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Kate Hunter
khunter4@lesley.edu

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**Peering through the Window: Engaging Older Adults in Different Art Media to Build
Community and Find Identity through Play and the Challenge of Trying Something New**

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

May 5th, 2024

Kate Hunter

Art Therapy

Raquel Stephenson, Ph.D., ATR-BC, LCAT

Abstract

Some older adults experience physical and cognitive changes that can lead to social isolation and can impact identity, health, and wellbeing. Research has shown that arts-based group psychosocial interventions have the potential to improve the quality of life for older adults along with fostering connections in community and building confidence and acceptance of self-identity. From this research, I developed a crafts-based intervention that focused on the interests and hobbies of the group members. The group was offered in an independent living facility with women over the age of 62 who were American and Asian-American. Over the course of the sessions, the data revealed that the group members were able to find strength and community through being challenged by new activities formed from their interests. The group members were also able to identify themselves in their art making, showing the potential of taking multiple pieces of art and bringing them together to show a bigger picture of the individual. The findings support the research that art therapy has many benefits for older adults, but challenges the notion that the activities be based out of fine arts interventions. It emphasizes the need for further research within the field about implementing crafts-based interventions with older populations.

Key Words: Older Adults, Art Therapy, Crafts, Identity, Community

Author Identity Statement: This author identifies as white, cisgender woman from the Northeast of the United States. This author acknowledges the ways in which her identity and experiences influence the following method and research process.

Introduction

As older adults age, they face many challenges including declining physical and mental health, grief and loss, social isolation, loss of autonomy, etc. With every challenge they may face, it could feel like they are losing pieces of themselves, of their individuality, and of their community. Implementation of creative arts therapies has been found to improve the quality of life of older adults and foster confidence, inspiration, motivation, and insight (Stephenson, 2021). Current research in the field shows the importance of art therapy in working with older adults in helping to slow the regression of aging and to help improve quality of life. The materials and interventions presented by the researchers highlights the use of fine arts in the studies and inquiries being addressed. These materials include drawing supplies, painting, etc (Rankanen, et al., 2022; Haiblum-Itskovitch, Czamanski-Cohen, & Galili, 2018). The use of the fine arts has created a grounded base for the field of art therapy in understanding how to work with clients across many populations. However, there is growing research showing that the healing work done with art therapy stems out of more than the fine arts. Instead, there is room for media that would be termed as crafting including working with textiles, using elements of nature, jewelry making, paper crafts, ceramics, and sculpting.

In my experience working with older adults for three internships spanning across my undergraduate and graduate career, I have found that there are benefits from using traditional media like watercolors and acrylics to paint and create with. However, it does partner with an increased anxiety around art making and comments like “I am not an artist.” These comments show the hesitation that they have that can hold them back from engaging with the material to the fullest degree as they feel they do not know what they are doing or are unqualified. There are some individuals who work well with these materials, but others consider it something scary

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because they associate fine arts with art in museums and require great skill and talent. This brought me to considering what kind of art making does feel attainable for older adults. How can I find ways to make the process approachable and less intimidating?

I presuppose that engaging the older adults in art making that connected with their interests would help them to connect to the activity and their peers who may share similar interests. This was seen in one senior residential facility, where they used textile crafts as a way to build community and give purpose to older adults during the Covid-19 pandemic (Narkter, 2022). This project was able to build bridges between older adults who enjoyed working with fiber arts during a time when social isolation due to pandemic restrictions was becoming a massive struggle in residential communities everywhere. Getting in touch with the population and understanding where their interests lie paves a path to a more meaningful group protocol that meets them where they are both physically and mentally. This led me to consider what skills or pastimes older adults at my site had and how I could turn them into art therapy interventions. With this thought and research, I posed to myself the question: how can art therapy interventions based on the group's interests lead way to building community, creativity, and identity?

To answer my question, I set up a group intervention protocol that was built upon the interests and hobbies I discovered about the group members while working with them in previous months leading up to this intervention series. I was able to determine that many of the older adults had participated in some form of fiber art crafts during their life. I thought of ways I could take something like knitting or crocheting (a popular hobby) and take the essence of the activity and make it less dependent on precise fine motor skills and good vision. Instead, I considered how the same material of yarn or string could be used in a new light. This thought process of considering the new potential out of interests and materials brought together a series

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of interventions that would challenge the group members to try their hand at something new by using what they know. The feedback from the group members was positive and many discussed the benefits of being challenged by the activity while simultaneously having fun with the materials. I learned that playful challenge and curiosity allowed them to connect more as a group and with themselves. At the end, I had the group members bring their four art pieces together and we were able to see the group members' identity and creativity as a unified whole built from the individual moments of each artwork.

Literature Review

Older Adults

The population of older adults has been on an upwards trend in recent United States history with the reports from 2019 showing that 16.5 percent of the population is 65 years old or older (Population Reference Bureau, 2024). This percentage is expected to rise as the Boomer generation continues to enter this demographic. With the rise in the population of older adults, there has also been an increased need to provide care for the aging population. With age comes a variety of arising problems from physical ailments, cognitive decline, and mental illness (Galassi, Merizzi, D'Amen, & Santini, 2022). In research performed by Roberts and Adams (2017), they found that within senior housing there were reports of quality of life being negatively impacted by personal health, function, and interpersonal relationships. The combination of declining health and losses can result in a decrease in a support system and losing recognition of one's own strengths within themselves.

Social Development

In Arnheim's (1986) work, he recognizes that as physical health declines the older adult does not lose their potential at being valuable as their capacity for wisdom grows. As they age,

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humans have the potential to shift who they are as they mature and are able to shift their attitudes. The ability to create shifts in one's attitude can greatly impact the path to successful aging (Zhang & Niu, 2013). One way to create a strong impact on one's attitude towards life is by engaging in creative activities. Zhang and Niu talked about how creative activities can improve older adult's abilities to problem solve, build self-esteem, create coping skills, improve internal locus of control, and improve life satisfaction.

