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Cultural Wounds Find Release: Art Therapy and First Generation Immigrants' Mental Health

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**Cultural Wounds Find Release: Art Therapy and First Generation Immigrants' Mental
Health**

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NURS 4100 Nursing Research and Senior Thesis

Professor Lynn Noyce

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Abstract

Background: First-generation immigrants in the United States confront significant mental health challenges rooted in cultural identity conflict. Specifically, these challenges are linked to elevated rates of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as indicated by Lindert et al. (2009). Art therapy holds promise as an intervention for treating mental health and identity conflicts in a variety of populations. Yet, little is known about how art therapy can improve the experience of first-generation immigrants experiencing cultural identity conflicts.

Objective: This study aims to assess the effectiveness of art therapy in improving the mental health and cultural identity conflicts of first-generation immigrants in the United States, a departure from conventional therapeutic strategies.

Method: The mixed-method study will involve 20 first-generation immigrants aged 18 and above who self-identify as experiencing mental health issues linked to cultural identity conflicts. For two months, participants will be attending eight art therapy sessions. To assess mental health symptoms and cultural identity, participants will complete the Symptom Checklist-90-Revised (SCL-90-R) and the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). A survey will be conducted pre-intervention and post-intervention to measure the effectiveness of the art therapy. In the qualitative portion of this study, the participants will be interviewed to gather more insight about their experiences. We will use inferential statistics to calculate the p-value. If the p-value is under 0.05, the results are considered statistically significant and not due to chance.

Hypothesis: Art therapy can enhance the mental health of first-generation immigrants with cultural identity conflicts.

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*Ink and canvas speak,
Cultural wounds find release,
Identity's art.*

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Cultural Wounds Find Release: Art Therapy and First Generation Immigrants' Mental Health

As of 2021, the United States is home to nearly 45.3 million immigrants, constituting approximately 13.6% of the total population (Ward, 2023). The process of adapting to life in a new country poses numerous challenges for immigrants, including language barriers, limited employment opportunities, and restricted access to healthcare services (NYS-IA, 2020). These challenges, often referred to as post-migration stressors, have significant adverse effects on the mental health of immigrants. Lindert et al. (2009) reported high rates of depression (35%), anxiety (28%), and PTSD (47%) among first-generation migrants (n = 24,051), primarily assessed through self-report tools such as the Hopkins Symptom Checklist and the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire. For comparison, the 12-month and lifetime prevalence of major depressive disorder in the adult U.S. population was 6.8% and 16.9%, respectively, and the 12-month and lifetime prevalence of any mental health disorder were estimated to be 32.4% and 57.4% in 2013 (NIMH, 2013). While these data are more than a decade old, the disproportionate burden carried by these immigrants persists. Moreover, external factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in border policies, and global political issues, have exacerbated the mental health challenges faced by immigrants. A concerning aspect is the reluctance of many immigrants to seek the mental health assistance they require.

Cultural identity encompasses a person's sense of belonging to a community with shared characteristics, which may include racial, ethnic, or geographical origins. Cultural identity significantly influences various aspects of daily life, including health-related behaviors (Unger, 2011). The process of acculturation involves individuals adapting to the society and culture of their host country, often leading to a detachment from their original cultural identity (Cambridge

Dictionary, n.d.). Cultural identity conflicts may arise when individuals experience an internal conflict related to the two cultures they are exposed to. Phinney et al. (2001) describe this as an "intrapersonal perception of incompatible cultural dimensions of the self." Groen et al. (2019) enrolled 57 Afghan and Iraqi refugee and asylum-seeker psychiatric patients in a mixed methods study that explored the relationship between cultural identity confusion and psychopathology. The researchers identified that the most commonly reported post-migration living problem (PMLP) was family separation. One interview described not being with family as "having no life at all." Family separation was strongly associated with more perceived psychosocial disconnection and less ability to cope with post-migration stressors. In the multivariate regression analyses, PMLPs emerged as the only statistically significant predictor for both PTSD and anxiety/depression ($p < 0.05$), even when accounting for various factors, with medium effect sizes (0.41 and 0.40, respectively), underscoring the substantial impact of post-migration stressors on mental health outcomes in this population (Groen et al., 2019). These findings indicate that post-migration stressors, including family separation, insecurity about the future, loneliness, health issues, and fear of being sent back, significantly predict the severity of PTSD and anxiety/depression among Afghan and Iraqi participants. The next step involves exploring interventions to effectively prevent and treat these mental health conditions.

