

Youth Identity: Transition to Adulthood Explored Through Altered Book Construction

Tori Charles

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Department of Art Therapy in the Graduate Program
Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College
Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana

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ABSTRACT

This study explored art therapy as a vehicle for exploration of self-identity in a sample of urban youth transitioning to adulthood. Five emerging adults were recruited from a Washington DC area arts-based nonprofit organization to engage in altered book construction as a way to explore negative and positive experiences that had impacted their identity. In addition to creating an altered book, participants also completed pre and post surveys, as well as created audio recordings in which they shared in further depth about a negative experience that had impacted their identity. Based on theory in the areas of youth identity development and narrative therapy, the researcher hypothesized that the creation of altered books would bring self-awareness and clarity to the personal identity of the participants, as well as provide a safe space to release emotions in connection with identity. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes that occurred during the youth's creative process. The themes identified by the participants included: relationships, physical appearance, and cultural appropriation. The findings indicated that supportive relationships with family, friends, and in the community can impact an individual's identity and how they view themselves. The themes found during the study support the hypothesis that interwoven ideas and actions of others and society impacts how one can perceive the self based on what each individual has experienced. Creating narrative art allowed each individual to tell these experiences, express ideas, and gain reflective distance, enabling them to understand who they are and why.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Identity can be looked at through many different theoretical lenses. Erikson (1968) defined the search for identity as a normative *crisis*, with a healthy resolution resulting in the individual having a clear sense of who they are and their role in this world. Marcia (1966) defined a successful identity formation, or what he referred to as identity *achievement*, as stemming from an individual's commitment to an identity after having explored their interests and beliefs. Modern identity theory has focused more on the physical aspects and development of an individual than their mental and psychosocial development. Shanahan (2015) claimed that modern day youth have built their identity based on self-perception and social comparisons with peers of the same chronological age. Attitudes and actions can produce certain behaviors and stigmas depending on each individual's perception (Jegade, Olowookere, & Elegbeleye, 2016). This behavior can be reinforced by subjective societal norms of how one should look, act, or behave (Jegade et al., 2016).

Erikson's psychosocial theory (1968) posited that life can be broken down into a sequence of steps defined by a core developmental task. Three developmental tasks that have been identified to characterize youth and identity exploration include learning to be productive, learning to connect, and learning to navigate (Chalk & Phillips, 1996). Social pressure and expectations can force individuals to conform to social standards, shy away from self-acceptance and self-value, and believe that they must act or behave as others do. When addressing peer influence and youth identity, one should address the social psychosocial ideologies that are hidden and exposed through human existence and interactions (Jegade et al., 2016).

Problem Statement

Gupta (2017) found that minority youth often face common identity concerns relating to career, academic performance, spirituality, and gender. Typically lower in status and power, minority groups are frequently subject to racism and discrimination. Moreover, research has shown a decline in economic security for poor and middle-class families, as well as an increase in concentrated poverty areas, single parent households, and isolation from middle and working-class areas (Chalk & Phillips, 1996). Additionally, youth have entered into the juvenile and child welfare system at increasing rates (Chalk & Phillips, 1996).

As viewed by Chalk and Phillips (1996), studies has shown that both social structure and the developmental tasks identified for youth have been constructed from a framework based on white middle-class adolescent populations. However, such a framework does not reflect the reality for many youth who experience unique challenges and disadvantages related to their racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic backgrounds. Other research has found that social exclusion from peer groups can result in depression, psychological maladjustment, poor achievement, school dropouts, and violence in adulthood (Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski, 1995).

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following questions: (a) How can art therapy interventions be used to help influence a positive self-identity for adolescents and young adults struggling with society's standards? (b) What negative experiences have impacted their identity formation? (c) What positive experiences have impacted their identity formation? and (d) What role has technology played in youth identity formation?

Basic Assumptions

This researcher believes that social standards, especially beauty standards accessed through various forms of technology, may negatively impact minority youth by contributing to

the formation of a negative self-concept. Research has found that the quality of one's family relationships are significantly correlated with the development of self-esteem, even though many of these studies have disproportionately relied on middle class white males as subjects (as reviewed by Plunkett et al., 2007). Family structure may also play an important role in shaping youth identity development (Rattay et al. 2018). Adolescents with separated parents, or who live with stepfamily members or in a single parent home, may be at higher risk for emotional and behaviors problems, as well as lower health-related quality of life (Rattay et al., 2018). In modern day society, the family structure in homes have changed. Both single parenting and being raised by another family member outside of a biological parent are increasingly common (Chalk & Phillips, 1996). Many African American youth experience life at an accelerated pace due to taking on primary caregiver roles to younger siblings or other family members. Consequently, they develop entrepreneurial skills at a young age in order to survive in their environment, which often moves them more quickly into adulthood (Chalk & Phillips, 1996).

Social supports outside of the family, such as in the community, also play a major contributing role towards the achievement of key developmental task and accomplishments for youth as they enter adulthood (Chalk & Phillips, 1996). Connective and supportive relationships between youth and adult mentors provide guidance during this transitional period and may positively influence youth perception of life goals, decision-making skills, and outcomes (Chalk & Phillips, 1996). However, as youth turn to others outside of the home for acceptance, which encompasses peers and/or adults from various social groups and organizations, this could also lead to irregular or negative formations of self-esteem and self-identity (Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski, 1995). Unfortunately, the exclusion of minority youth in research has limited the reliability and validity of research on the topic of identity formation, making research that

focuses on these populations especially critical.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the use of art therapy as a vehicle for exploration of self-identity in teens and young adults. Participants engaged in altered book construction as the primary means of exploring the negative and positive experiences that had impacted their identity, as well as completed an identity survey and made audio recordings documenting their experiences. The researcher assessed for common themes across participants' altered books, the identity surveys, and the personal recordings. These data sources were key in understanding the specific challenges participants had faced related to identity formation, whether pertaining to cultural or societal beauty standards, family structure, negative experiences, and/or positive experiences. It was also hoped that this study would reveal the therapeutic impact of art on youth struggling with identity, as well as aid future research relevant to the topics of minority youth and identity.

Operational Definitions

Altered Book. A published book that has been changed into a new work of visual art through various art processes such as painting, drawing, collage, writing, and embellishments (Chilton, 2007).

Identity. Identity refers to the individual characteristics by which a thing or person is recognized or known (Webster, 2018).

Stages of Development. Erikson's (1968) *stages of development* theory includes eight stages of psychosocial development: trust, autonomy initiative, and identity.

Standard. Also known as a criterion or a test, the term *standard* is used in this study to refer to a social or behavioral expectation that has been established as a rule or model by

authority, custom, or general consent (Webster, 2018).

Justification of the Study

This study was important to the researcher because of what she had experienced as a teen as result of prevailing social standards, beauty standards, and other social ideologies. Social milieus that consistently provide negative messages and experiences for youth limit desirable life options and can lead to poor decisions and other negative outcomes (Chalk & Phillips, 1996).

This researcher has witnessed countless young adults and teens who struggle with self-acceptance and peer pressure. In minority communities, the development of positive racial identity can be negatively impacted by stigmatizing experiences with regards to physical attributes (e.g., skin tone, hair type, body type), developmental tasks, and other social expectations. Identifying how youth struggle in these areas may help to counteract negative self-identities, raise awareness, uplift and celebrate uniqueness, and counteract colorism and its stigmatism.

This study sought to advance the field of art therapy by examining how art therapy could be used as a vehicle to facilitate the exploration of identity for urban youth transitioning to adulthood. It also proposed to show how art therapy can be used as a healing process for youth who have experienced poverty and trauma. As there has been a lack of research surrounding the topic of identity with youth minorities, this study aimed to work against this deficit. This study may be used to help others in future studies that relate to the topic of youth and identity.