The ideas brought forth by Arnheim (1986), and Zhang and Niu (2013) contribute to the theoretical frameworks that have defined the field of mental health counseling with older adults. The ideas brought forth by these authors of wisdom, the maturing self, and shifting attitudes towards life relate to the ideals presented by Tornstam's (1999) framework of gerotranscendence. Tornstam's theory of gerotranscendence touches on the idea that with age the older adult makes a variety of transitions to rediscover themselves by confronting the good and bad aspects in order to become a less self-centered version of themselves that has integrated all stages of life. Additionally, there is a transition in the relationships older adults have. They become selective with who they spend time with as it becomes more symbolic for them to maintain relationships that go beyond the superficial level and hold meaning and support. Within Stephenson's (2013) research with art therapy and gerotranscendence, she identifies how the gerotranscendence framework can create many therapeutic goals including fostering artistic identity, increasing sense of purpose and motivation, and fostering connections with others.

Cognitive Development

As older adults age, they face a lot of challenging realities including thoughts about the end of their life and wondering if they are regretful of any of their decisions (Erikson, 1959). They are contemplating their past and how it has led them to where they are and finding peace

and wisdom within that. On the other hand, older adulthood begins at 65 and many older people have many years of life ahead of them. Therefore, along with Erikson's (1959) past oriented thought patterns, there needs to be room for future oriented thoughts including what can I still do, what do I want to accomplish, etc. Older adults can continue to "learn new skills, form new memories, and improve vocabulary and language skills" (National Institute on Aging, 2023). In pursuance to holding space for these thoughts, society must have a better understanding of what happens with aging especially with the rise in numbers of older adults facing cognitive decline with the potential of developing serious diagnosis like dementia (Zhao, et al., 2018). In the field of mental health counseling, one of the biggest changes that is being extensively studied is the effects of aging on the brain and the resulting cognitive impairment that can develop.

Most older adults face some level of mild cognitive impairment as they age that has minor symptoms that ultimately do not negatively impact the older adult's ability to function day to day and can complete activities of daily living independently (Safien, et al., 2021). This mild decline in cognitive function has been identified as changes to the structure in the brain as the density of it decreases and the neuropathways can begin to decline from irregular use (Key & Szabo-Reed, 2023). This impacts their memory function, ability to problem solve, and make decisions. However, Safien, et al. (2021) identified that mild cognitive decline can be slowed and, in some cases, reversed. Within their review of literature, they delved through different methodologies and their potential for helping the older adult. Safien, et al (2021) and Galassi, et al (2022) both identify psychosocial interventions to have the biggest impact on improving cognitive function, fostering self-esteem, enhancing social skills, enhancing emotional processing, and reducing stress. The psychosocial method that became prominent within the research by both literature reviews was the use of art therapy. Art therapy can engage the older

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adult while also introducing therapeutic methods to help foster a safe space for other skills to be developed (Safien, et al., 2021; Galassi, et al., 2022).

Finding Self and Community with Age

Self

As previously addressed, older adults face the realities of physical decline with age. Before physical decline is identified as disability it is considered frailty (Robinson, Gogniat, & Miller, 2022). The effect frailty has on an older adult is the weight of knowing that they are changing and losing pieces of their functional independence. The weight of these changes negatively impacts the self-esteem of older adults and causes them to lose sight of who they are and what they are capable of. As frailty develops, the older adult's ability to carry out activities of daily living declines and they may no longer be able to complete tasks like driving, grocery shopping, fulfilling medical instructions, etc (Salthouse, 2012). As the older adult leaves their residence less and less, they start to become socially isolated and become distant from their support systems. As a result, they can see the decline of their mental health, their physical and cognitive health, and their quality of life.

While social isolation negatively impacts the individual, it can also be an indicator of valuing self with age. Tornstam's (1999) theory of gerotranscendence indicates that older adults become more selective in who they spend time with as they work towards making meaningful relationships. This includes their relationship with themselves. As Stephenson (2006) addresses, working with visual arts is a successful way to empower frail older adults and spark further growth in their creativity. The empowerment of the individual can help them to recognize their own strengths and how those strengths have carried them through to their old age. The

incorporation of art making has been identified as helping to guide older adults to building a meaningful relationship with themselves.

Community

Along with building a strong relationship with self, it is also beneficial for older adults to build connections with others. This can be a time in an older adult's life where they are faced with the loss of many things including the people closest to them (Bandari, et al., 2019). The resulting loneliness of losing one's support system can be seen in isolation from others or feeling lonely even in the presence of others. It is challenging to build a meaningful community that supports and improves the older adult's quality of life. Without building a community, the older adult can develop mental health problems including depression and anxiety, develop cognitive impairment, have feelings of emptiness and abandonment, and increased frequency of visits to medical professionals (Mann, et al., 2017; Bandari, et al., 2019).

To counteract these issues from developing researchers, including Flatt, et al. (2015), recommend the inclusion of social activities in daily life. When older adults identify an activity they enjoy, they will find improvements in their cognitive health, enjoy feelings of leisure and productivity, increased self-expression, and identify meaningful social roles. The older person will be able to find within the social activity their role in the work which gives them the stepping stones to engage with others with increased ease. Pitkala, et al. (2011) identified in their research that creating group interventions designed to be socially stimulating including groups like therapeutic writing, group exercise, and art experiences were beneficial in building meaningful connections between group members. These groups were found to decrease feelings of loneliness and to reduce risks of additional health and cognitive issues.

Art Therapy

The incorporation of art in mental health counseling as a form of therapy has been around since the late 1930's (Galassi, et al., 2022). The American Art Therapy Association (AATA, 2024) describes art therapy as a form of ongoing treatment that engages the individual's mind, body, and spirit in ways that allow them to communicate and express themselves through the process of art making. This allows them to step outside of the constraints of verbal or written communication that may feel limited or restrictive to their lived experience. In more recent history, there has been growing research around the benefits it has for older adults especially as a psychosocial group intervention (Safien, et al., 2021). Galassi, et al. (2022) found that creativity and expression when given space would shift into self-expression, self-identity, and creativity. These three elements impact the attitude of the elderly individual allowing for them to reconceptualize their relationship with later life.

In Partridge's (2019) book, she breaks down art therapy with elders into three qualities: qualities of the space, qualities of the facilitator, and qualities of the older adults. With these three qualities, she addressed the need to take into consideration the environment where the art therapy will take place. It is important to create a safe space for the session to allow for authentic art making. The second quality discusses the role of the art therapist as a guide for the process, but also as a fellow artist. There needs to be a balance between gentle leading and being a peer within the process. The third quality stresses the importance of meeting the older person where they are and giving them the autonomy to make decisions about their art making. Partridge (2019) also discusses the importance of reminding the reader that the older adult should be given a voice in the process. They should be given the opportunity to guide the projects.