Problem Statement

This study focuses on the disjunction between cultural identity and acculturation, particularly among first-generation adult immigrants residing in the United States. First-generation immigrants are individuals who were born outside the United States and have relocated for various reasons (Bureau, 2021). Mental and psychological challenges associated with immigration are under-discussed in healthcare. Disparities in the utilization of mental health

care services are observed among different ethnic groups, such as Latinos, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and African Americans, who frequently access mental health services at lower rates than national averages. A systematic literature search conducted by Amelia S. Derr (2015) revealed the unique migration-related stressors experienced by first generation immigrants can cause or exacerbate mental health issues. Because first generation immigrants access mental health care services at rates significantly lower than the general population, they are at a heightened risk for being untreated.

Healthcare providers, including nurses, must consider the holistic needs of the populations they serve. Even when patients are physically unwell, unresolved mental health issues can impede recovery. For example, Derr's systematic literature search found that only 6% of Asian and Latino immigrants had ever received mental health care, making them 40% less likely than U.S.-born participants to access services (Derr, 2015). Concerns arise when mental health professionals lack adequate training to comprehend and address the unique cultural experiences and challenges faced by immigrants.

Current interventions for mental health problems resulting from acculturation often include support groups and psychotherapy, with cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) being a prominent approach. CBT is a structured, goal-oriented form of psychotherapy that focuses on identifying and altering negative thoughts and behaviors (Cleveland Clinic, 2022). Art therapy, combined with CBT, has shown promise as an effective intervention, allowing individuals to express their inner thoughts and emotions while enhancing self-understanding through artistic expression. While there is little research illustrating the impact of art as a monotherapy for first generation immigrant adults, Lee et al. (2015) found in their qualitative study that this intervention helped children in South Korean immigrant families newly residing in the United

States navigate the complexities of cultural identity conflicts (Lee et al., 2015). The American Art Therapy Association highlights the main functions of art therapy, which include fostering self-esteem and self-awareness, reducing internal conflicts and distress, and building emotional resilience. Art therapy has primarily been used with children, but its effectiveness in addressing the challenges of acculturation among first-generation adult immigrants remains unexplored (Lee et al., 2015).

Research Question

The research question for this study is as follows: How does art therapy, as an intervention, influence levels of psychological distress and connection to cultural identity among immigrant adults in the United States?

Hypothesis

We hypothesize that culturally sensitive art therapy will improve the mental health of first generation immigrants facing cultural identity conflicts in the US, as indicated by reduced psychological distress and increased cultural identity post-art therapy.

Literature Review

The purpose of this research review is to connect the ways in which art therapy has aided different populations in improving their mental health and sense of self. By illustrating the impact of art therapy on these populations, this review hopes to aid the reader into understanding the correlation between mental health and cultural identity for first generation immigrant adults in the US. The information in this literature review was retrieved from Google Scholar, Iceberg, and PsycArticles. Keywords used to search for the six articles included: “art therapy,” “identity,” “interventions,” “mental health,” “anxiety,” “depression,” and “PTSD.” Each article was primary research, peer reviewed, and published between 2016 and 2023. This literature review is divided

into two categories: (a) identity and art therapy interventions and (b) art therapy interventions for mental health issues.

I. Identity and Art Therapy Interventions

An immigrant's cultural identity is important in their navigation in a foreign country. Maintaining a strong cultural identity is a valuable source of support for immigrants, aiding their adjustment to a new society, and offering protection against stress (Espinosa et al., 2016). Identity therapies may be utilized to help immigrant adolescents who are experiencing distress and other detrimental developmental effects (Schwartz et al., 2006). The database searches did not return any peer reviewed primary research examining the use of art therapy as identity therapy for first generation adult immigrants. However, the studies described in the following articles analyzed the effect of art therapy on identity exploration among other adult populations.