Chapter II

Literature Review

This study focused on minority youth as emergent adults and how they identified in relation to their current societal context. More specifically, this study sought to examine the impact of social standards on how the youth participants viewed themselves, including both positive and negative experiences. Previous literature has focused on the role of family dynamics in impacting youth identity development, general developmental processes related to identity, the consequences of negative life events on youth identity, and cultural actions and beliefs. The literature reviewed also explored treatment available for youth struggling with identity, including art therapy services for youth. Finally, the use of altered books as a type of narrative arts-based therapy applicable in the treatment of youth will also be reviewed.

Impact of Family on Self Identity

Family dynamics can play a major role in an individual's development as they transition from a child to a young adult. Parental support has been linked to autonomy and relatedness, these two themes have been identified as fundamental needs of an emergent adult. A lack of parental support has been linked to psychological stress (Inguglia, Ingoglia, Liga, Lo Coco, & Lo Cricchio, 2015). During this transition from youth to young adult, the parent and youth's relationship may be particularly important in developing closeness and trust (Jaggers et al., 2015). Autonomy and relatedness support has been theorized to lead an emergent adult to have a sense of choice during identity development and increase exploration, as well as aid in regulation of emotions (Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009). As a child becomes socially and cognitively mature, a close and open relationship between parent and offspring should result in regulation in independence and connection (Fulgini & Pedersen, 2002). Parent and child conflict

resulting in arguing and fallouts may result in a lack of closeness and trust in the parent-child relationship (Jaggers et al, 2015). Inguglia (2015) hypothesized that during adolescence there is an increase in autonomy and a decrease in connectedness within the parent and adolescence relationship. Maladaptive social development and difficulty with social activities may be a result of lack of emotional support between youth and parent (Sitzer & Stockwell, 2015). Without coping resources, it can be hard for youth to process and modulate stress, which can impact them in the future when processing stress and information (Sitzer & Stockwell, 2015).

Relatedly, it is also important to consider the impact of socioeconomic status and other systemic familial factors on the identity development of adolescents. As a key support system, family is often the youth's first line of defense. Family cohesion plays a major role in the development of adolescents and youth (Jaggers et al., 2015). Minimal family cohesion or excessive family cohesion have both been shown to negatively impact youth development, and lack of family cohesion altogether has been linked to low academic achievement and problem behaviors in youth (Jaggers et al., 2015).

Developmental Theories

To understand how youth identity is formed one should be familiar with the developmental stages of an adolescent and young adult. Individuals can develop on different levels based on factors in their environment and experiences from birth (Shin et al., 2007.) Adolescent development has been impacted by a number of other factors such as social, emotional, and cognitive aspects from childhood to adulthood (Jaggers et al., 2015).

Campbell (1995) explored the expansion of a social identity theory. This theory highlighted how identity was shaped and constrained by social context that were continuously changing. The theory focused on how life challenges, group membership, and behavioral

expectations impacts identity. Vaida and Ghimbulut (2014) felt that to have a successful transition into society, personal development was a necessary factor. It is believed that personal growth and self-awareness were explored as youth transition to adulthood (Bruening, Huberty, Skelton, Brennhofer, & Voytyuk, 2017). During this stage youth are trying to gain a sense of independence as well as responsibility and experiencing changes in thoughts and feelings (Saleem, Arati, Yadav, & Khadi, 2017).

When practical needs are not met, focusing on the formation of the self and future stability is difficult, if not impossible. Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs classified human needs into different categories of physiological and emotional needs. In order for higher emotional needs and aspirational goals to be met, foundational physiological needs must be in place and sustained.

Vaid and Ghimbulut (2014) suggested that priorities at this age might include improving health and well being, avoiding the use of alcohol, drugs and aggressiveness, and improving communication and teamwork. Priorities at this stage may be joining the workforce, establishing a residence, and exploring career and education options (Shen et al., 2017). The environment in which the individual has developed could impact these priorities.

An individual who grew up in poverty may be more focused on basic needs versus developmental needs. Human motives can regulate an individual's perspective (Anburaj, 2017). Self-medication can be a result of failure to meet needs. Adolescents and youth may turn to many methods of self-medication, including drugs, alcohol, risky sex, disordered eating, and other self-harm behaviors (Bruening, Huberty, Skelton, Brennhofer, & Voytyuk, 2017). The experiences during this transition can have a profound impact on a youth's identity as they enter adulthood. During this time youth go through a life transition where major developmental tasks

change and life transforms, and some things are refined or left behind (Lane, Leibert, & Goka-Dubose, 2017). The stage after adolescents before adulthood is known as “emergent adulthood.” (Bruening et al., 2017). This stage was not characterized by a certain age or specific age group. It was proposed that the timing and elements of this stage are culturally constructed (Saleem et al., 2017).

Social development and relationships also play a very important role at this stage. At this time youth become more involved and intimate with friends (Bruening et al., 2017). The concept of self can be seen as a loose association of group memberships, with various groups becoming salient in different situations (Campbell, 1995). Peer acceptance and opinions are found to be increasing in importance at this stage than adult opinions (Shin et al., 2007). Youth are more open about personal thoughts and feelings as well as expanding their personal beliefs and ideas (Bruening, 2017). The opinion and regard from friends and peers can highly influence one’s self-concept and self-worth.

Maintaining healthy relationships can impact an individual’s self-esteem and resilience as well as aid in positive relationships with others (Saleem et al., 2017). Rejection from peer groups can lead to alienation, school related violence, and harm to self and others (Sitzer & Stockwell, 2015). Campbell (1995) suggested that when studying identity formation, one considers how cognitive process and identity are shaped and constrained by social and material factors.

All of these elements can be related and contribute to stressful interpersonal and intrapersonal problems (Shen, Thai, Cullen, Lim, & Klimes-Dougan, 2017). Attunement of stress, emotional management, and self-regulation take place during this time period (Shen et al.,

2017). Emotional management can be defined as experiencing or using one's own judgment to negative emotional state (Shen et al., 2017).

Cortisol was identified as a key stress hormone present in youth experiencing stress, somatic illness, and psychological disorders (Shen et al., 2017). A rise in cortisol levels were also linked to emotional disorders such as major depression, and anxiety disorders (Shen et al., 2017). This could make youth vulnerable to other psychological disorders.

The emotional health of an emergent adult can be related to the youth's transition from adolescent to young adult. Emotional health can be defined as an individual's well-being and how they cope with stress and life events (Saleem et al., 2017). Emotional health also includes self-awareness and being able to identify and respect one's own emotions as well as others (Saleem et al., 2017). Self-awareness can be defined as the capacity of awareness an individual has of their own emotions and how they impact one's behavior and thoughts (Saleem et al., 2017).

Emotional health relates directly to mental health and can be seen as fundamental for youth during times of transition from adolescent to young adult and then adulthood (Saleem et al., 2017). Sitzer and Stockwell (2015) hypothesized that prevention of psychological problems with youth should be addressed through therapeutic practices early on opposed to after the fact. Just as in the transition from adolescent to youth, young adults seek security (Saleem et al., 2017). Being secure allows an individual to live their everyday life comfortably. To be comfortable and relaxed can be seen as the opposite of having anxiety and feeling unstable or unsure. This also means all of their basic needs are being met mentally and physically. Being in a good state of emotional health can bring on self-awareness, increase self-esteem and self-confidence, and promote emotional managements (2017). Self-confidence can be defined as an

individual's commitment to a challenging action in order to gain success (Saleem et al., 2017). Self-esteem is perceived self-worth and competence in social relations (Saleem et al., 2017).

