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The Impact of Healing Arts on Students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha

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The Impact of Healing Arts on Students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha

University Honors Program Thesis/Capstone/Creative Project

University of Nebraska at Omaha

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University of Nebraska at Omaha Honors Thesis Abstract

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Abstract

A recently emerging way to decrease stress of individuals is by practicing therapeutic art. The aim of this form of therapy is to provide a sense of expression and relief to individuals who suffer from constant anxiety and stress. Therapeutic art can be performed by a therapy session where an individual express themselves using art to communicate their thoughts and emotions. Since this form of therapy does not require artistic sense or skills, many individuals can benefit from it. Moreover, another form of this therapy is surrounding stressed individuals with calming art, such as photography, music, sculpture, and painting, etc. There are multiple research experiments that study the impact of therapeutic arts on different individuals. Therefore, this study was conducted to observe and analyze data collected from UNO students' responses to three different pieces of art by using survey questions during two time periods, the beginning of the semester and at midterms. This will allow to have a clearer understanding of the relationship of UNO student's stress and the influence of art therapy.

Introduction

Art is a diverse subject that evolved over time with humans. "What is art?" One might ask. As simple as this question may sound, there are a variety of answers on what is or what is not art. This is a topic that has constantly been discussed by individuals interested in the realm of

Art. For instance, in Paris, annual events were held to exhibit, observe, and discuss the artworks that are presented in what is known as the Salon. However, during the 19th century, the impressionist movement did not please some of the elites and critics of the Salon. As brilliantly described in Slavis's book "The Impressionists," he talked about how the impressionist movement had an influence on the future of art (Slavis, 2008). In modern times, critics and people do not view impressionism as it was viewed in the past, and it is regarded as a highly accepted form of art that is taught in schools. In the 19th century in Europe, impressionist art was a new form of art that did not focus on painting Greek and Roman mythology, as well as religious themes; on the other hand, the impressionist artists focused on painting the everyday life of people. Furthermore, it was rejected from the Salon because some critics at the time accused it of being unfinished, imperfect, and messy (Salvis, 2008). Similarly, in modern times, novel forms and styles of art are not accepted in society, similar to the French artist, Marcel Duchamp, who challenged the definition of art by changing the position of urinal and calling it a fountain (Judovitz & Duchamp, 2010). Duchamp's piece of art was declined when he submitted it to an art committee. He is one of the contemporary artists who have challenged the definition of art in the modern times. The author Nigel Warburton of the book "The Art Question," discusses arts of all forms and styles through the lens of art philosophers such as Civel Bell and R.G Collingwood, who explain and discuss the changing and redefining the definition and meaning of art (Warburton, 2002).

Despite the fact that art is viewed as a form of aesthetic expression solely, there are multiple functions of art. Definitely, art is used to decorate and beautify places and locations, however, art is culture, history, a source of income, and therapeutic. In addition, more work and educational institutions started incorporating elements of art into their buildings. For instance,

some college campuses invite their students to watch a play, live music, and go to the art building's student exhibition. All of these activities involve the element of art in them which is also a form of leisure and relaxation. Indeed, academic institutions are established to be a source of knowledge and opportunity, however the journey to acquire knowledge is rather stressfully challenging to students. The causes of stress may be developed due to a single or a combination of many factors, which could be challenging professors, difficult course materials, or personal problems, etc. Regardless of the factors that stimulate stress amongst university students, there are various ways for students to relieve their stress. As mentioned previously, Art can serve as a form of relaxation and leisure in addition to other ways to relieve stress, such as some to exercise at the gym, consume foods, socialize with friends, or meditate. Therapeutic art is a rising and an emerging way to decrease stress of individuals, including college students. The aim of this form of therapy is to provide a sense of expression and relief to stressed individuals. In a pilot study conducted by Kaimal et al in 2012, they focused on how art therapy would impact the levels of anxiety through measuring their cortisol levels, which is a steroid hormone that is related to stress. This study shows the positive impact art leaves on stressed individuals. Therapeutic art can be performed by a therapy session where an individual express themselves using art to communicate their thoughts and emotions (Kaimal et al., 2016). Since this form of therapy does not require artistic sense or skills, many individuals can benefit from it. In another interesting study by Sandmire et al., they have worked with participants and how art would have an influence on their anxiety. The experiment has shown positive influential impacts on the participants who suffered from anxiety.