In the qualitative study, *Using art therapy to address the protective false self when working with queer identity*, Kamal Naran (2023) engaged queer people in a series of eight art therapy sessions to address the protective "false self." A study goal was to understand if art therapy could help these individuals in their path towards self-acceptance. Their participant criteria consisted of: (a) participants that identified as queer, which included various sexual orientations and gender identities; (b) those who were 18 years or older; and (c) participants who showed an interest in discovering more about their queer identity. Naran (2023) gathered her sample by approaching different organizations that work with the queer community as well as having posters advertising the research study. The study was advertised with posters and outreach to organizations serving the Lefika La Phodiso – Community Art Counseling & Training Institute Queer community in South Africa. Convenience sampling was used and seven participants were enrolled. The study design for each session was structured around an action

research methodology that included planning, observing, performing, and reflecting (Naran, 2023). The researcher monitored the participants' emotional state by using a feeling wheel at the beginning and end of each session. In the last two sessions, the participants were asked to create artworks and share stories about their experiences with the group and their journey with their queer identity. Naran employed Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology, which was found to be highly valuable in the field of program evaluation and development. It is often used to monitor and understand the most significant and meaningful changes in people's lives. The study found that art therapy effectively allowed all the participants to symbolize and explore their true and false selves. They also found that the participants' artwork represented generic figures, hiding the individual identity while allowing them to engage with their authentic selves from a distance. This study confirmed the existence of the false self and its role as a protective barrier that conceals their true self, all in the name of navigating society with more ease.

The small sample size of this study is one of its limitations. Due to the small number of participants, there will likely be insufficient representation of LGBTQ+ identities. The small sample size may be due to lack of mental health resources and stigma, something that is very common in immigrant communities as well. However, some strengths of the study consisted of proving the effectiveness of art therapy in helping people explore and express their true and false selves, as well as bringing to light the protective function of the false self and the need for a kind, thoughtful, and patient approach while working with the LGBTQ+ community. This approach is also appropriate for the first generation immigrant to deliver a culturally competent plan of care.

Stanislovas Mostauskis et al. (2023) uncovered the impact of art therapy on women in Lithuania who had attempted suicide, with special focus on depression, anxiety, and psycho-emotional state. Mostauskis et al. (2023) collected their sample from the Lithuanian

Crisis Intervention Center. Participants were six women between the ages of 25 and 40 who had various experiences with suicide attempts and were experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety. They were exposed to eight art therapy sessions delivered over the course of 9 months. The Hospital Anxiety and Depression (HAD) scale was used to assess the psycho-emotional state of the participants before and after each session. Additional insights into the changes in the participants' psycho-emotional states were gained via the qualitative examination and notes of the participants' artwork and their in-session comments. Using the notes recorded, it was possible to analyze changes in iconographic and formal themes in the participants' artwork and relate such changes to their emotional states. At the beginning of the art therapy sessions, the participants' initial drawings exhibited symptoms of depression and anxiety, such as isolation, detachment, and anxiety. However, as the sessions progressed, the drawings became more open, positive, and expressive, and the participants themselves became more open and aware of their negative emotions as well. They were more outspoken and direct, demonstrating an increase in emotional awareness. The strength of this study is its mixed research method approach. The study focused on a specific group in Lithuania which may limit the applicability in other areas.

In a cross-sectional study using the Identity Denial Scale, vignettes, art therapy, and surveys, Bustamante (2023) delves deeply into cultural identity and implications for third generation and fourth generation Hispanics and Latinos in the United States. The purpose of their study was to find out how these later generations interpret their racial and cultural identity and how they deal with cultural imposter syndrome, which is the perception that they do not truly belong to their culture or cultural identity, a person's sense of belonging to a community with shared characteristics. Inclusion criteria were simple: (a) being of Hispanic or Latinx descent and (b) being 18 years old and above. The participants were exclusively women, representing a

diverse range of ethnic backgrounds, including Puerto Rican, White Hispanic, and White Latina. All participants possessed some form of higher education, ranging from undergraduate to doctoral studies. The generational breakdown included individuals from the first, second, and third generations. The participants were shown a two-part vignette that aimed to bring up empathetic responses in relation to an incident regarding cultural imposter syndrome. Then, they were instructed to create a self-portrait that represented their most authentic self, allowing them to use any medium that they felt appropriate and comfortable using. Participants were then asked to answer three open ended questions about their art and complete the Identity Denial Scale. A high score in the Identity Denial Scale suggests that individuals frequently encounter doubts, pressures, or conflicts related to their cultural identity. A low score suggests that participants are likely to have a strong sense of cultural identity. Some important findings included how many participants, regardless of their generation, felt out of place and felt the pressure to conform to social norms. Participants also made it known the importance that family ties had on maintaining their cultural identity and how it provided them a sense of security and strength. The qualitative data revealed that younger participants, notably first and second generations, reported a sense of disruption and the need to wear a mask in order to fit in, despite the fact that third-generation participants scored higher on the Identity Denial Scale, 28.73% higher than the first generation's scores. This means that in future generations, the internal fight with cultural identity may become more obvious and apparent (Bustamante, 2023). Although 51 people signed the consent form, only 12 participants completed the entire study with a majority being first and second-generation women, so the small sample size was one of their limitations. The mixed methods approach generated very in-depth participant responses that provided insight on the feelings relating to