Crafts as a Form of Art Therapy

Historically, the way art therapy was understood and practiced was through the use of materials that would be associated with the fine arts including drawing utensils and paints (Park, Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2020; Moon, 2010). These art materials are the foundation of the field of art therapy. However, the label of “artist” and the cultural implications attached to these materials can be a hinderance towards the therapeutic work being done. In Leone’s (2020) book, she directly addresses this by introducing the concept of using crafts as a form of media for art therapy. By nature, crafting is a more approachable method as it is accessible, functional, and a skill often passed down through generations as opposed to learning the fine art skill in school or from a master. Craft as an art form also engages the sensory and kinesthetic application of art making as there is usually a three-dimensional aspect to the work. Additionally, Collier and von Károlyi (2014) identified that the tactile quality and the repetitive motion of crafts can improve mood and activate the individual’s flow state.

As a way of keeping a professional status in a world of occupational, recreational, and activity therapies, art therapy has tried to define itself with the art media being used in practice (Kaimal, Gonzaga, & Schwachter, 2016). However, there is a growing amount of literature showing evidence in support of crafting as a form of therapy that influences health and wellness. Some identified crafts in the literature include fiber arts (knitting, crocheting, sewing, quilting, weaving etc.), pottery, woodwork, glasswork, and origami (Leone, 2020; Kaimal, Gonzaga, & Schwachter, 2016). Crafting as a creative activity has been identified as being relaxing, a form of stress relief, helps with self-regulation, boosts positive moods, increases cognitive functioning, and leads to greater social communication (Kaimal, Gonzaga, & Schwachter, 2016).

Paper Crafts

Crafting as a media for art therapy can include a variety of interventions with one being paper crafts. Paper crafts could be folding paper or cutting and gluing paper together to create something new. There is limited research in the field of art therapy about using paper crafts with older people. However, when used with adults and adolescents, the results show the potential of paper crafts as an intervention. One method of paper crafting is paper folding also known as origami. When used with adults struggling during the COVID-19 pandemic, Bhattacharyya, et al. (2023) found that engaging in the activity created a physical outlet for the individuals to process their emotions and when done in a group setting helps build community and create space for collective healing. On the other hand, when origami was implemented with a group of adolescent girls, Edwards and Hegerty (2016) discovered in their research that the adolescents saw an improvement in coping with stress, depression, and anxiety. In addition, the authors found that the group setting allowed for a safe peer environment that gave space for building healthy relationships and seeking support from one another. Alternative to paper folding is being able to cut and glue paper together to make something. Baker (2020) found in an art therapy group she attended that the challenge of trying to build something with paper brought the group together to accomplish their goals. There was strength in numbers, and she left the group feeling strong and resilient.

Fiber Arts

Fiber arts as an intervention holds a lot of historical and cultural significance as it is a media that is passed down through generations as a form of self-expression and storytelling (Gaspar da Silva, 2023). It is a medium that builds communities out of the circumstances of life. Fiber arts is an umbrella term for many types of crafting including knitting, crocheting, weaving,

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quilting, sewing, embroidery, and more (Nartker, 2022; Ma & Zha, 2023; Gaspar da Silva, 2023). Researchers like Ma and Zha (2023) identified that the textile aspect of fiber arts engages a person's sense of touch drawing them into the warm, soft fiber as it brings on feelings of safety. In their research, they explored how working with different textured fabrics might affect mood and alter the benefits of artmaking. As a result, they learned that no matter the fabric, whether it be felt, wool, silk, or cotton, the individual would engage with their imagination and creativity and find that they felt more at peace within themselves and had decreased symptoms of mental health issues. On the other hand, Nartker (2022) worked with older adults in a group setting and found that the use of knitting, crocheting, and quilting helped to reduce stress and helped individuals to cope with illness and unresolved grief. Ultimately, the group felt more connected and experienced joy and confidence through their work. Nartker's (2022) study also showed that these activities were mentally stimulating and supported cognitive functioning.

Clay Work

Working with clay is a tactile experience that engages the whole body in the work whether it is throwing pottery on the wheel, hand building with coils or slabs, or extruding pieces of clay to manipulate (Fortuna, 2021). The process is hands on and can be intimidating to approach, however, once engaged creates a natural flow of creativity that allows the individual to engage wholly in the process of creating from within themselves (Rankanen, et al., 2022). The connection to self is deeply profound. Former art therapist, Ron Hays, used clay work after retirement as a way to deal with his rapidly declining cognitive health (Jones & Hays, 2016). He noted that through his art making he was able to prolong his memories and cognitive ability, while effectively grieving and coping with his strong emotions. In other words, he believed that working with clay gave him a sense of purpose to his life that was rapidly changing due to his

progression of dementia. Alternatively, when using clay work with older adults in a group setting, the group members reported feeling they were able to express their important thoughts and feelings through their own imagination and the manipulative quality of the clay (Bae & Kim, 2018). In both individual and group work, clay work allowed for a discovery of oneself, improved emotional control, improved mental health, improved mood, increase in coping with stress, and improved ability to make decisions and problem solve (Bae & Kim, 2018; Rankanen, et al., 2022).

Expressive Therapies Continuum

A framework for understanding art therapy and more specifically crafting as a media is the Expressive Arts Therapy Continuum (ETC). The ETC was developed by Kagin and Lusebrink in the 1970's and was later built upon by Hinz (2020). The framework lays out a structure for studying the effects of art making on an individual. It is split into two columns with three levels in each. The column on the left side covers the functions of the left hemisphere of the brain that is processing information with organization and logic. The three levels on this side include kinesthetic, perceptual, and cognitive. On the right side of the columns, it covers the right hemisphere of the brain which is processing information with emotion and intuition. The three levels in the right column are sensory, affective, and symbolic. As an individual makes art, they can move through the different sides and levels. The individual can also reach a state of creative flow by moving through the framework.

When the ETC was designed, it took into consideration Piaget's stages of cognitive development of children and not the cognitive, physical, and emotional development of an older adult (Stephenson, 2021). In a chapter of Stephenson's (2021) book, she conceptualizes the idea of changing Piaget's stages into three alternative stages that match the development of an older

population: motivation, connection, and identity/legacy. These three concepts bring about a new way to understand how older adults are impacted by art making and correlates more directly to the therapeutic goals set for this population. In particular, these concepts can help an art therapist witness the growth within an older adult as they are able to find engagement in the challenge of art making (motivation), build up connections with others (connection), and identify who they are and their strength in aging (identity/legacy) (Stephenson, 2021; Stephenson, 2006).