In addition to studies' findings regarding how the different forms of how impactful art therapy is on individuals who are stressed and/or anxious, another form of this therapy is

surrounding stressed individuals with calming art, such as photography, music, sculpture, and painting, etc. (Case & Dalley, 2014). As an example, the Buffett Cancer Center building at Nebraska Medicine adds therapeutic art pieces in halls and waiting areas to give the sensation of comfort and support to its patients. The artists who have created this support and artistic environment for the patients at the center are Jun Kaneko, Dale Chihuly, and other artists listed in the UNMC website under Healing Arts. Similarly, at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), an activity called Destress Fest is held at the end of each semester, which includes activities that are efficient in making the students less anxious and stressed. The previous two examples both at UNO and Nebraska Medicine, show numerous benefits and rewards that impact the individuals exposed to therapeutic art. A similar approach to the Healing Garden in the Buffett Cancer Center is visiting museums as a form of art therapy. Opening doors of museums as places where people feel relaxed and calm has increased throughout the recent years (Treadon et al., 2006). There have been many experiments and research regarding the influence of art on people of different ages. A research conducted by Bennigton et al in 2016, the authors experimented on the psychological influence by visiting museums on the well-being of older adults. This reiterated the idea that Art Therapy can be through art making or being surrounded by art, as well as that people of different ages are influenced positively by art. In order to have a better understanding of the influence of the Therapeutic Arts on UNO students, a study will be conducted to analyze the results using statistical tests.

Thesis

As mentioned previously, the main purpose of the research is to discover more about how being surrounded by creativity and art would impact the mental health of students at UNO, such as stress and anxiety. Therapeutic art is a blooming field at UNO and there are many activities

that are provided to students at certain times during the semester. Additionally, art therapy can be used to treat not only stressed students but also other individuals who suffer from mental and physical health. Hence, this experiment will focus on observing and analyzing the collected data from UNO students' responses to three pieces of art made of different mediums by using survey questions during two time periods, the beginning of the semester and at midterms. The proposed hypothesis is that the responses of the students will show statistically significant change based on the time of the semester, which will reflect how the students respond to the artworks and stress. The level of significance will be measured through the Student's t-test alpha value of 0.05.

Methodology

Participants

For this study, the participants are UNO students from different buildings on campus. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the participants were provided the survey non-electronically; however, during the spread of the pandemic, the survey was given electronically. The participants were from different majors and class levels, which ensured the randomness of the participants selection. The number of participants is 56, for the first survey given, and the number of participants for the second survey is 86.

Procedure

UNO students were asked several questions through a survey, by using Survey Monkey, to observe three pieces of artwork, which have the same theme but different colors, shapes, or objects. Each artwork was made with a different medium. The demographic questions include their class level and major, as well as questions about what they liked and disliked about the artworks, how did it make them feel, and what piece of artwork would make them feel the most relaxed. The survey was given out at two different times of the semester. The first survey was

given out on February 19, 2020 and the second survey was given out on March 12, 2020. The survey given early in the semester where the students were presumably less stressed. Then the second survey with the same questions was given during midterms where students were presumably more stressed. Both surveys consisted of the same set and number of questions, which are six questions in total. The first three questions of the survey are demographic questions such as class standing, major, and preferred studying location on campus. The last three questions ask the students whether or not they like to have art, which presented artwork do they prefer the most, and what would they change about the drawing. Art Therapy. In order to measure if there's an impact on Art Therapy and students' stress, statistical analysis was used. The statistical test used to analyze the results is the Student's t-test. The level of significance will be measured through the Student's t-test alpha value of 0.05. Excel was used to perform analysis and statistical tests.

Results

As previously discussed, the two surveys that were given out at two different times of the semester were collected, as well as they were observed to have had varying results. As shown in Figure 3, the two surveys format and questions are shown. Furthermore, the two surveys have questions about the three attached artworks. The first question of both surveys is what their class is standing and two other demographic questions. The bar graph found in Figure 1, contains the total number of participants and their class standing. As depicted in the bar graph figure, the total number of participants for the first survey is 56 (in blue) and for the second survey it is 82 student participants (in orange). Additionally, the highest-class standing number in survey one is Seniors, and for survey two the highest standing class is Freshmen. In Figure 3, the number of participants for both surveys as well as their answer to the third question which is about whether

they prefer being surrounded with art while studying. The answers collected were organized in a table. For the first survey that was given out, the number of participants who answered 'Yes' were 56, and the number of students of survey 66 UNO student participants. From each survey and the three artworks, the most to least preferred were counted (Table 1). In survey 1, the most preferred artwork is artwork one, and in survey 2, the most preferred artwork is artwork 1 as well. Also, in this table, the statistical Student t-Test was performed. The statistical test result suggests that it is 0.001476.