cultural identity, highlighting the importance of familial support for overcoming identity conflicts, with older participants attributing their resilience to age and strong family ties.

These articles provide evidence for therapy's effectiveness for healing diverse populations struggling with identity and self-acceptance issues. The results of the studies demonstrate that art therapy positively impacts emotional states and increases emotional awareness, which is relevant for first-generation immigrants facing identity and emotional challenges in the U.S. Applying art therapy to promote self-exploration, expressiveness, and emotional well-being supports this proposal for future research.

II. Mental health and Art Therapy interventions

Moving to a new unfamiliar environment can be a distressing experience, especially without adequate support and lead to self-esteem and mental health issues (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). Among first generation immigrants, high rates of depression, anxiety, and PTSD have been reported (Close et al., 2016). This section of the literature review will explore how art therapy has been beneficial to diverse populations experiencing mental health issues.

Decker et al. (2018) uses a randomized controlled trial involving 38 patients at a residential center specializing in military PTSD treatment. They focus on the use of art therapy among U.S. veterans carrying this diagnosis. The study aimed to assess whether combining cognitive processing therapy (CPT) with art therapy would lead to a significant decrease in PTSD symptoms compared to CPT alone. An additional goal was to see whether the supplemental art therapy would reduce depression symptoms. Participants were assigned to either the experimental or control group. The experimental group received 8 hours of CPT and 8 hours of art therapy while the control received 8 hours of CPT and 8 hours of supportive psychotherapy. Supportive psychotherapy was included in the control group to make sure that the

participants had the same number of hours spent in treatment. The art therapy sessions focused on a variety of components which include psychoeducation, enhancing a sense of security, developing and working through the individual's visual trauma narrative, and evaluating artworks. Six directives were used for constructing the visual trauma narrative. To measure PTSD and depression symptoms during pre-treatment, midpoint, and post-treatment, a PTSD checklist, Beck Depression Inventory, and a 5-point Likert scale were used. Veterans who received both CPT and art therapy showed great reduction in depression symptoms strongly correlating with the decrease in PTSD symptoms to a statistically significant amount compared to those who only received CPT with $r(29) = 0.80$ and $p < 0.000$. There are several limitations to this study. The sample size is not diverse as it is mostly male which does not adequately represent the broader population. There is also a possibility that the previous PTSD treatments that the participants received influenced the results. Despite these limitations, there are strengths as well that support the idea that art therapy is a strong intervention for individuals experiencing mental health issues. The study is a randomized controlled study that uses a larger trial and addresses limitations from past studies in which it is the highest level of evidence in research. Furthermore, another strength would be how the study focuses on a population experiencing PTSD and depression, the focus aligning with the population discussed in this paper, namely first-generation immigrants who encounter PTSD and depression.

In another article, *Beneficial Effect of Mindfulness-Based Art Therapy in Patients with Breast Cancer—A Randomized Controlled Trial*, Jang et al. (2016) studied the impact of mindful-based art therapy (MBAT) on depression, anxiety and quality of life in breast cancer patients. The study consisted of 24 women over the age of 50 years old with stage 0, I, II, or III breast cancer who had received a diagnosis for breast cancer and surgery at Wonkwang

University Hospital. All the patients underwent surgery, chemotherapy, or radiation treatment less than two years before. This was a randomized control trial where the participants in the MBAT group went through a series of 12 sessions, each lasting 45 minutes. These sessions included psychological interventions from Korean Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (K-MBSR) into mindfulness activities. All participants in the control group and MBAT group continued to receive standard post-treatment care relating to their breast cancer. The study used a self-report assessment method as participants evaluated themselves before and after treatment using the Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI) and the European Organization for Research and Treatment of Cancer Quality of Life Questionnaire.