Negative Impacts on Youth Development

Minority youth, as well as youth impacted by language barriers, may not receive adequate education or have adequate opportunities for growth (Nelson, 2008). This includes no sports, tutoring, traveling opportunities, access to the arts, and most importantly health care amidst poverty (Nelson et al., 2008). Risky behaviors have been the leading contributor to health problems and mortality among youth in the United States (Kann et al., 2018). Emelianchik-Key (2016) wrote that the current average ages for youth participating in self-injuring behaviors was 12 years of age, but usually starts in adolescence. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) was created to monitor six categories of priority risky behavior of youth and young adults (Kann et al. 2018). It monitors behaviors that can cause unintentional physical injury and violence, tobacco usage, other drug use and alcohol, sexual behaviors and sexually transmitted diseases, unintentional pregnancy, unhealthy eating habits, and physical inactivity (Kann et al. 2018). Self-injury as a result of risky behavior, can be defined as intentional harm to oneself to regulate emotions and decrease stress (Emelianchik-Key, Byrd, & La Guardia, 2016).

The YRBSS system uses a school-based survey called the *Youth at Risk Behavior Survey* to collect information based over a 30 day timespan (Kann et al. 2018). In 2008, the YRBSS showed that 20% of students were engaging in alcohol and cigarette use, cocaine was used less than 5%, and inhalant use was at 10% (Pisetsky, May Chao, Dierker, May, & Striegel-Moore, 2008). Each substance use was more prevalent among youth males than females (Pisetsky et al., 2008). However in, 2017, the survey showed that many high school students participate in at risk behaviors which is the leading cause of death for youth between the ages of ten and twenty

four in the United States (Kann et al. 2018). Reports also indicated that 29.8 % reported current alcohol use, 19.8 % reported marijuana use, and 14% reported using prescription drugs without a prescription. Substance abuse has been shown to suppress appetite, eating, or weight (Pisetsky et al., 2008).

Emelianchik-Key et al. (2016) found that 7.4 % of the youth in high school reported having attempted suicide. Suicide was the third leading cause of death in adolescence and youth, with 15% suffering from clinical depression. Suicide was clearly defined in *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders* (5th ed.; *DSM-5*; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013) as self-harm with intent or aim to die. Emelianchik-Key (2016) recognized depression as being associated with suicide ideation, self-injury, and risky behaviors in youth. Low self-esteem has also been seen to correlate with suicide in both male and female youth populations (Emelianchik-Key et al., 2016). Data from the YRBS are used to analyze the overlap between self-injury due to risky behaviors and suicide ideation among youth (Kann et al. 2018). 43% of youth reported using technology for non-school related reasons, including video games or computer use for more than three hours per day (Kann et al., 2018). The Youth Risk Behavior Survey documents that subgroups of students categorized by race, ethnicity, gender, and grade level have a higher prevalence of at-risk behaviors, which can result in mortality, morbidity, and social problems.

In the United States, at least 25% of youth were believed to have experienced some form of trauma (Costello, Erkanli, Fairbank, & Angold, 2002). This may include natural disasters, life-threatening accidents, maltreatment, assault, family and community violence (Costello et al., 2002). According to Naff (2014), these traumas can result in symptoms that impact an individual's mental health and physical well being, but all individuals do not exhibit the same

symptoms and severity. Sitzer and Stockwell (2015) reported that a high number of youths have experienced relatives or parents going to jail, leaving the country suddenly, living with divorce and parent conflicts, and domestic violence. Boals and Schuettler (2009) advocated that it may not always be the traumatic event, but how the individual assigns meaning and how they process the trauma that determines its impact. Naff (2014) stated what can define a trauma and its impact was its origin. Shapiro and Forrest (2004) defined small “t” traumas such as bullying, loss, and self-failures to have the potential to impact an individual’s quality of life and may require clinical attention. These types of trauma may not seem small to the individual however. Research showed that stress in early life could increase maladaptive behaviors, such as substance abuse later in life (Costello et al., 2002).

Treatments Available for Youth

Traditional methods of intervention may be ineffective for this population, especially those who have experienced trauma (Sitzer & Stockwell, 2015). Culturally youth may be opposed to revealing trauma and expressing emotions to an outsider, such as a therapist in “talk therapy”. Eye movement desensitization (EMDR) and processing are two treatments geared towards treating individuals who have experienced trauma (Cvetek, 2008), as well as bilateral stimulation (McNamee, 2006) and narrative therapy (Wigren, 1994).

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has also been considered as helpful with youth in reducing distressful symptoms (Naff, 2014). Within cognitive behavioral therapy the client and clinician would include psychoeducation and relaxation techniques (Naff, 2014). According to Scheeringa (2017) CBT can have a negative impact on youth who have experienced trauma. It can make them reluctant and avoidant having to narrate their traumas again and again. Naff (2014) also suggested combining cognitive behavioral therapy along with coping strategies and

skills when treating individuals with trauma symptoms. To increase self-efficacy and self-esteem the client center approach, for example, client involvement in goal setting was recommended by Naff (2014).

Art Therapy for Youth

Schwan (2018) suggested that art-based programming can help to promote mental wellness, recovery, and also can increase social inclusion and life skills. Increasingly, cultural arts such as music, dance, theater, visual arts, photography, and graphic arts are being used in youth prevention programs (Rapp-Paglicci, 2006). The arts have also been proven to address issues such as social, community, and health problems. Detention centers, inpatient treatment programs, community centers, and agencies that serve youth who are marginalized often successfully use arts-based programs. Rapp-Paglicci (2006) hypothesized that a successful program to treat at risk youth should include parental education and training, as well as skill learning. Nelson (2008) identified key components to a successful youth program as positive peer group interactions, supportive adult workers, a family atmosphere, activities and skill training.

Schwan (2018) identified five key ways art can be used by youth to cope. It can aid in coping with adversity, it can allow them to create meaning, manage mental health challenges, manage stress, recover from trauma and create a safe space, explore, express, and discover themselves, as well as develop positive self esteem and create hopefulness for the future. Mental health problems have been identified as a leading cause of health burdens to youth under the age of 25 (Gwinner, 2016). Findings from a program geared towards homeless youth using art-based interventions revealed that art could be used as a facilitator to support youth self-care and meaning making practices (Schwann, 2018). This can include the youth creating practices to

improve their health, pursue their goals, and empower themselves. Also highlighted in the programs research was the importance of the youth being able to build on their own strengths and assets (Schwan, 2018). Sitzer and Stockwell (2015) identified attributes that will aid youth survival as self-esteem and self-efficacy, personality, individual talents, and opportunities for growth in a positive environment.

The mental health and well being of the younger generation can determine the future health of an entire population (Gwinner, 2016). Psychoanalytical thinking leads us to believe that creating artwork can give an individual access to the unconscious mind (Hilbuch, Snir, Regav, & Orkibi, 2016). Naff (2014) stated that art making in a session could allow a client to diffuse tension by focusing on the process rather than themselves. Art making can also allow the individual to reflect inner emotions with minimal distortion. Scheering (2017) indicated that cognitive distortions do not need to be explicitly addressed in order for therapy to be successful. Transference can be monitored in the way the client interacts with the art materials (Hilbuch et al., 2016). Expressive therapies can allow youth to generate metaphorical symbols and can provide safety and exploration (Sitzer & Stockwell, 2015). Moreover, the art making process can encourage intra- and interpersonal transference relationships (Hilbuch et al., 2016). The client's transference response to the art materials can be identified as intrapersonal, and responses to the psychotherapist as interpersonal. Art therapy uses the creative process to help clients access their own knowledge, coping skills, and resources (Naff, 2014). Naff also promoted art therapy as an affective technique in treating individuals who have experienced trauma. Sitzer and Stockwell (2015) urged that art-based prevention programs would be beneficial to at risk youth as well as youth who have experienced trauma. Findings show that art

therapy has been more impactful in treating trauma related symptomology than non-art therapy treatments (Naff, 2014).