Method

An art therapy intervention plan was implemented at an independent living facility for older adults aged 62 and older in the Boston area. The plan included four group activities that would take place over six sessions that would last from 90 to 120 minutes. The four art interventions that were presented were based on interests and hobbies residents who had been coming to the weekly art group had shared in previous sessions. These hobbies were reintroduced as art activities that met the residents where they were in their ability and cognitive level. The hobbies selected reflected interests in reading, paper crafts, cooking/baking, and textile crafts including sewing, embroidery, crocheting, knitting, needlework, latch hooking, and quilting. Many of the older adults reported inability to continue or reduced dedication to the activity due to struggles with the media as their body aged causing some reduced functioning. As a result, each of these hobbies was presented to the residents in a new way that met their ability and the overwhelming interest of the residents to try new activities. With each activity, the residents were invited to explore their identity and to be creative with their art making.

Setting

The group art therapy sessions took place in the multi-purpose room where the doors were kept open, inviting anyone who was interested to join. The multi-purpose room was located

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in a central part of the building inviting the community to join any group activities taking place. The group needed to remain open to anyone interested in joining so that no one in the building felt excluded and had opportunities to build connections. However, the older adults living there are active outside of the building and may not have time to spend on in-house programming. Some individuals still worked, visited relatives and friends, went to appointments, decided to go out for the day to shop or go out to eat. The building was set up to provide affordable living for older adults including offering subsidized apartments to individuals identified as low income or really low income by the government.

Materials

Each art directive required a different set of supplies with the exception of one consistency, a wooden canvas that would be used to create a frame, a home for each artwork. Given the variety of interests expressed by the group members that were being taken into consideration in the formation of the group series resulted in a range of materials. For the first intervention, the materials included were pages torn out from a book, magazine, and old calendars, glue sticks, scissors, and the additional option of using watercolors. The second intervention brought forth a different set of supplies as the group worked with felt. In addition, for this intervention was the inclusion of scissors, pencil/pen, scrap paper and two ways of securing the piece together: hot glue or sewing thread and needle. The third art intervention included foam board, sewing pins with a ball head or corsage pins, embroidery thread or low weight yarn, and scissors. An additional option for this activity was adding a background to cover the foam board which could be something made by the group or scrapbooking paper. The fourth intervention brought in some kitchen ingredients including flour, salt, oil, water, food

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coloring, bowl, spoon, and any measuring utensils needed. With the resulting mix, clay tools were used to assist with sculpting.

Participants

A total of 5 residents engaged in the art therapy sessions with 3 residents attending the group for all four interventions. The other two residents attended a single session. The ages of the residents ranged from 62 to 95 years old. All participants lived in the same building with all except one living in subsidized apartments. All of the participants were women who had previously attended art therapy groups and art classes at the site and at an adult day care program. From these five participants, four were Caucasian and one was Asian American. Four of the participants had attended my art therapy groups and as a result I already had rapport built with each of them in advance to running this intervention series. The group was open attendance for anyone who lived in the building to join which allowed for any resident to stop into the group including the fifth participant who joined for a session. The residents who joined this group were known for being active in the community and seeking ways to engage with other residents and build up a sense of community. Additionally, the three participants who attended each session were dedicated to joining any kind of arts and crafts groups available to them and were always looking to try something new and enjoyed being challenged by the process.

Procedure

All materials were gathered before the session and set up at a rectangular table with six chairs in place for residents to join. Each of the interventions was introduced with a sample the week before per the residents' request. I found this to be a good idea as it gave them time to process what the intervention entailed and to brainstorm ideas for the prompt put in place to help

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promote creative thinking and original ideas. At the beginning of each session, the sample was brought out and the procedure walked through. This was done as a reminder, but also to allow any new participants to understand the project. The participants would be given the opportunity to ask any questions or voice any concerns they had. The group would then go around and talk through what was inspiring them for the activity and what they wanted to accomplish in their art making. If the intervention required any learning steps, the group would walk through them together and then they would be able to take their own ideas and bring them to fruition.

Data Collection and Analysis

The method was tracked in three ways: reflective journaling, taking notes of observations and qualitative feedback from the residents, and creating before and after artwork as a form of reflection on the process. Before each session, I would create a sample art piece that would show my expectations for the project and how I saw the process going: this was my before artwork. Having worked with these residents previously and seen their capacity for creativity and going beyond the prompt, I decided that I would have a lot to learn about the process from them. Therefore, I created after pieces to show how my own conceptions of the work were changed and as a way to visually reflect what both the group members and I gained from the artmaking done in session. After each session, ten minutes were taken to write down initial observations and quotes from the group members. Later in the day, I would take time to reflect on these initial notes and write down more thoughts about the process in a journal. This process would help me to witness the unexpected trends within the work and see where the group had been successful and where there was room for change and growth.

Results

Intervention One: Book Flowers

Figure 1

Before: Art Sample for Book Flowers



Intervention Description

The main therapeutic goal for this session was to build connections between group members and have them re-identify the uses for materials. In order to accomplish this, I identified two common interests in the group members: reading and gardening with a specific affinity towards flowers. With limited space at the site for residents to garden, bringing in a way to build a garden or even a bouquet without the eventual wilting and decomposing of the flowers would give them satisfaction as well as a new skill to continue practicing. As a way to bring in the affinity for reading, I brought in a book that had been falling apart and pulled out pages for the members to use. In addition, I brought magazines to include color and help draw in any members who were less avid readers.

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At the beginning of the session, I introduced the project by showing the group members five different flowers that could be made out of paper and how the flowers could then be arranged in a wooden frame to different effects (see Figure 1). The group members were invited to pick up the flowers and explore the different shapes and types of flowers and then share which ones they were drawn to and were interested in making. With the decision made on the order of which flowers they would learn to make, the group moved forward into the creation process. I helped walk them through instructions on how to make the flowers, but left room for the creativity of the members to come through in their choice of paper, size of the paper, and making as many of any type of flower as they liked. The group members were able to learn how to make all five flowers at their request and as a result the project would last two sessions.