Jang et al. (2016) found that participants in the MBAT group experienced a statistically significant reduction in anxiety compared to the control group with the p-value less than 0.001. The research also showed a decrease in depression, fear of recurrence, and improvements in their energy and physical function through MBSR along with participants reporting comfort and a reduction in fatigue. These findings suggest that mediation programs can provide assistance and offer an avenue for breast cancer patients who suffer with anxiety. Limitations in this study include a small sample size and women-only population, which reduces generability and limits insight into long-term effects. No power analysis was done to reveal the power of the sample size. In addition, the assessments were reliant on self-reported surveys which had the potential for researchers to intervene during the study. Participants may have provided answers that may not reflect their true thoughts influenced by socially acceptable or desirable answers which leads to less accurate data. However, a strength of this study is that it is a randomized controlled study that used a validated self-report tool, the PAI. Furthermore, this study deals with a population that undergoes emotional stress, anxiety, and depression similar to this paper's population.

Kongkasuwan et al. (2016) conducted an RCT to determine whether a combination of creative art therapy with conventional physical therapy could reduce depression, improve functional scores, and enhance the quality of life for stroke patients. Participants were 113 stroke patients who were more than 50 years old, could communicate verbally and were willing to cooperate. The researchers allocated 59 participants to the control group and 53 to the intervention group. A baseline assessment of age, sex, education level, comorbidities, onset, type, and involvement of stroke was first determined. All participants received conventional physical therapy five days per week and the intervention group received additional creative art therapy twice a week for four weeks. The creative activities aimed to stimulate cognition, physical state, emotion, communication, social relations, and spiritual dimensions. These sessions included meditation with music, group singing, and group-healing circle. After 4 weeks of treatment, participants were assessed for all outcome measures including cognitive function using the Abbreviated Mental Test (AMT), functional scores using the Modified Barthel Index (BI), and quality of life using the pictorial Thai Quality of Life questionnaire (QoL).

Kongkasuwan et al. (2016) discovered that stroke patients who received creative art therapy in addition to conventional physical therapy showed a statistically significant improvement in functional scores with a p-value equal to 0.043 and reported an increase in concentration, improved emotion state, higher self-confidence, and greater motivation. Most importantly, there was a statistically significant decrease in depression with a p-value less than 0.001. The limitations in this study were that the AMT could not distinguish cognitive changes, possibly due to the small sample size or high baseline scores of AMT. The sample size was small, as a power analysis was not performed. The strengths were that it was a randomized control trial with various outcome measures, including cognitive function, functional scores,

psychological status, and quality of life. In addition, the study included all genders, unlike the other articles, more specifically 31 females and 28 males.

The research articles included in this category emphasize the importance of addressing mental health challenges in various populations, specifically those experiencing PTSD, anxiety, depression, and emotional distress. They demonstrate the potential of art therapy as a valuable intervention for diverse populations coping with mental health issues. Although each article focuses on different demographics (veterans with PTSD, breast cancer patients, and stroke patients), they share a common theme of using art therapy to help with symptoms of distress, anxiety, depression, and emotional stress. While a study on the use of art therapy as an intervention for first-generation immigrants is currently lacking, these articles strongly suggest its promising efficacy in addressing anxiety, depression, and PTSD within this demographic.

This literature review highlights the promising outcomes of art therapy interventions for diverse populations, guiding the design of a culturally competent and effective intervention for first-generation immigrants grappling with both identity and mental health issues.

Research Proposal

With the discussion of the six articles in the literature review, art therapy has shown positive results in enhancing emotional awareness and expression, quality of life, and mental health in different populations. The articles and problem statement provide a good foundation for understanding the severity of the problem as well as why art therapy is a notable method of intervention to alleviate discomfort relating to mental health and identity conflicts. Although these two categories were discussed separately, art therapy serves as a bridge between mental wellness and identity exploration. Artistic expression provides a therapeutic outlet for mental health issues by allowing individuals to explore and express their complex emotions related to

cultural identity, in turn, promoting a more all-encompassing approach to wellbeing. With this understanding, the primary aim of this study is to prove the effectiveness of art therapy as a form of processing cultural identity and improving mental health outcomes in first generation immigrants in the United States.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used to support this proposed research study is known as Madeleine Leininger's Transcultural Nursing Theory. This theory was established in 1974 at the University of Washington School of Nursing after Leininger recognized the importance of culturally competent nurses (Bvorel, 2022). Cultural competence involves nurses actively self-reflecting, navigating diverse dynamics, and recognizing and embracing diversity. Nurses need to acquire and integrate cultural knowledge and adapt to the cultural contexts of the communities they serve (Cross et al., 1989). This framework works as an intersection between modern healthcare and patients' cultural heritage, aiming to further understand the identities and attitudes as well as health-related concerns of those they serve. It is crucial for nurses to be able to communicate effectively with their patients and form a trusting bond, especially with those with diverse cultural backgrounds, such as first generation immigrants (Bvorel, 2022).