Narrative Therapy

Narrative therapy was defined as a collaborative creative intervention that is client centered (Ghannadpour, 2018). According to the creators of narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990), narrative therapy was defined as the process of re-authoring life stories to move past “problem-saturated identity” to “strength-based identity” in order to gain skill to solve external problems. Nelson (2008) identified storytelling as a tool and intervention in youth development programs. Storytelling can allow youth to explore and clarify their personal values to aid in decision-making to decrease risky behaviors (Nelson et al., 2008). Narrative Therapy can use a self- report pre and post-intervention to measure effectiveness. Narrative therapy has been used across a variety of populations to treat numerous diagnoses; it has been specifically helpful in treating self-harming behaviors (Ghannadpour, 2018). Narrative therapy has also been identified as a treatment method for youth trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Scheeringa et al., 2017). Narrative therapy has been used to decrease hopelessness in youth suicidal ideation and attempted suicide (Rutter & Behrendt, 2004).

Within narrative therapy, an alliance-centered therapy was suggested to unite complex systems of care (Ghannadpour, 2018). This would include youth, family, school, and outpatient providers, care coordinators, etc. Creating this alliance can allow everyone to face problems together as a whole. Research suggested that narrative therapy has been used as a tool to bridge communication between youth and families (Ghannadpour, 2018). Cultural patterns and structure can also be addressed within storytelling (Nelson et al., 2008). Narratives can allow the youth to understand experiences, convey information in a present time sense, and give new

perspectives (Nelson et al., 2008). Metaphoric and symbolic language can be used to create stories and meaning of an individual's life experiences, and distance and emotional safety can be created by youth when storytelling in third person (Nelson et al., 2008). McClintock (2004) identified several ways in which storytelling can aid in evaluation and program development: (a) storytelling lends itself to participatory change processes because it relies on people to make sense of their own experiences and environments; (b) stories can be used to focus on particular interventions while also reflecting on the array of contextual factors that influence outcomes; (c) stories can be systematically gathered, and claims verified from independent sources of methods; (d) narrative data can be analyzed using existing conceptual frameworks or assessed for emergent theme; and (e) narrative methods can be integrated into ongoing organizational processes to aid in program planning, decision-making and strategic management.

Altered Books

A unique and effective art therapy intervention related to narrative therapy is the process of the altered book construction. Highly structured art directives that include materials such as collaging of images, altered books, and boxes can allow the client to feel in control (Naff, 2014). Research shows that youth with avoidant and undemonstrative features, such as behavior and attitude, gained positive results from structured and directive therapy techniques (Scheeringa et al., 2017). Chilton (2007) defined an altered book as a pre-existing book that the individual transforms into a new work of art. Creating altered books is an adaptable form of art because it is a unique approach to self-expression and is adaptable to many different levels of artistic skills.

Altered books can be accessible, symbolic, offer healing, and promote growth and change (Chilton, 2007). Altered books can allow a wide variety of artistic approaches. The client can paint, and draw on the cover or the pages of the book, add and remove, poetry, text, words, and

images. The book can be embellished with found objects from nature, objects with meaning, stickers, fabrics, and beads.

Chilton (2007) highlighted “freedom of expression” as a theme in the altered book-making directive. Altered books have no rules and, as with many art therapy approaches, allows the therapist to encourage the client to create freely. Altered book directive and art therapy welcomes the client to individuality and personhood. The altered book directive can be less intimidating to the clients because they are not faced with a completely blank page, but are provided with the text and pre-drawn elements (Chilton, 2007). This can stimulate and give structure to the creative process while still encouraging self-expression. Each page of the book offers text, as well as images for the client to react to and explore (Chilton, 2007). The size of the book that the client chooses with this directive can also have an impact. The amount of pages in the book may require the alteration process to take an extensive amount of time (Chilton, 2007).

Altered books can be helpful to a client who is experiencing transition. Chilton (2007) shared that the process of opening and closing a book can symbolize the opening and closing of stages in an individual’s life. Taylor (2004) stated that books provide an opportunity for knowledge and can capture the memories and culture of the writer. Within a group art therapy setting, Chilton recommended not use controversial, explicit, and religious books with the altered book directive. Additionally, she also cautioned against using books that are irreplaceable, one of a kind, or rare due to cultural aspects or poverty. Overall, this creative act mirrors the existential drive to make one’s one identity unique in the world (Chilton, 2007).

Summary

Research supports the significant impacts of relationships on youth identity. Healthy and unhealthy relationships inside the household were examined, particularly relationships with parents. Both positive and negative relationships with family, friends, and members of the community have proven to impact youth as they explore and determine who they are. The literature addresses developmental stages of identity for youth transitioning to young adulthood. These stages differ and can be impacted by culture and financial circumstances. This research included emotions, attitudes, wants, and needs of a youth who is exploring and transitioning between stages of identity. Barriers that have negatively impacted minority youth identity included language, education, and poverty. These barriers have challenged youth in creating a successful positive identity. Art therapy as a form of narrative therapy has been identified to have a positive impact on youth exploring their identity and experiences that impact it. Specifically, narrative therapy in the form of altered books was identified as a creative experience that allows youth to understand their experiences, change their story, while also being culturally appropriate. Studies show that youth don't always respond well to talk therapy, but can use art materials to cope and form a response as well as process feelings and emotions.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This qualitative study utilized a self-identity pre and posttest survey with an art directive to investigate the identity formation of young adults. Both surveys along with a discussion, following the art directive, were used to identify common themes impacting the process of identity formation.

Participants

Female and male youth from the Southeast District of Columbia community between the ages of 18 and 23 years old served as participants in this research study. Students were informed about the opportunity to participate in this study through email as well as by flyers (Appendix A) posted at a nonprofit arts organization located in the Northeastern region. Announcements were also made during open studio sessions by the researcher. Participants signed consent forms clarifying the purpose of the study, the research design, the potential risks involved, participants' rights to terminate, terms of confidentiality, and the intent of the self-report surveys.

Five participants were chosen based on their availability and interest in the research being conducted. The participants were chosen on a first-come, first-serve basis. Release forms to photograph participants' artwork and process were also distributed. The forms explained how the images would assist in analyzing data and themes as they relate to the formation of self-identity and self-concept.

The participants received copies of all signed consent forms at the start of the process and were able to take their original artwork at the completion of the study. All artwork, images of work, and forms completed during the study were stored in a password-protected file on the

researcher's computer. As an incentive for participation in the study, the participants were given a meal of their choice.

Research Design

The participants were given a pretest survey regarding identity. All participants were asked to complete the survey during the opening of the first session. Following this, the participants was asked one at a time to share an experience that impacted their identity in a negative way. This personal account was recorded in a one on one interview in a secure location. After completing the survey and voice recordings, the participants were asked to join in creating an altered book based on their identity. Then they were given a very clear definition of what an altered book is and its purpose. Following they were asked to select a book that caught their interest from a collection of donated books to create their own altered book. They were asked to consider the question: *How does society see me? How do I see myself? How do I want to be seen?* The construction of the altered book would take three sessions (1.5/2 hours). At the closing of the third session the participants were asked to share their altered books and creative process. Following the artwork being shared, the participants were asked to complete the posttest survey.

Research Instruments

Survey questions. Discrepant information was provided to show the multiple perspectives on the topic and demonstrated the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher was responsible for distributing all relative forms to participants including demographics form and explaining the directions for the survey questions on identity, and the altered books during each hour-long session. The first survey included a self-report assessment (see Appendix B) that was developed based on a review of the literature. Questions

focused on participants' past and current experience involving transition and formation of self-identity as a young adult. This survey was used as a qualitative tool to determine common themes, elements, and influence in the formation of self-identity for inner city minority youth. After completion of the study, survey questions (Appendix B) were administered that focused on the participants' experiences creating the altered book. These questions also allowed the researcher to understand what influences the development of youth identity. The survey also allowed the participants to process their own experiences that impacted them.