Figure 2

After: Art Reflection for Book Flowers



Observations

The observation most prevalent in the group was the rippling of excitement of the members trying something new, something they had not previously done. This would become a

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theme across all the projects presented. During the exploration of the flowers, the group broke out into conversations about flowers and which ones they liked. They were able to identify this small part of themselves and then share it with the other members creating a rich conversation about their significance to them. The connection between the members was evident and when it came time to pick the first flower to learn they unanimously voted for the same one. During the creation process, the group members expressed feeling challenged, but found it to be stimulating and engaging. When working with older adults, it is important to create a balance between challenge leading to focus and engagement versus challenge leading to frustration and disengagement (Majeski & Stover, 2019). This was a balance I strived for in all the activities since most of the members who would attend the groups had attended at least two beforehand giving me an expectation of skill and cognitive level.

At the end of the first session, the group had learned how to make two flowers and asked to learn the other three flower designs the following session. It was agreed on by the group to continue the work into the next session. What had not been anticipated was two of the group members choosing to work on making more flowers between the two sessions. When they came in for the second session, the engagement of the residents even post session was not something I had been intending to happen, but indicated to me the benefits of using interests to spark a continuation of building the neuropathways from learning something new and reinforcing it. With the flowers already made, the group was ready to try new techniques for making flowers. The remaining three designs ranged in the level of interest the members had in adding them to their final piece, but there remained an interest in learning to make them regardless. By the end of the second session, the group members were putting their bouquets of flowers together in their frames and were ready to glue them down. Each person created a different design inside their

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frames ranging from only a few flowers to flowers crammed together filling the space completely. In my own reflection of the work, I chose to use the two most popular flowers that appeared in each group members' final piece (see Figure 2). Their careful deliberation of color choice, aesthetic, and placement was mimicked so that I could understand how they were experiencing the process. I was able to understand that the group members were working within the left side of the ETC and were processing the art making very logically.

The group members were able to create completely unique finished products despite learning the same building techniques together. The room for creativity in the group creates a welcoming environment for new ideas. However, I did wonder if I presented too many ideas for the group by bringing in five flower designs. Given the group extended into a second session in order to learn all of them, it creates the potential for an extended project that could last several sessions with more flower designs being brought in and potentially learning leaves as well. It is important to know the group and what they are able to accomplish in the given time frame, which for this group was two hours each session. Some older adults might become overwhelmed with too many options especially if there is any cognitive dysfunction like dementia impacting the brain's ability to function. Knowing when too many options were provided and also the difficulty level of the paper craft are important aspects to note during this activity.

Intervention Two: Layered Felt

Figure 3

Before: Art Sample for Layered Felt

***Intervention Description***

The main therapeutic goal for the second activity was to promote exploration of their self-identity through identifying things and hobbies that they enjoyed and wanted to highlight in an art piece. The second goal was to challenge their mindset about how art is made by reversing how they saw images in order to cut out less and less pieces out of the felt. This project was an opportunity to use an activity they enjoyed which was textile arts with the presentation of the option to include embroidery in their process. Many group members used to embroider, do needle point, and cross stitch. This was presented into the activity by having group members take their layers of felt and sewing them together. However, it also gave them a chance to embrace other parts of themselves that were individual to them whether it be an athletic hobby or tapping into symbols that felt representative to them.

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I presented the project the session before we were going to start, in order to give space for members who would need time to process what the art making entailed and to think about what they would like to explore in their art making. I showed the group a sample of the project and used paper to demonstrate how the layers worked (see Figure 3). I then handed out sheets of paper for the group members to practice and sketch on between the group sessions. Additionally, I explained to the group that they would only be doing three or four layers so the images should be simplified to that many colors. The next week at the beginning of the session, I went over the process again using the felt to explain how the different layers came together to create an image. The group members were able to ask any questions before they started and during each step to feel secure in the process. The group members would sketch the image on each piece of felt and then cut it out from the middle leaving a peephole that would show the color underneath it. The bottom layer of the piece was left uncut and created the base for the image. The group worked on this project across a session and half of the next one in order to finish.

Figure 4

After: Art Reflection for Layered Felt



Observations

The group was intrigued by this activity. Each of the members had never seen this done before and were interested in trying it. Going into the first session, one of the members had used the time between sessions to figure out how to use the layers to make her image and brought a paper version of what she wanted to do. Two of the group members had worked on sketching out their ideas, but needed assistance figuring out the layers of color and how they would make their image. During this session, a fourth person joined the group, this individual came into the session not knowing what the project was, but was interested in trying out the art group. I went over the project with her a couple of times and helped with planning her image. Each person chose to create different imagery based on their interests with one being a hobby and the others being aesthetic imagery that held deeper meaning to them. Each group member talked briefly about the significance in their work and each of the group members had an opportunity get to know each other better.

As the group worked, each group member would need one on one assistance to ask questions and double check they understood what they needed to do before starting. I went around the group and assisted them one by one giving them each time to feel comfortable before moving on. Each member was able to make significant progress on their work with two being almost done and two being about halfway through the work at the end of the first session. The second session, everyone was able to finish cutting out the felt. At this time, I offered them to be able to use glue to secure the felt together or they could sew around the edges to bring them together. The members decided to use glue as many of them had found the process overwhelming and wanted the final steps to be an easier process. This indicated to me that the intervention was made up of two activities instead of one. The group members would have to

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agree to work on the project again in a following session in order to complete the sewing component.

Everyone was able to complete the project with the layering of the felt appearing different depending on each group member's image. The group's tendency toward creativity shown through. In my reflective art making, I tried to slow down the process and create a simplified design that was easier to process (see Figure 4). I realized that in order to allow the group to be creative in this process it would have to be a less cognitively challenging experience. Understanding how the layers of felt came together to create the image was difficult to understand and I had to give a lot of guidance on what to do and each of them trusted me to tell them what they needed to do. This puts a lot of pressure on the person leading the group to be able to think about everyone's project and help them where they were. I knew the project would be the most challenging to figure out and maybe it is a little too much for this population without finding ways to simplify it. One way it might have run a bit smoother is by having simple images all ready for the group members to cut out instead of working with their own hand drawn images that held many details. This does have the potential to stifle the group's creativity. I would recommend being very mindful of the group's cognitive functioning before running this project as one member found it to be frustrating and was unhappy with how their art piece was looking at the end of the first session.