Incorporating Leininger's Transcultural Nursing Theory is crucial for this study as it emphasizes the understanding and respect for patients' cultural values, beliefs, and practices. To ensure cultural congruence/competency, art therapy interventions should be personalized to the participants' cultural values and customs. Interviews and self-report questionnaires will be conducted to incorporate the theory and put it in action. This customized approach enhances first generation adult immigrants' general wellbeing while also fostering a deeper sense of cultural identity for them.

Research Design

Method

Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be used to determine the effectiveness of art therapy among first-generation immigrants who experience cultural identity conflicts leading to mental health issues. This mixed methods study will involve 20 first-generation immigrants in the United States, at least 18 years old, who identify as experiencing mental health issues related to cultural identity conflict. Convenience sampling will be used to recruit participants from community organizations, mental health clinics, and support groups.

In the quantitative phase, self-reported questionnaires, the Symptom Checklist-90-Revised (SCL-90-R) and the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), will be used to evaluate every participant's mental health symptoms and cultural identity. The SCL-90-R examines a range of psychological symptoms and distress, while the MEIM places a strong focus on assessing the impact of cultural factors, such as an individual's ethnic or racial identity as well as their level of connection to their group. Over the course of two months, a series of eight group art therapy sessions will be conducted simultaneously for all 20 participants. These sessions, scheduled for every Saturday, will each last for 2 hours. Group settings provide a supportive environment for individuals to share their acculturation experiences and connect with others facing similar challenges and can foster a sense of community and belonging (Mac Fine Art, 2020). During each session, participants will have the opportunity to discuss their artwork with the group, guided by the art therapist who will lead the discussion. Given the diverse language backgrounds of the participants, there will be individual interpreters for each participant who will be communicating through headphones. All necessary art materials will be supplied for the sessions. In the first four sessions, visual art therapy will be provided through drawing and

painting. This modality allows individuals to express their feelings and experiences through visual mediums like drawing, painting, or sculpture. It can help individuals explore their cultural identity and adjustment in a nonverbal way (Psychology Today Staff, 2023). In the next four sessions, narrative art therapy will be provided. This approach combines storytelling and visual art to help individuals create and share their personal narratives related to acculturation (Ackerman, 2023). It can be a powerful way to process and communicate cultural experiences.

After 20 participants are enrolled and demographic data is collected, the SCL-90-R and MEIM surveys will be administered as the pre-intervention assessment. Next, the 20 participants will be exposed to the eight group art therapy sessions. At the end of the last session, the SCL-90-R and MEIM surveys will be readministered. In order to gain additional insight into participants' experience in the study, a 30-minute semi-structured interview will be conducted with each participant. These semi-structured interviews will include a set of 10 open-ended questions connected to cultural identity and art therapy and allow for follow-up questions and exploration based on the participant's responses. The interviews provide a balance between structure and flexibility, ensuring that key topics are covered while also allowing for unexpected insights to emerge.

Data Analysis

Paired sample t-tests will be used to compare the pre-intervention and post-intervention SCL-90-R and MEIM scores. For this study, a p-value of $p < 0.05$, will mean that the art therapy intervention had a significant impact on the mental health of the first-generation immigrant participants and allow for the null hypothesis to be rejected. Lastly, for the quantitative data, a regression analysis will be used to show determinants of improvement in mental health. Once the interviews are transcribed, thematic analysis will be performed to organize this qualitative data in

a structured and meaningful way that captures the essence of participants' experiences and the key messages they convey.

Limitations

One specific limitation is that the study findings will not be able to be generalized to all first-generation immigrants in the United States. Another limitation is that there could be a self-reporting bias, which could lead to an exaggeration or minimization of the intervention's effectiveness. The absence of a control group poses a challenge in isolating the exact influence of art therapy, thus diminishing the study's ability to establish a causal relationship with confidence.