Altered book. The altered book was presented to the participants as a way to explore their identity and the different elements that have influenced their identity in the past and present. Altered books offer a tactile quality that allows the client to manipulate an object already filled with meaning versus blank pages (Chilton, 2007). Chilton hypothesized that re-creating a book that already is filled with images and text by taking away and adding allows the client to create symbolism and meaning while narrating their experiences. The participants were given a choice of several size books from which to choose . They were then given five questions to guide them during the creative process in making their altered books. The participants were given access to a variety of mixed media to use in creating their altered book that included: paint pens, markers, crayons, color pencils, scissors, glue, and found objects.

Data Collection

After obtaining permission from the research site and the art therapist, the researcher posted flyers at both studio spaces and made announcements during the daily open studio sessions about recruiting participants for this study. The participants who showed interest in the study were contacted individually through email as well as face-to-face communication at the end of open studio sessions. On the scheduled day of the study small groups of participants were

scheduled to participate in an hour-long study in the studio space. After discussing and explaining the various requested forms for participation and release information, the participants were given the opportunity to ask for further clarification on all information given.

The researcher gathered three forms of qualitative data during the study, including self-identity pretest and posttest surveys and voice recordings. Also collected were consent and photo release forms and a voice recording release form. As participants were completing the forms and pretest survey, participants were individually requested to create a voice recording based on a negative experience about their identity that impacts on their self-identity. Participants were then invited to participate in creating an altered book focused on themes and exploration of self-identity. After completing the art, the participants were asked to create a name for their work. Following the altered book process, participants were asked to complete a post survey on self-identity and research process. At the conclusion of session three, the artwork created was photographed. Digital photos and voice recordings were assigned a numerical code and alphabetical code to protect each individual's identity and information.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Data. The outcome was based on themes emerging from eight questions on the questionnaire. The questions focused on what has impacted participants' views and perceptions of the self, and how these impacts have occurred. The primary focuses were: (a) Youth gave a brief self-description; (b) Youth's perception of self; (c) Youth's perception of how they are viewed by others; (d) What they find to be of importance and priority; (e) Identification and description of family influence; (f) Identification and description of technology influence; and (g) Identification and description of social media impacts.

Methods of inquiry included thematic analysis where common themes and connections of impactful experiences were found through the altered book making process, personal experience voice recordings, and identity survey.

In order to interpret the data, thematic analysis followed six basic steps:

1. **Immersion.** All data derived from the study, including the artwork and stories gathered through voice recordings, were organized into groups by the researcher. The researcher spent time immersing herself in the data to get a sense or preliminary analysis of the data. Emerging thoughts and questions were written in a log about each set of data.
2. **Understanding.** Data was carefully read and observed to determine overall meaning. Special emphasis was given to participants' descriptions. More notes and questions were generated by the researcher.
3. **Abstraction.** The researcher created codes based on her theoretical and knowledge base by segmenting text and images into categories. Categories were then labeled.
4. **Synthesis and Theme Development.** Based on the codes and data from step one and two, themes and subthemes were determined as part of the major findings of this study.
5. **Illuminating phenomena.** A discussion was provided explaining how the themes were interconnected to the research questions.
6. **Integration.** Integration of the learning and the meaning of the themes and descriptions were provided in the conclusion to this study (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Creswell, 2014).

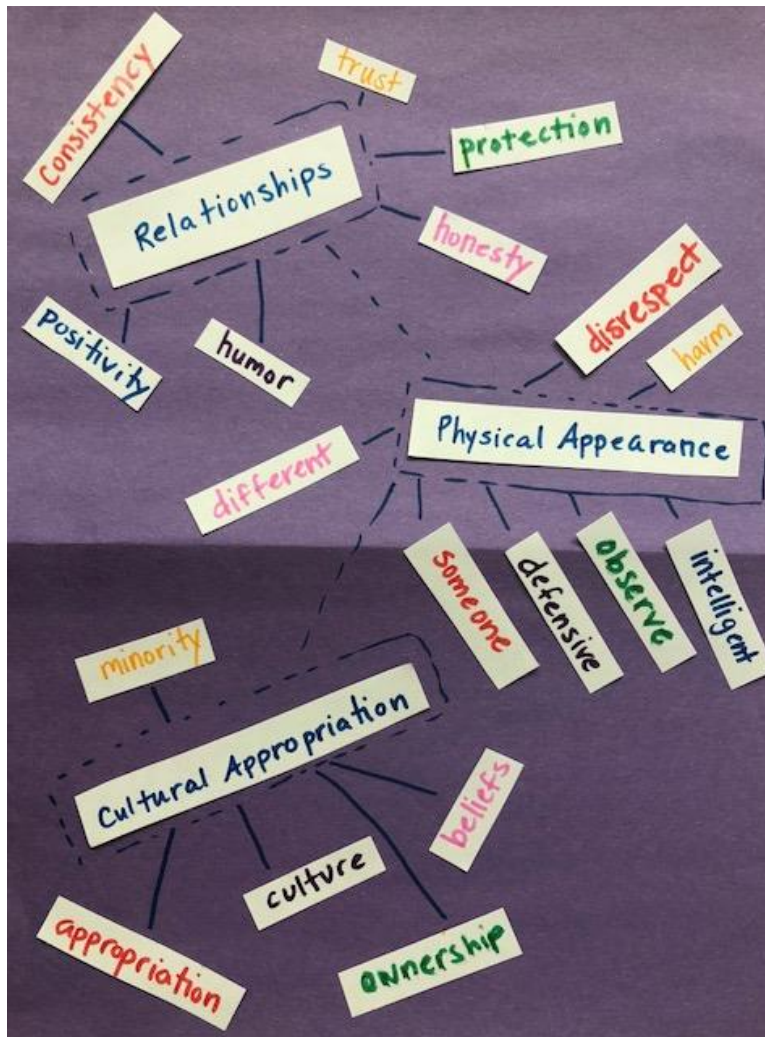


Figure 1. Thematic analysis chart.

By using theme based analysis, the researcher was able to identify common themes in the development of self-identity and self-concept. Through an open-ended question survey prior to the art assessment/directive, post assessment survey, altered book, and personal account recordings themes were identified. The researcher's leading goal was to understand original themes behind data collected and how they connected to youth and identity.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability, the researcher started by developing a standard demographic form modeled from similar forms researched. The framework of the study

included validity strategies such as triangulation of themes, presentation of discrepant information, provision of personal accounts, and clarification of researcher biases.

The researcher found multiple overlapping themes from sources, including artwork, voice recordings, and pretest and posttest surveys. Discrepant information was provided to show the multiple perspectives on the topic and to demonstrate the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Verbatim accounts taken from participants' voice recordings and shared experiences were used as support within the thematic analysis. According to Gwinner (2016), thematic analysis can be used to help identify which themes span across the data, and it can expand on more detailed analysis of the interconnections related to art, therapy, and health.

Finally, the researcher identified assumptions and biases that may have inadvertently shaped the study and its results to allow the readers to understand the researcher's perspective (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher made constant effort to protect the study's accuracy and reliability. Detailed accounts of the focus of the study were presented, including the process for data collection and analysis, the researcher's role, and the researcher's bias (Creswell, 2014). Finally, three qualified external readers with degrees and experience in art therapy and/or mental health were responsible for ensuring that this qualitative research study followed standard protocols and the prescribed outline of the study (Creswell, 2014).

Ethical Implications

To ensure the safety of the participants, the researcher followed the American Art Therapy Association's code of Ethics (AATA; 2013) as a guide; these practices were used as a foundation for this study. One of the leading principles included *respect for all persons*. This was demonstrated through the consent forms and information regarding the study given to the participants. All information was given verbally and in written form (Kapitan, 2010). The

participants were given the time after receiving the forms and verbal information to gain clarification about all information presented. After time to process and consider the information presented, the participants agreed verbally and signed the forms after agreeing to participate in the study. The participants were reassured that all information obtained would be confidential and the researcher made sure to store all information and forms from the study in the researcher's password protected computer. A second core value, *beneficence*, was also practiced with the researcher disclosing any foreseen potential risks that might be experienced as a result of participating in the study (Kapitan, 2010). Because the study focuses on identity, the participants were informed that one potential risk involved the possibility of re-experiencing difficult emotions or memories. To provide further support, a list of local counselors and their contact information was provided. There were also two certified art therapists available during the study for the participants to speak with as needed.