Discussion

The three first questions of the 6 questions were demographic questions. For each survey, the student class standing varied drastically. In survey 1, the highest-class standing is seniors, whereas survey 2's highest class standing is freshmen. Due to the fact that the distribution of the survey differed because of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the class standing might have varied due to this fact. Furthermore, question two of the surveys asked regarding the major of the student participants. There were numerous different responses for this question, however, for survey 1 the highest majors are art related and survey 2's highest majors are biology related, such as bioinformatics. For the last demographic question, it asked the student participants to list what where they preferred to study. The responses varied based on each survey, but both had the Library and Milo Bail Student Center as the highest two places. These demographic questions helped to interpret the results and gave more information about the participants.

From the two surveys, we were able to obtain answers whether Therapeutic Art has an influence on students' stress. We have measured their stress through a statistical test called Student t-Test to find if there's a significant finding in from the collected survey responses. According to the test results, we were able to say that students at UNO show different responses

to art pieces which may be due to stress induced by the exam period. Hence, each artwork would work differently based on which one makes the students less stressed, and which one makes them calmer and more relaxed. As shown in Table 2, this table shows the statistical analysis of question 5 of the six questions in the survey that is ranking the preferred artwork and describing the reason why they liked it. The statistical t-test calculated by using excel was determined to be statistically significant. The value 0.001476 is less than the significance level 0.05 which means the null hypothesis is rejected. The student responses of each survey had varying responses on what was their preferred artwork. However, in the Table 2 that shows question 5 data table, the most preferred artwork was artwork 1. As stated in the results, it was found to be more favorable and relaxing in both surveys according to the students' responses. For question 4, which asked about the student if they find art to reduce their stress, in a yes or no format. In general, for question 4, more individuals found art to be helpful to reduce their stress levels. In survey 1, out of 56 participants, 52 said that being surrounded by artwork reduces their stress levels; and in survey 2, out of 86 participants, 66 mentioned that artwork reduces their stress levels (Table 1).

The analysis of the responses has helped to answer the thesis question regarding if art therapy has an influence on stress of UNO students at different times of the academic semester. The significant result of the statistical test emphasizes on the idea that stress increases during midterms, which can also be an indication that by being exposed to the artworks presented might have had an impact on the stress levels of the student participants. As previously discussed, the results varied based on the preference of the artwork. The survey responses were sometimes difficult to interpret due to the fact that the students understood the question in a different manner. This may have caused an error or misunderstanding of the question which could have resulted in impacting the survey responses. Another unexpected influence on the responses is the

COVID-19 outbreak which has caused a delay of distributing the surveys. Hence, in future studies, the survey question can be worded different to avoid misinterpretation of the questions.

Conclusion

The proposed hypothesis was to test whether therapeutic art has an impact on stress, specifically on UNO students. Hence, surveys were randomly distributed to student participants which asked about their demographics (i.e. class standing and major) and about the three artworks. The survey was distributed in two different time frames of the academic semester at UNO. The results have shown that the t-test was found to be statistically significant regarding question 5 data, which suggests that this could be due to stress induced by exams during midterms. Additionally, students have expressed their preference regarding which artwork they preferred the most. As stated previously, some of the limitations is that the students have interpreted the questions differently, which have resulted for the data analysis to be slightly difficult to analyze. Also, for future directions, the study could have been expanded to a longer time frame for better statistical results and analysis.

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Tables

UNO Student Participant Responses on Question 4

Answers	Survey 1	Survey 2
Yes	52	66
No	4	16

Table 1 UNO student participant responses on Question 4: Based on the location you have listed; do you think being surrounded by art reduces your stress levels? (art meaning paintings, sculpture, and colorful wall paintings, etc.). This table shows the statistical analysis of question 4 of the six questions in the survey. In survey 1, out of 56 participants, 52 said that being surrounded by artwork reduces their stress levels. In survey 2, out of 86 participants, 66 mentioned that artwork reduces their stress levels.

UNO Student Participant Student’s t-Test & Preferred Artworks

Preferred artwork	Survey 1	Survey 2
Artwork 1	28	37
Artwork 2	15	23
Artwork 3	13	22
<u>t-test=</u>	0.001476	

Table 2 UNO Student Participant Student’s t-Test & Preferred Artworks. This table shows the statistical analysis of question 5 of the six questions in the two surveys. The statistical t-test was calculated, and it was determined to be statistically significant.