Ethical considerations

This study will seek approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Dominican University of California. A written consent form will be obtained from all participants prior to the start of the study. Participants have the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants' information will remain confidential throughout the study by using initials of their names.

Conclusion

Cultural identity conflict is a complex topic that demands a comprehensive research approach. A mixed method study is best suited to explore the personal benefits of art therapy for first-generation immigrants grappling with cultural identity and mental health conflicts. A potential follow-up could assess the long-term impact by reconnecting with the initial 20 participants after a year. Another avenue for future research involves running a new study with a different type of art therapy such as expressive art therapy, a modality that incorporates visual arts, music, movement, and drama, and evaluate its effect on mental health as reflected in SCL-90-R and MEIM scores. Our motivation for this research is deeply personal, inspired by our

own parents' struggles when they moved to the United States, the sense of isolation that comes with being far from home and family. Our research aims to highlight how cultural identity and mental health intersect for this diverse demographic and assess the potential of art therapy as an effective intervention. In nursing, creating a supportive and culturally competent environment is crucial for quality patient care. Holistic care, which includes culturally tailored interventions, is at the core of our commitment to provide inclusive and compassionate nursing practices.

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Appendix

Literature Review

Citation: Naran, K. (2023). *Using art therapy to address the protective false self when working with queer identity*. South African Journal of Arts Therapies, 1(1), 89–110. <https://doi.org/10.36615/sajat.v1i1.2576>

Purpose/Objective of the study: Explore defense mechanisms in queer identity exploration, focusing on the false self, promoting self-acceptance

Population of interest and sample size: 7; Queer individuals 18+, regardless of art experience, recruited through organizations and posters

Study Design: Qualitative action research

Study Methods: Art therapy session that included info sessions, hybrid sessions, and check-ins/outs.

Major Findings: False self's protective role in concealing true self. Art therapy helps symbolize and explore true and false selves. Ambivalence of identity – concealing and revealing. Shift towards conscious recognition of the false self. Importance of recognizing and acknowledging the false self.

Strengths: Study design was able to allow for insight into the effectiveness of art therapy in exploring identity and acknowledging the false self.

Limitations: Limited participant diversity; difficulty engaging with the unconscious false self; COVID-19 impact on in-person sessions.

Citation: Mostauskis, S. ., Sebeikaitė, A. ., & Rapolienė, J. . (2023). *Effect of Art Therapy on Changes in Psycho-Emotional State for Women Who Have Attempted Suicide*. Reabilitacijos Mokslai: Slauga, Kineziterapija, Ergoterapija, 1(28), 35-48. <https://doi.org/10.33607/rmske.v1i28.1358>

Purpose/ Objective of the study: Investigate art therapy's impact on psycho-emotional state in suicidal women in Lithuania, focusing on depression and anxiety levels.

Population of interest and sample size: n=6; women aged 25-40 with suicide attempts.

Study Design: Mixed-methods

Study Methods: Longitudinal design with art therapy sessions. Used Hospital Anxiety and Depression (HAD) scale, iconographic, and formal analysis.

Major Findings: Reduction in depression levels.

Artwork reflects emotional states, becoming more positive to initial assessment.

Increased emotional awareness from initial assessment.

Mixed impact on anxiety levels.

Strengths: Combined quantitative and qualitative methods. Direct exploration of art therapy's impact.

Limitation: Small sample size. Absence of a control group. Influence of other treatments. Limited duration and generalizability.

Citation: Bustamante, Tara, *"Cultural Identity of And Implications for Later Generational Hispanic and Latino Populations In The United States"* (2023). Art Therapy | Master's Theses. 15. <https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2023.AT.06>

Purpose/ Objective of the study: Explore cultural identity in later generational Hispanic and Latino individuals in the U.S., focusing on cultural imposter syndrome.

Population of interest and sample size: n=12; Nonclinical Hispanic and Latinx adults in the U.S.

Study Design: Cross-sectional study

Study Methods: Quantitative Identity Denial Scale and qualitative self-portraits and vignettes.

Major Findings: Cultural identity challenges and cultural imposter syndrome. Importance of family support.

Strengths: Mixed methods for comprehensive exploration. In-depth participant responses. Focus on later generational experiences.