Researcher Biases

The researcher aimed to take an objective perspective when creating and conducting this study. Additionally, the researcher worked to maintain awareness of countertransference issues, as well as transference issues stemming from the participants. The researcher strove to make sure the study was based on established theory and measurable data. Being an art therapy graduate student also created a bias for the researcher in that she had to ensure not to do any harm to the participants by avoiding or ignoring information or methods in which she has not been fully trained. The researcher was also an intern at the organization from where the participants had been selected. This may also constitute a study bias in that participants had already formed a working relationship with the researcher prior to the beginning of the study, which may have influenced their decision to participate. Conversely, though, this may have also

been helpful in making the participant feel more comfortable with the researcher. Because the participants and graduate student were doing the study with an art therapist present, the researcher was in constant communication with the art therapist on methods and how the study was conducted to reduce bias and increase validity of the study.

CHAPTER IV

Results

An analysis of the data indicated three overarching themes. These included (a) relationships, (b) physical appearance, and (c) cultural appropriation.

Supportive Relationships

In interviews, surveys, and altered book responses, many of the youth expressed the importance of relationships and how they had both negatively and positively impacted their identity. All of the youth discussed relationships that involved family, friends, and members of the community. The relationships spanned from close relationships, which developed over time, as well as short brief relationship, potential relationships, and dissolved relationships. All of the youth focused on the changes and evolution of close relationships as they approached adulthood. Four of the five teen participants expressed that relationships with their parents (see Figure 2) were the most influential in their identity and who they had become. Four out of five participants indicated that their mother was the main person who influenced them. One participant said, “my mother was my best friend, she was the only one who stood up for me.”

The codes supporting the theme of relationships included consistency, trust, protection, positivity, humor, and honesty. Two of the five participants identified friends as being the most influential relationships impacting their identity. One participant identified her grandmother as being a mother figure that impacted her development and taught her many things.

When asked about relationships, support was a main theme. A male participant said, “My mother was the only support I had, she taught me everything I know about the world and how to survive.” All five participants identified support being a main factor in maintaining a

relationship with an individual. One participant described his relationship with friends as akin to family. Along with the theme of support was also the theme of consistency. All of the participants described consistency as a form of support. They also described how relationships that had been cut short or altered had negatively impacted them (Figure 3). One participant shared that his potential relationship with his father who he had never met impacted him both personally, as well as impacted his relationship with his mother. Two of the five participants expressed feeling a void from the absence of one parent. For both participants, death was the reason that their parents were no longer present.

During the altered book process, participants focused more on their negative and positive experiences that involved both family and friends. For all five participants, positive experiences reported in the altered books and interviews involved family and friends. Four out of five participants' negative experiences involved members of the community and the outside world.



Figure 2. Parental relationship.



Figure 3. Ending of a relationship.

Physical Appearance

Physical appearance was a theme that was reported by all participants in terms of how it had impacted them both positively and negatively. For many, the most influential experiences that impacted their identity involved peers from the community and strangers with whom they had no direct relationships. Many expressed underlying themes of gender, race, and body shaming.

All of the participants identified as African American. It was reported in the interviews that being a part of a minority race in modern day society had hugely impacted their sense of identity. Four out of five reported negative experience with individuals outside of the African American race. One reported negative experiences within her race, specifically including her peers and family members. All participants reported the common theme of “lack of value” due

to race and skin color. A male participant said, “For me being a black boy, I know my life doesn’t matter to others.” Many expressed that being a part of a minority race brings about a lot of stigmatism and ideologies. Members of the community were identified as key to racial micro aggression. A female participant expressed, “My roommate’s father told my roommate not to be alone with my boyfriend because he was black and may do her harm.” Four of the youth expressed negative experiences in which they had been the victims of racism. Participants reported being watched as criminals, treated differently than other customers of a different race, not served as a customer, treated as if they were a threat or expected to do harm to others.

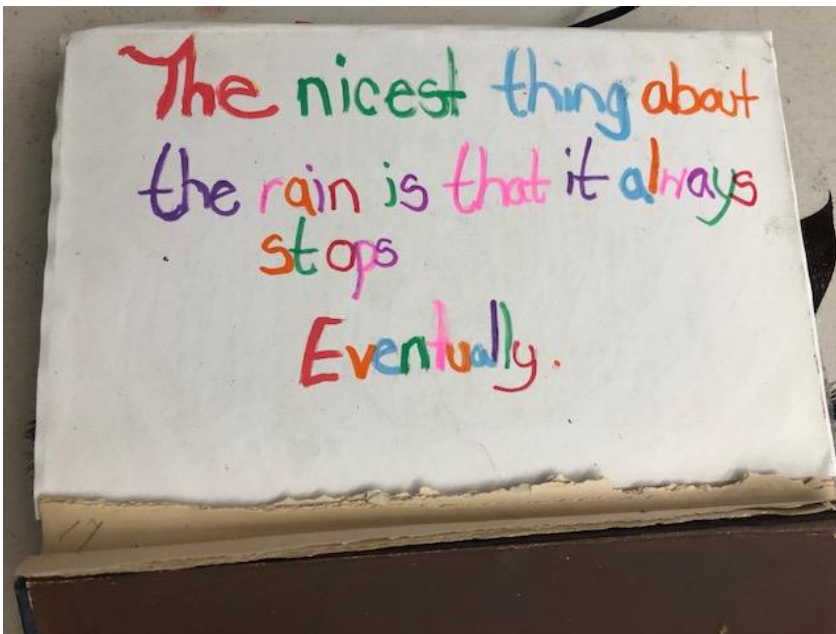


Figure 4. Altered book page done by female participant regarding minority status.



Figure 5. Altered book page done by female participant regarding prejudice and biases.

Gender was also a common theme in the interviews with the youth. It was reported that women participants had more negative experiences in social interactions with peers and people outside of their race. The male participants reported more incidents that involved physical harm and violence. Male participants reported feelings of worthlessness due to a combination of race and gender. Both male participants reported a general lack of respect for the lives of African American men in the communities. One participant pointed out that he received nothing but backlash and hate from his peers and community around him and that the only person who supported him was his mother. The same participant reported that being a black male in today's society is scary and that he felt he had to succeed in some venue to feel that he is important and that his life matters to others. He expressed that getting a good job would make him feel like 'somebody.' Both males in interviews identified the stereotype created by society that the only successful careers available to them are those in the sports industry or as chefs. One expressed how difficult it has been for him to fight that stereotype. He explained that he is often asked upon meeting individuals what sports he plays or if he plans to make a career out of being a football or

basketball player. The other male participant said he believed that in our modern world gender roles have changed and he believed there should be no gender box. A male participant exclaimed, “Any gender can do anything they want to do if they put their mind to it and believe in their self.” The female participants did not report any specific concerns or experiences with gender.