Intervention Three: String Art

Figure 5

Before: Art Sample for String Art

***Intervention Description***

The therapeutic goal for the third intervention was to look inward and reflect on who they are and find a symbol to represent this deeper meaning of themselves. With this intervention, the group was being asked to focus on themselves and foster their sense of self-identity and find confidence within their identity. To create their symbol of self, the facilitator decided to bring in the group's affinity for fiber arts again, but this time focusing more on the manipulation of thread and yarn. The group members had discussed how each of them had knitted, crocheted, weaved, or latch hooked at some point in their lives and had really enjoyed it. These hobbies had required a lot of careful fine motor skills and good eyesight to complete. Many of them had phased out this pastime because of arthritis, having trouble seeing what they were doing, etc. I decided to take the materials yarn and embroidery floss to make string art as it is a similar idea, but would be more accomplishable with their limitations.

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During the second week of making the layered felt project, the group had finished halfway through the session, so I introduced the string art activity. I showed the group a sample of the activity along with pictures of other designs to show the group the possibilities within the project (see Figure 5). Additionally, the different pictures showed the group members that how they wrapped the string around the pins created different effects. After showing the group, I had the members sketch out their ideas and pick out background paper to cover the foam that was glued into the wooden frames. I had them stop at this point so they would all be able to move on to the next steps together the following week. During the second week, the group had the whole session to put the pins into their foam and then weave the yarn around them. I demonstrated both of these steps to the group before they started.

Figure 6

After: Art Reflection for String Art



Observations

String art as an activity became a popular craft for parents to do with their kids a few decades ago and many of the group members talked about doing this with their kids or having

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watched their children do this. This connection to their kids led to conversations about their children and their own childhoods. The engagement in the conversation and excitement about the activity resulted in a buzz in the room creating an atmosphere of playfulness and joy. The members were invested in the process and each member approached it with a different goal to their process. For example, one group member decided to also add the element of spirographs to her work as she had enjoyed doing those in her childhood. The intervention was well received and following the group other members in the community who had not been at the group wanted an opportunity to do the activity. The perception of the activity easily could have been conceived as childish, but instead there was a genuine childlike response in seeing a cool activity they wanted to try.

Between the two sessions for this intervention, the members expressed that they could not wait to keep working on it and wanted to be able to move on to the next step. I reminded them that they were doing the project as a group and it would not be fair to the other members for someone else to move ahead in the project. The group members honored the boundary and the start of the second session was an anticipated event with everyone ready to get started. The second session also brought a new member to the group. This member required some assistance in setting up, but was able to follow all the steps. Upon finishing the project this group member reported that it was a wonderful experience since she felt she could not create any more due to her low vision. With everyone's finished pieces together on the table, I was able to see the group interconnected and strung together in their love of creating, helping each other, and sharing their playful joy in the process. In my reflective art piece from this intervention, I wanted to show this energy, so I made five circles that create a circle together (see Figure 6). To me the circles appear to move and rotate together as they can work together and build each other up.

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When deciding to do this intervention, I had no idea the group would respond so positively to the project. Everyone in the group was interested in doing it again so they could push their creative process. Community members who saw the completed pieces were interested in joining the group and asked if it would be offered again. If I were to run it again there are a couple things that could make it an even easier process including offering pins with more than the pearly white heads. Something darker would be easier to see for residents with low vision which is something I wish I had for the resident who joined the group as she struggled with seeing the pins while putting them in. It became a bit of a safety concern as I worried, she would accidentally poke herself trying to pick up the pins. Another change I would make now knowing the popularity of the activity is to give them a bigger foam board to work with. The limited space in the wood frames created a control for not designing anything too complicated, but I think if I run the group again, I would offer a slightly bigger space for them to work in.

Intervention Four: Play Dough

Figure 7

Before: Art Sample for Play Dough



Intervention Description

The fourth intervention was an opportunity for reminiscence and finding a memory or a place that holds special meaning for the group members. A part of who the older adults are lies in their present lives and who they identify as, but there is also who they have been and what brought them to where they are today. The therapeutic goal for this intervention was to use reminiscence as a way to see their growth as a way to foster their self-identity and self-confidence by recognizing their potential for change. I introduced the concept of this intervention the session before so the group members would know what to expect as well as have time to think about it. I told the group they would be making their own play dough from ingredients found in the kitchen. The hobby that inspired this project was group members talking about fond memories around cooking and baking and moments they had with their family in the kitchen.

I was recreating this experience for them by making a dough that could be molded and shaped like clay to create a 3-dimensional image of a memory or special place. During the session, I laid out the ingredients as well as the recipe for the members to follow. In addition, I brought gloves and model magic as a back-up in case anyone was averse to the messy nature of mixing the dough or the texture it had. I showed them the sample and explained the process for making the dough and how they would shape it into the wooden frames by laying down plastic wrap (see Figure 7). With a base layer applied into the frame it would be possible to build the image up from there.

Figure 8

After: Art Reflection for Play Dough

***Observations***

The group was receptive to trying to make the play dough, however, when they saw the model magic they asked if they could use it instead. Two of the three group members had used model magic before at the site and had enjoyed the process. They wanted to be able to use it again. Upon hearing what the others said and having some apprehension about the texture of the dough, the third member also decided to try the model magic. The members proceeded to roll out the model magic or smoosh it into the wooden frames to create their bases. I showed them a couple methods for building the image using ceramic methods including coils, embossing tools to press into the model magic, cutting out shapes from slabs, etc. The group members were quiet during the group as they were engrossed in the creation process. I believed that within their silence they had entered a flow state where they were so engaged in the process they forgot about their surroundings and allowed their creativity to lead the process.

One of the group members also discovered the colors could be mixed together and became creative with her use of mixing colors and creating solid colors and marbled colors for her image. The other two group members wanted to add paint embellishments to their piece. They felt that paint would be able to capture the effect they were looking for. One was looking to add specific details to the elements of her image and the other wanted to create a blended flow of colors that would capture the movement she was hoping to portray. Due to the request to use paints, the group would work on the project again the following session, but the addition of paint was not considered in the results as it switches out of the realm of crafts and enters the fine arts.

There was some disappointment that the group did not want to make the play dough and the use of the model magic might not reflect the full intention of the intervention. However, the group was able to engage fully with the activity and were able to connect to the intention of exploring their past that makes them who they are. Being able to share these special moments, memories, and places allowed the group to share parts of themselves with each other that they had not previously discussed. For example, the group talked about favorite vacation spots that people had traveled to and how the sensation of doing an activity can be special. I was able to see the group have fun and explore a fun side of themselves that brought them joy and elements of whimsy that is a wonderful thing to bring out of the older adults through their artwork. In my reflection of the art project, I saw the importance placed on experiencing life and how these memories can build bridges to other people's own experiences. When trying to recreate the intervention through the group's process, I focused on the environment and how it builds multiple moments for different people instead of the individual experience I had depicted in my original sample (see Figure 8).