Figures

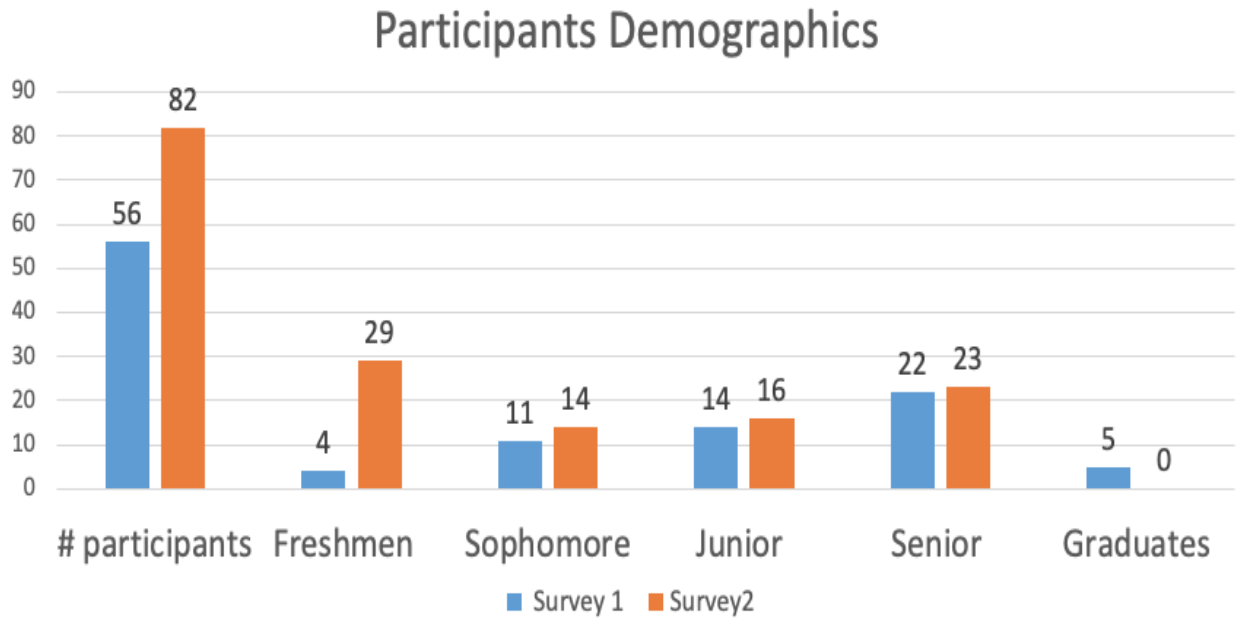


Figure 1 UNO Student Participant Demographics. This figure depicts the bar graph which shows the results of participants demographics of both surveys. The first survey has 56 participants (depicted in blue) and the second has 82 participants (depicted in orange). As shown in the graph, the total number of participants is presented as well as the class standing above of each bar graph.

The Three Artworks



Figure 2 The Three Artworks in The Survey Questions. This figure shows the three artworks used and are numbered on the top left. All artworks have a similar theme that is a book, a coffee mug, and scattered papers. The difference between them is the medium used. Artwork 1's medium is watercolors, artwork 2 is abstract, and artwork 3 is digital with soft colors.

The Survey Questions Format

Survey-HealingArt-2

Art Therapy Survey

Hello,

This survey is for my honors project thesis and it discusses the topic of Art Therapy, and how does it leave an impact on students' stress.

For this survey you will need the three images attached in the email for questions 5 and 6. Please address the three images with the numbers that they are labelled with in the top left corner (1, 2, and 3).

Thank you for taking the survey!

1. What is your class standing?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate Student

2. What is your major?

3. On campus, where do you like to study?

4. Based on the location you have listed, do you think being surrounded by art reduces your stress levels? (art meaning paintings, sculpture, and colorful wall paintings, etc)

- Yes
- No

5. Which of the three artworks you liked best (1, 2, or 3)? Briefly describe why?

*See attached images in the email. Answer based on the image number on the top left corner.

6. Briefly, how would you change one of the three artworks to your liking? (In terms of colors, shape, or style, etc)

*See attached images in the email. Answer based on the image number on the top left corner.

Figure 3 The Survey Questions Format. This figure shows the asked question and their format.

This format was used for both surveys that were distributed.