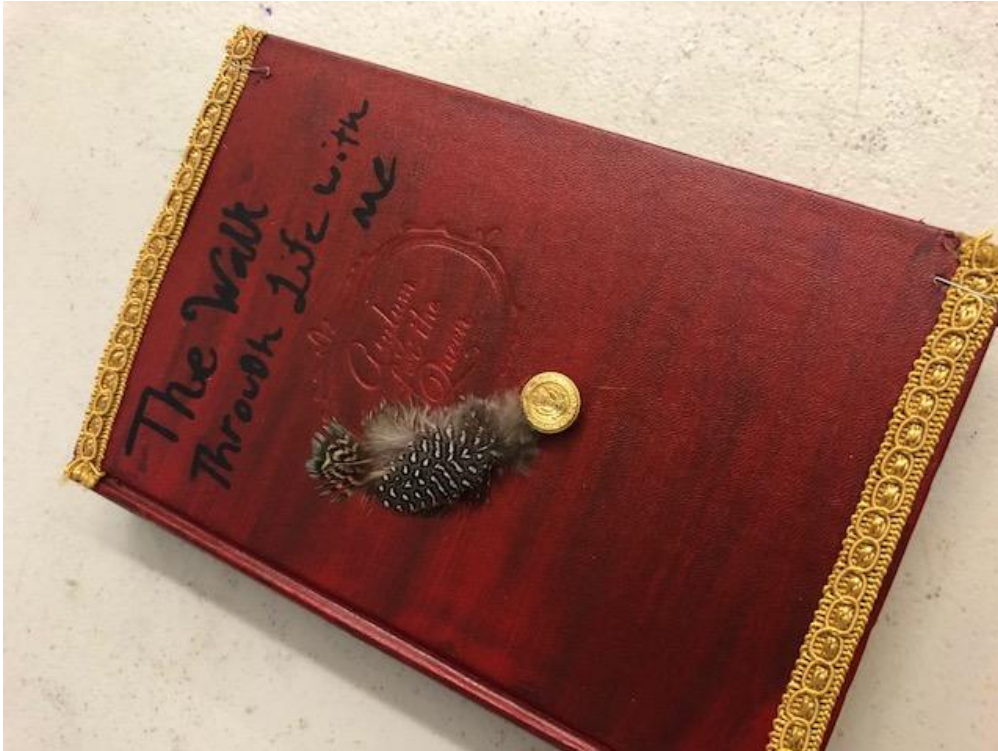


Figure 6. Altered book page done by male participant regarding status and race as an African American.

Race was a common theme expressed by all five participants. Four out of five participants expressed negative experiences regarding race. One participant recalled a negative experience involving an employee of another race who did not want to serve her or her grandmother due to their race. Another participant had a negative experience with her roommate in her college dorm. The roommate’s father made the assumption that because the young lady was African American she listened to rap music. Two of three male participants expressed

having racial encounters where the other race feared them or thought that they would cause harm to others because they were African American and males. A female participant reported that in engaging with other she feels that she has to put on a façade and change her voice and mannerisms in order to escape judgment from outside races. She admitted that she changes her voice on the phone when doing telephone calls to anyone that is not a friend or family member, in fear that she will be treated differently or not get good service if she doesn't sound 'white.'

One of the male participants shared about a negative incident that involved a neighbor of a different race. He expressed that growing up he built a relationship with the older woman by taking out her trash a few days a week. Once he became older and was a young man and recognizably not a child anymore the woman acted as if she had never met him, threatened him, and ran him off. His grandmother later expressed to him that the lady probably felt threatened by him now that he is older and of another race. The same participant shared a second experience of being racially profiled in a shopping mall. He was followed by an employee and badgered about making a purchase. "I noticed that she wasn't following other customers, but everywhere I went she went, I'm not stupid I know when I'm being followed," he expressed. The codes supporting the theme of racism include: disrespect, harm, observe, defensive, intelligent, and different.

Two of the female participants expressed not being comfortable in their own skin and being unhappy with their appearance. Both participants shared how being overweight has impacted them emotionally and socially. One participant shared that she has been overweight for her entire life and weight issues have always been a problem for her. Dating has been difficult, she has also had a difficult time in school with being teased as well as at home with family.

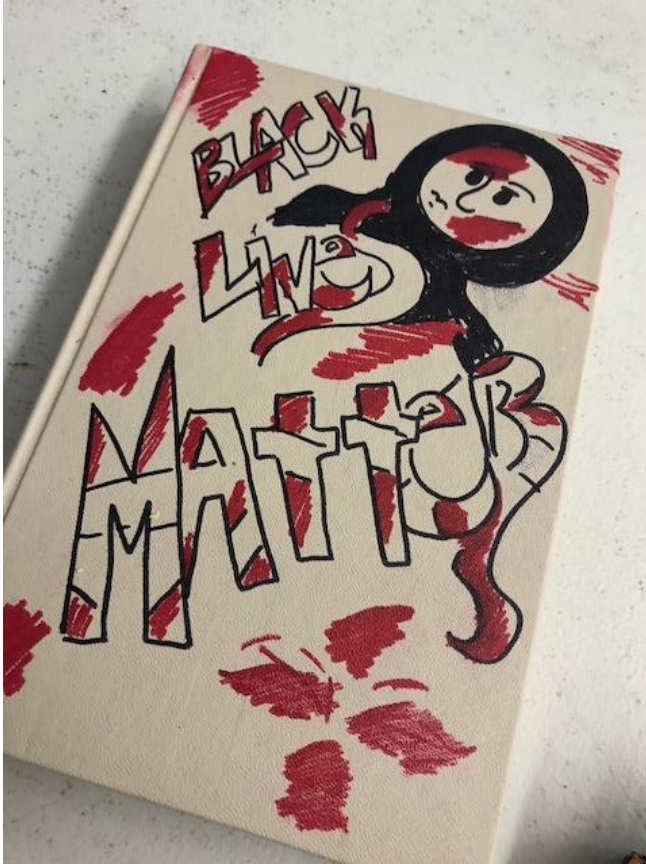


Figure 7. Altered book page by male participant regarding race.

Cultural Appropriation

Both males and female participants expressed discomfort, anger, and concern with the theme of cultural appropriation. Two participants expressed frustration with the dominant white society taking on nuances and habits from African American people. “Can we even be ourselves, can we have anything!!!” A male participant expressed. One male participant gave the example of gentrification happening now in communities and how the culture and history of the people there is being erased. The same participant expressed how the language and slang, style of dressing, and beauty standards of minorities are being duplicated mainly by Caucasian Americans, but by other races as well. The participant felt that the dominant race group in society is taking our culture and practices and projecting them on themselves.

Three of the female participants reported that social media, ads, TV shows, and beauty standards have all evolved to fit the body and style of African American women. Specifically, they identified surgery and other products available to enhance the buttocks, hips, lips, hair, and eye color. “For example Kylie Jenner, like why all the surgery, to look like us?” one participant expressed. The male participant also pointed out that in the past we have been judged and looked down on for the same things that the dominant culture is trying to appropriate today. Codes associated with this theme cultural appropriation were minority, ownership, culture, and beliefs.



Figure 8. Altered book page done by female participant

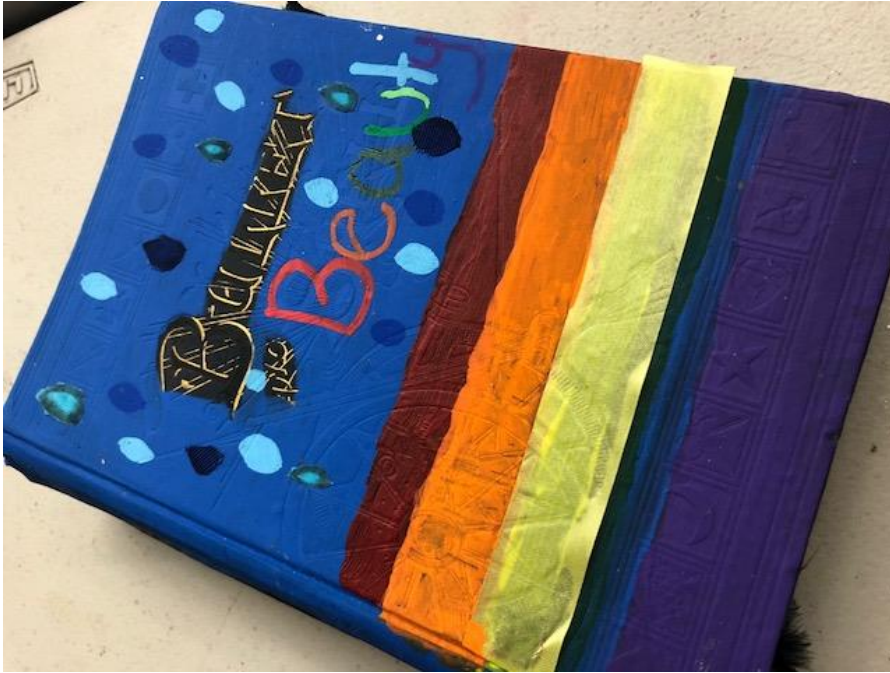


Figure 9. Altered book page done by female participant

CHAPTER V

Discussion

A study was done using narrative therapy through altered book-making to explore common themes that had impacted youth identity. Youth were given pre and post surveys containing open-ended questions, as well as engaged in individual and group discussion. Individual interviews consisted of personal accounts of negative and positive experiences that had impacted participant identity development. After completing the altered book process, the participants had a group discussion to identify positive and negative experiences, as well as other thoughts or feelings that had emerged during the creative process. A thematic analysis was conducted with the information gathered from the study. The overarching themes included relationships, physical appearance, and cultural appropriation.

