with SUDs.

In looking at research that explored group music therapy for addiction treatment it was found that music not only assisted with the group coming together but also aided in self-expression promoting the effectiveness of group work. In addition to this, it was found that participants gained awareness of the denial stage of change, a key to working on addiction (Adams & Stickley, 2019). One of the activities used in group sessions with adolescent substance users was incident drawings. These drawings are a technique used to ask participants to draw their traumatic events related to using substances to create a link between inner experiences and outer visualizations. This allows for a bridge between thoughts, feelings, and emotions to be created where they originally might have been suppressed by substance misuse. According to Adams & Stickley, individuals can reawaken their emotions and sensations and open a dialogue while feeling safe to share at their own pace (Adams & Stickley, 2019). Embodiment and self-awareness require gentle, informed, and guided work therefore, person-centered theory is a perfect complement to the work above as it is an expressive art therapy approach that allows for self-discovery through the arts from an emotional depth that explores hidden or suppressed emotions (Knill, 1999). The person-centered approach is one that requires a safe environment supported and created by a facilitator who can make room for personal growth by being genuine, warm, empathetic, open, honest, and caring (Corey, 2013).

The literature presented above revealed ways in which the arts and expressive arts therapy have been used as a means of coping with SUDs for the treatment goals of emotional regulation and distress tolerance, the building of community and support of family, and embodiment and self-awareness. The section on emotional regulation and distress tolerance opened the discussion about the use of person-centered therapy and continued to mention the use of a combination of CBT, ACT, and expressive writing. Clay in art therapy, mindfulness, and the Literacy-Free 12 Step Expressive Arts Therapy curriculum was also discussed in relation to emotional regulation and distress tolerance for substance use. The second section focused on community and family, with mentions such as group-based art therapy, family-based interventions, and music therapy. The concluding section on embodiment and self-awareness touched on dance movement therapy and yoga, clown therapy, song lyric analysis, creative writing, and group music therapy.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the past and current use of expressive arts therapy in developing coping mechanisms for substance use recovery and to explore possibilities for the future of further integration. Research has demonstrated a wider need for implementation of the arts into current programs available for persons suffering with SUDs as the arts are impactful in the world of therapy and only enhance the experience, offer more options, and cater to a larger audience of people who might be tentative toward exploring the benefits of therapy. This can be seen specifically in the research done by Boals et al., (2018) and Lorenz et al., (2022) with major implications for improvement in emotional regulation, distress tolerance substance use decrease, and motivation to change and share. It was no surprise that the research on expressive arts therapy in correlation to substance use disorders was lacking as expressive arts

therapy is quite new and research in the field is now quickly building. Some research was found on dance movement therapy, but a wider study was seen in music therapy, art therapy and expressive writing. Writing, playing with clay, puppet making, lyric analysis and clown therapy are all forms of art that have already been utilized within the field, formulating data for further research and progress in expressive arts implementation. Research specific to the adolescent age group was exceedingly difficult to find with most post pandemic articles stating that it was a complex study due to lack of previous data and the growing use of substances over the years. During my research, I found much more information on the young adult, adult and elderly age groups with information that could still be utilized for further research in younger age categories for example the use of clown therapy was very in depth and show possibilities for being adapted for younger ages through its extensive list of benefits for people struggling with substance use disorders. Some important mentions recognized in this review was the lack of follow-up and long-term interventions for a more accurate look at how the arts truly makes an impact on coping with substance use. Momeñe stated that adolescent substance use is a serious social issue that may be connected to emotional dependence, attachment styles and difficulties in emotional regulation (Momeñe et al., 2021) With emotional regulation being one of the cores of treatment goals for adolescents, the inclusion of family-based interventions and adult interventions is pertinent to breaking the cycle of substance use disorders.

Another notable comment on the literature found was that additional information on the demographics of the participants is important. For example, some of the literature did not offer much of a demographic background to the participants. Most of the literature presented gender and only some offered age therefore narrowing down the global usefulness of the data collected for example, the age range of participants for research done by (Ono, 2018) was not mentioned

and only three participants were in the study as well as Barton (2011) only had a total of 8 participants in the study with most of them being Caucasian. Despite this, a lot of useful progress was made in the collection of data on the response to the arts and expressive arts therapy as a coping mechanism for substance use. The literature found, showed that the combination of expressive arts therapy and substance use treatment creates space for clients to feel more comfortable in seeking help and reaching treatment goals through a wider range of options that can be tailored to the client's specific needs and cultural background, for example the use of culturally relevant activities in the study done by Zambian professionals (Lorenz et al., 2022).

In looking at the existing treatment options available, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) showed up as the most preferred pathway for persons struggling with substance abuse. Combinations of CBT and expressive art therapy were found and highlighted the benefits of this combination for clients trying to find ways to cope with internal triggers for example expressive writing interventions showed a decrease in event centrality, pulling clients away from the trauma of a past event and giving them back the power to tell the story. One of the key issues with people seeking treatment is the length of time it takes for them to seek support. Expressive arts therapy can be a more playful, enticing option that may be less intimidating and function as a means of bringing people together to tell their stories and find more creative ways of coping to heal. Person-Centered Expressive Arts Therapy in combination with CBT offers a safe and supported environment for creation and deep exploration of the client's sense of self, this is pertinent to psychological growth. Some suggestions for future research would be to continue to explore ways in which expressive arts therapy can be more easily integrated into social society in a way that is more easily digestible and stigma reducing. For example, creating more accessible and affordable means of getting help through funding to continue to build culturally relevant

community programs, using the arts of those communities as the foundation for developing coping mechanisms. A fitting example of this was shown in the research done by (Lorenz et al., 2022). Further to this, integration of arts-based activities and family within substance use programs is highly recommended. Some other suggestions would be to further the research on adolescents and young adults and build upon culturally sensitive data for all age ranges, current and past.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM**Lesley University****Graduate School of Arts & Social Sciences****Expressive Therapies Division****Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Expressive Arts Therapy****Student's Name:** Zayna McDonald**Type of Project:** Thesis**Title:** Using Expressive Arts Therapy to Develop Coping Mechanisms to Manage

Substance Use: A Literature Review

Date of Graduation: May 21, 2023

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

Thesis Advisor: E Kellogg, PhD