Discussion

When creating this intervention series, I was exploring the question: how can art therapy interventions based on the group's interests lead way to building community, creativity, and identity? In order to answer this question, I conducted a thematic analysis of the data I collected across these six sessions. From this data I revealed four themes: 1) the challenge of something new, 2) building neuropathways, 3) finding wonder, curiosity, and play, and 4) window to the person.

The Challenge of Something New

With age comes a full life of trying new things and developing interests and hobbies out of the new. However, with age also comes the possibility of losing the ability to pursue those interests and hobbies. For my interventions, I explored what would happen to give a tug on these strings of old hobbies and interests and seeing how they could be reformed into something new to try, and to give them the opportunity to take what they know and remold it into something they can still pursue. Majeski and Stover's (2019) research discusses how expressive arts have the potential to build resilience in older adults. By facing challenges and overcoming the functional and cognitive limitations to complete the task, they are able to build their resilience. According to these authors, having resilience characterizes strengths in meaning making, emotional regulation, improved cognitive functioning and wellbeing, and enhances positive emotions. The enhanced positive emotions creates bridges to making sense of self, being engaged, making connections with others, and build coping skills.

With the four interventions that I ran, I saw the potential of bringing in previous interests in a new way was very engaging for the residents. I was also hoping to challenge the group

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members. By using something familiar they would feel some comfortability in the task, but using it in a new way that challenges them while still meeting their ability level. Each of the group members expressed how the interventions were challenging and how they enjoyed the opportunity to problem solve and learn something new. Between the two sessions for the first intervention, residents were practicing their new skill of crafting paper flowers. They enjoyed the process and wanted to keep engaging in it. Their excited engagement was also evidently seen in the members' desire to continue to work on the string art between sessions. The group members were being challenged by each of the projects and each challenge was an invitation to them to find themselves in something new and familiar. Being challenged together united them as they found success together. The group members were finding new strengths within themselves while creating art that was meaningful to them.

Building Neuropathways

Within the interventions I ran, I was able to take note of moments where I saw the group members wanting to continue the work and keep practicing the skills learned outside of the group. It was seen in making flowers between sessions. Additionally, when one of the group members worked on figuring out how to create the felt layers before we started the intervention. Seeing the member bring in a paper sample of how the layers would work to build up her desired image and being able to confirm that she had done the layers correctly was a moment of amazement for me and a boost of self-confidence for her as she had spent time trying to understand how it worked. The group members taking time outside of the sessions to practice or continue their work shows their engagement in learning and the effort they were putting into building the pathways in their brain so that they can learn a new activity.

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Beyond the group learning new skills, they are also able to practice old ones and, in the process, maintain neuropathways by activating that area of the brain. During the string art intervention, one resident was reminded of the process of making spirographs as a kid and thought the process of weaving the yarn string around the pins could recreate this effect. She was trying something new, but she did so while continuing to employ knowledge that she already had. This shows that she was using the neuropathways she already had to build new ones. Another example was the group members seeing the Model Magic and being instantly drawn into wanting to use it for the project. The group had used this material before and wanted the opportunity to use it again. The ability to use it again was reactivating their neuropathways that were built on the previous experience using Model Magic a year before. However, the connection went further back into their life experience by going back to times when they had used Play-Doh as kids or with their kids.

When aging, the brain's plasticity level can become rigid and the brain's ability to build and maintain neuropathways declines. Rueter-Lorenz and Park (2014) developed the Scaffolding Theory of Aging and Cognition to explain the effects neural aging has on cognitive function with considerations for both structural and functional brain variables. The brain's cognitive function is declining, however, despite the rigidity it still has the ability to access memories and build neuropathways for the newly developed knowledge. This requires a longer period of practice and repetition in the learning process in order to build a secure connection in the brain that can continue to be accessed. In general, Rueter-Lorenz and Park believe that there remains the potential to reverse some of the effects of aging and improve the brain's ability to process information and memory function. I was able to see some of these effects during the art making

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process as the group members were taking time to learn, practice, and build upon memories of skills they already possessed.

Finding Wonder, Curiosity, and Play

Over the course of the four interventions, the group members were able to explore and have fun in their process of art making. I got to watch as the group members moved around the ETC as they worked as it suited their process of creativity (Hinz, 2020). They were able to spark conversations and play throughout and created strong bonds between them as they came together to create. Saliba and Barden (2021) identified playfulness as the ability to frame or reframe an everyday situation to bring entertainment, mental stimulation, and engage a personal interest in the situation. One intervention that was particularly impactful was the string art. Many of them had watched their kids do this activity, but had not done it themselves. They talked about their children and childhood and through the process of connecting with the younger versions of themselves they allowed themselves to play. They had fun with the designs and were interested in creating meaningful symbols that represented them. One group member asked if they could make a spirograph with their string art, an activity they used to love doing. I assisted them with setting up their circle with pins, but they knew the process already of how to create the same effect as a writing utensil on paper. She was letting curiosity guide her process.

Another activity that sparked a lot of playfulness was the play dough activity. The group members were all familiar with Play-Doh. Despite the group using model magic the texture and manipulation of it was the same. The group joked and laughed as they began talking about all the different tools one could use like the extruder that made “hair.” They were becoming playful in their work. There was also an element of wonder as they realized they could mix colors and add color with markers. The group members experimented and let the process take them along for the

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journey. As they worked the conversation eventually stopped as each entered into a flow like state as they focused on the work. They were able to find a balance along the ETC that allowed them to fully emerge into art making. They were creating on their own without needing extra assistance from me as they worked. The group was able to experiment together and reframe the idea that the media was for children and made it a fun experience for them to play with.

Over the course of all four interventions, I was able to watch as their confidence in their ability grew. They relied less heavily on my support and direction to help them complete their artwork. The roles transitioned away from me as an art teacher and them as students, they were coming into their own artistic identity where they could feel confident in their work and recognize their strengths in the process of making art. Tornstam (1999) identified gerotranscendence as a process as elders age they are able to better understand themselves and can release old roles they held onto that no longer serve them. I was able to see over the sessions as the group members were able to release their roles as students and become a community of artists working towards similar goals with their own levels of creativity. They had built a meaningful community through connections and shared experiences.