Supportive Relationships

In this study, relationships were a major theme for all participants. This theme was consistent with all participants in the study. The participants appeared to confirm Inguglia's (2015) contention that parental support is linked to relatedness and autonomy. The theme was also supported by Jagers (2015), who identified trust and closeness as important elements of youth parent relationships. All of the youth identified codes related to the theme, which included trust, consistency, and support. Four participants identified their relationship with their parents as most influential to their identity. Two participants expressed being negatively impacted by their parents, which had resulted in a lack of closeness and trust. This theme was also supported by Jagers (2015), who stated that lack of closeness and connection could be a result of fallouts and arguments between youth and their parents. Relationships with other family members and family cohesion was also addressed in the study and reported by two participants. One

participant expressed that their family's lack of cohesion had negatively impacted their grades and behavior at school. Jagers (2015) identified lack of family cohesion as a major impact to youth development.

Physical Appearance

All participants reported various negative and positive experiences that related to their physical appearance. Shen (2017) identified that goals for youth at this time should involve joining the workforce, establishing residence, and exploring career and education options. For the female participants, beauty standards impacted their motives. Not meeting beauty standards and having negative experiences related to physical appearance impacted their motives as they explored their identity. Anburaj (2017) supported this by recognizing that human motives can be regulated by an individual's perspective. An impact was also noticed regarding each participant's mental and emotional state, and feelings towards themselves due to negative experiences with race. Campbell's (1995) social theory recognized that identity can be shaped and constrained by social context. He also touched on the importance of acceptance and social groups. All participants reported negative experiences with race that related to the codes of disrespect, difference, and harm. Not being social accepted because of appearance and skin color had served to negatively impact how the participants identified.

Cultural Appropriation

Cultural appropriation can happen naturally in a culture that is mixed with different races and populations, all living in one place while practicing different beliefs, rituals, and habits. One male participant specifically showed concern about beauty standards for women and how they vary across cultures. He expressed African Americans as "not being able to have our own identity." "They shame us but then want to be, look, and do as we do," he expressed. All

participants expressed the viewpoint that African Americans are not accepted in society, while at the same time are culturally appropriated by other races.

Limitations

One major limitation to the study was time. The research collected was based on three sessions. After the study was completed the researcher realized how having the time to create could impact the results of not only the product but also the therapeutic process. Two of the participants even expressed not having enough time to really create freely and felt pressured as a result. All three sessions were an hour and a half long. The first session was not completely focused on the creative process because the researcher had to give the pre survey and explain the research purpose and process to the participants.

Another limitation to the study was participants being present and on time for every session. All participants were on time and gave full participation for the first two sessions. The male participants were not able to participate in the final session. This included the discussion at the conclusion of the last session and post survey. The researcher was able to talk to both individuals during the creative process, but was not really able to see the full impact of what the altered book process could do for the individuals from a therapeutic standpoint. Another limitation to the study was the sample size and only having one minority status represented (e.g., racial identification). All youth participants were from the same socioeconomic status and came from similar backgrounds. As stated in the introduction, the researcher believes that there should be more information, research, and studies completed on youth from a variety of ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. Being able to include a variety of ethnicities would allow for better results in terms of the impact art therapy can have on youth and identity.

Recommendations

Future recommendations for a study based on youth would include a larger sample size, a longer study, and a variety of youth from different backgrounds. Individuals who have experienced trauma would benefit from this study because of the narrative process used when creating altered books. Having a larger group of participants could raise both the validity and quality of the research being conducted. It would allow the researcher to account for youth and individuals who may drop out, not show up, or those who did not put forth full efforts or participation. Due to schedule conflicts, mishaps, and transportation, some youth were late and in the last session did not come. To avoid this in the future having a larger participant group could help fill the gaps. Being able to have the research extended or doubling the amount of sessions would allow the participants more time to work in their altered books and focus on the process rather than the product. Not having enough time to process when creating the altered books may have impacted participants' therapeutic process, thereby impacting the study overall. The participants were asked to recall, retell, and in a way relive negative and positive experiences, without enough time to process all of those experiences. The AATA (2013) code of ethics addressed the therapist not being able to meet client's needs by opening up and leaving the client exposed.

The researcher feels that in order to keep the therapeutic process client centered, the time allotted for the creative process must be extended. Having a month with two sessions a week, totaling eight sessions would allow the participants more time to process information, feelings, and emotions. When processing a single experience every person's way of processing and time can vary. The therapist must take that into consideration when working with a group who all may

be processing differently at different paces. Plain and simple, the creative process cannot be rushed.

Having a variety of minorities in the study could strengthen the research results and allow the researcher to compare and contrast. By having youth from different backgrounds it would offer different perspectives on identity pertaining to religion, beliefs, struggles, and gender. During the process of collecting and gathering information, the researcher believes creating an inventory form would raise the validity and reliability of the research being conducted. This research and study are important in order to advance the field of art therapy, to offer more information on minority youth and identity, and to inspire further research in the future.

Conclusion

Conducting research on youth and their identity as an emergent adult can be very informative, especially for individuals in transition who may be exploring their identity at the same time. The researcher hypothesized that being able to create in order to process, explore, and find oneself can be very helpful. Identifying negative and positive experiences that impact one's identity was challenging. The first step of becoming aware of one's self, habits, beliefs, and perceptions may have been the most challenging part of the study. The participants were very willing and open with themselves and the researcher. Building a rapport with the participants prior to conducting the research may have aided in the research process. During this process, the researcher realized how many symptoms and diagnoses could be addressed using altered books and art in general. The researcher was also made aware that childhood, upbringing, and culture, among many other elements, impacted the youth's identity as it evolves.

The researcher realized the power of art and creativity to facilitate processing and explore participant emergent identity. The participants also expressed the feeling of not knowing

the power of creating artwork based on a topic to explore their unconscious feelings, thoughts, and beliefs. The researcher concludes that the art was able to bring relief, comfort, and understanding to the participants. Participants were able to process past traumas and experiences that they didn't know had as great of an impact as they did.

The researcher hypothesized that technology would play a more significant role in the identity of the youth. The researcher believed that social media, the internet, and other forms of technology would have a heavier negative impact on the participants. The participants expressed the role of social media as impactful, but not as much as racial prejudice and cultural appropriation. More research is needed on the role of social media and its impacts on minority youth, as well as youth experiences with prejudice and cultural appropriation. It is also recommended that more research be done on other forms of technology with a larger population across multiple minorities.

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Appendix A

This Skin I'm In: Identity

Pre/Post Survey

Age:

Sex: M or F

1. Describe yourself in one sentence.
2. What is important to you?
3. How do you think others see you?
4. How do you see yourself?
5. How has your family influenced who you are?
6. What type of media/ technology do you find yourself using the most?
7. How has social media/technology impacted how you see yourself?