Limitation: Small sample size. Online data collection. Gender bias.

Citation: Decker, K. P., Deaver, S. P., Abbey, V., Campbell, M., & Turpin, C. (2018). *Quantitatively Improved Treatment Outcomes for Combat-Associated PTSD With Adjunctive Art Therapy: Randomized Controlled Trial*. Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy

Association, 35(4), 184–194.

<https://doi-org.dominican.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/07421656.2018.1540822>

Purpose/ Objective of the study: Assess if the use of art therapy will improve PTSD symptoms among veterans

Population of interest and sample size: n=38; U.S. veterans diagnosed with PTSD

Study Design: Randomized control trial

Study Methods: The experimental group received 8 hours of CPT and 8 hours of art therapy while the control received 8 hours of CPT and 8 hours supportive psychotherapy. PTSD checklist, Beck Depression Inventory, and a 5-point Likert scale was used. Measured at three points in time: pre-treatment, midpoint, and post-treatment.

Major Findings: Individuals receiving both CPT and art therapy showed great reduction in depression symptoms strongly correlating with the decrease in PTSD symptoms to a statistically significant amount compared to those who only received CPT with $r(29) = .80$ and $p < .000$.

Strengths: Randomized controlled study. A larger trial that addresses limitations from earlier studies.

Limitation: Small sample size and mostly male. It is possible that previous PTSD treatment participants received influenced the results.

Citation: Jang, S., Kang, S., Lee, H., & Lee, S. (2016). *Beneficial Effect of Mindfulness-Based Art Therapy in Patients with Breast Cancer—A Randomized Controlled Trial*. *Explore*, 12(5), 333-340. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.explore.2016.06.003>

Purpose/ Objective of the study: Investigate the impact of Mindful-Based Art Therapy (MBAT) on depression, anxiety, and quality of life in breast cancer patients.

Population of interest and sample size: n=24 women over the age of 50 with stage 0, I, II, or III breast cancer.

Study Design: Randomized control trial

Study Methods: The MBAT group had 12 sessions for 45 minutes each. All participants received standard post-treatment breast cancer care. Self-reported before and after treatment

using the Personality Assessment Inventory and the European Organization for Research and Treatment of Cancer Quality of Life Questionnaire.

Major Findings: With the MBAT group there was a decrease in depression, fear of recurrence, improvement in energy and physical function, better physical and emotional quality of life, and reported comfort and decrease in fatigue. Participants in the MBAT group experienced a statistically significant reduction in anxiety compared to the control group with the p-value less than 0.001.

Strengths: Randomized controlled study. Validated self-report measures.

Limitation: Limited sample size due to no power analysis performed. Reliant on self-reported surveys. Introducing the potential for researcher intervention during the study.

Citation: Kongkasuwan, R., Voraakhom, K., Pisolayabutra, P., Maneechai, P., Boonin, J., & Kuptniratsaikul, V. (2016). *Creative art therapy to enhance rehabilitation for stroke patients: a randomized controlled trial*. Clin Rehabil, 30(10), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269215515607072>

Purpose/ Objective of the study: Determine whether creative art therapy, when combined with conventional physical therapy, could reduce depression, improve functional scores, and enhance the quality of life for stroke patients.

Population of interest and sample size: n=113 stroke patients aged 50 years or more. The control group had 59 participants, while the intervention group had 54 participants.

Study Design: Randomized control trial

Study Methods: Cognitive function (Abbreviated Mental Test), functional scores (Modified Barthel Index), psychological status (Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale), and quality of life (pictorial Thai Quality of Life questionnaire). All participants had physical therapy five days/week. Intervention group had art therapy 2x/week x 4 weeks of treatment with pre and post-intervention surveys.

Major Findings: Stroke patients who received art therapy in addition to conventional physical therapy showed a statistically significant improvement in functional scores with a p-value equal to 0.043 and reported an increase in concentration, improved emotion state, higher self-confidence, and greater motivation. There was a statistically significant decrease in depression with a p-value less than 0.001.

Strengths: Randomized controlled trial design. Various outcome measures were used: cognitive function using the Abbreviated Mental Test (AMT), functional scores using the Modified Barthel Index (BI), and quality of life using the pictorial Thai Quality of Life questionnaire (QoL).

Limitation: Small sample size. AMT could not distinguish cognitive changes possibly due to the small sample size or high baseline scores of AMT