Window to the Person

During my work with the group members, it was important to me to see the individual first and challenge my thoughts about what aging means. Interacting with the group members over several months allowed me to get to know them and understand how the aging body had changed what they could accomplish, but not the spark, the drive to accomplish whatever they set their minds to. Using the person-centered approach gives room for seeing the older adult for who they are within their environment and what you can do to support and enhance their strengths and quality of life (Stephenson, 2021). By choosing to let the older adults' interests

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inform the path for the interventions, I was hoping to understand them, their strengths, resilience, and to help foster self-confidence and joy. I also got the chance to see how these hobbies and interests influenced their lives and continue to represent them.

I was inspired by Caroline Hyland's approach of using art to challenge the viewer to see the individual instead of the older adult and their diagnoses (Fortuna, 2023; Hyland, 2024). Hyland who had several relatives diagnosed with dementia set out to advocate for older adults and spread awareness about dementia. She accomplished this by publishing the book 'Can You See What I See.' Seeing Hyland take the stories of the older adults in her life and creating artwork that showed who they were had me start to consider how I could apply this with my art group. None of the group members had dementia, but they were still people who deserved to have their individuality seen through art making. I built the interventions so that when brought together they created a windowpane (see Figures 9 and 10). A window into their souls. A chance for them to see themselves.

When the older adults brought together the four wooden frames to assemble their windows, they had a lot to say about what they had accomplished. The group members talked about what it meant to see what they had made over the seven weeks creating together. Unprompted one of the group members started talking about how she saw herself in what she had made she saw bright colors that showed her bright energy. She saw her love for movement and being active. She talked about how she did not consider her work to be technically perfect, but it was done by her and showed who she was and that meant the most to her. Another group member discussed how they had not thought they would be able to complete all of the interventions and had surprised herself. She saw herself as a persistent and patient person. She was able to find her own strengths in making the four artworks. It was meaningful to hear their

experiences and understand how they saw themselves now after creating a window into themselves. In Stephenson's (2006) research, she identified that when art therapists are able to foster an environment of exploration and emotional growth through the art making then older adults are able to recognize their own strengths. This can help them feel empowered and will continue to seek more growth in their creative process.

Limitations

With the consideration of all the benefits of using hobbies and interests to formulate a series of interventions, there were some limitations. The group being run was an open group that only had three consistent participants. Therefore, there lacks representation for the larger population by having a small pool of participants. Additionally, within this group there was little diversity with the members being predominantly white presenting women. The interventions run for this group may not work with other groups with more diversity across gender and culture. With the individuals all being women, there is little implication on the effectiveness of doing a similar process with a co-ed or all male group. The interests and hobbies between the genders and the roles as parents might separate their ability to connect with the material or have the stories about making art with their children that stemmed from a few projects. Similarly for cultural differences it does not take into consideration differences in beliefs and practices around art making and crafts. I recognize that the interventions I chose to run were specific to the interests of the participants from prior work with them and may not be representative of the interests and hobbies of other older adults from different backgrounds.

Another way the group lacks diversity is the range of ability versus disability both physically and mentally. The group members ranged in their ability to follow along with an intervention, but in general consisted of older adults who were independent and capable of

completing the projects primarily by themselves. Additionally, these interventions took into consideration their cognitive levels and ability to understand and complete the activities. There needs to be more considerations within this method of intervention creation that experiment with adapting the work to individuals with different needs including vision loss, cognitive decline, Parkinson's, arthritis, etc. One of the adaptations that needs to be considered is the length of time each intervention needs. I believed each of the interventions would only take one session, however, for the majority of them they required two sessions to fully complete. I had not predicted the amount of time the group members would need to complete the interventions. As a result, I feel there needs to be more considerations into the time length of the activity and if it makes sense for the group to have it span multiple sessions. Along the same thought, there needs to be considerations for how long one session lasts. The sessions I ran were an hour and a half to two hours long. I knew the group members had the stamina to participate for that length of time. However, some older adults may not be able to participate for that length of time and the facilitator may not have the time in their schedule for a session that long.

Implications

Engaging older adults in art therapy and creative activities has been identified in multiple researchers' work to be beneficial for the population of older adults for a variety of reasons. My considerations of the members in my weekly art group led me to create interventions that were impactful to them. Each of these interventions will have different success levels in other settings, however, based on the feedback from the group these interventions worked for them. I suggest further exploration in how client considerations of interests and hobbies can create more or less of an impact on the clients. Finding new ways to engage older adults in the process of creation in hopes of giving them the therapeutic benefits of being creative and making art.

What other interests or hobbies could be engaged in an art therapy intervention? There is room to explore and make new discoveries on intervention building and how expressive arts can continue to benefit older adults. I also suggest further investigation on the benefits of creating artwork in pieces that can come together to create a bigger piece. I found at the end of the sessions of creating the four wooden frames that bringing them together was a powerful experience for the group members involved. Finding ways to piece together portions of their stories, of their life opened their eyes to what they are capable of creating and the powerful meaning the four pieces create when brought together.

Conclusion

Engaging older adults in interventions with materials they were already familiar with was an effective manner in which to grab their attention and get them to try using the material in a new way. A way where they are not held back by disability or age, but are encouraged to explore, find ways to be creative, and have fun. The older adults were able to share knowledge and find ways to continue the practice outside of the group sessions. They were able to create new hobbies for themselves expanding their sense of identity and self-confidence. These interventions created a community of older adults who wanted to try new things and be challenged and were able to grow stronger together, to see their strengths and how they carry them with them, and watch as they were able to find moments of whimsy and play within the art making process. I found in my work that not every older adult feels comfortable painting and drawing. However, that should not be a limiting factor to what art therapy can do. I hope to continue finding new methods of meeting older adults where they are to create interventions that allow them to feel seen and that help them to see themselves.

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Appendix

Figure 9

Before: Sample Windowpane



Figure 10

After: Reflection Windowpane



THESIS APPROVAL FORM

**Lesley University
Graduate School of Arts & Social Sciences
Expressive Therapies Division
Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Art Therapy, MA**

Student's Name: Kate Hunter

Type of Project: Thesis

Title: Peering through the Window: Engaging Older Adults in Different Art Media to Build Community and Find Identity through Play and the Challenge of Trying Something New

Date of Graduation: May 18, 2024

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

Thesis Advisor: Raquel C. Stephenson
