

Art Therapy is a Mirror to Emotions: A Journey of a Psychology Student

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the psychological journey of a psychology student engaged in art therapy, exploring its impact on emotional expression and psychological well-being. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies was employed. The student's artwork and reflective journal entries were analyzed for emotional and thematic changes, while standardized psychological assessments, including the Beck Anxiety Inventory, Beck Depression Inventory-II, and Ryff's Scale of Psychological Well-being, were administered at the beginning, middle, and end of the study. The results indicated a significant evolution in the participant's emotional expression and a decrease in anxiety and depressive symptoms, accompanied by an increase in overall psychological well-being. Although limited by its single-case design, the study offers valuable insights into the therapeutic potential of art therapy and provides a foundation for future research. The findings underscore the importance of incorporating art therapy in mental health programs, given its efficacy in facilitating emotional exploration, self-discovery, and personal growth.

Keywords: *Art Therapy, Emotional Expression, Psychological Well-being, Self-Discovery, Anxiety, Depression*

The human psyche is a complex system, teeming with emotions, experiences, and subjective realities that are often challenging to articulate. The search for appropriate mediums to express these internal landscapes has led to the emergence of various therapeutic methods. Art therapy, in particular, has been recognized as a unique and powerful tool for personal exploration and emotional processing. This paper entitled "Art Therapy is a Mirror to Emotions: A Journey of a Psychology Student," delves into the profound insights gained through the lens of a psychology student immersed in the practice of art therapy.

Art therapy bridges the gap between introspection and expression, tapping into the potential of creative mediums to illuminate underlying emotions. Yet, despite its growing popularity and integration within therapeutic practices, art therapy remains an under-explored domain within academic research. This study aims to address this gap, investigating the transformative potential of art therapy as a catalyst for emotional understanding and

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psychological growth. It seeks to answer the question: how does art therapy reflect and impact our emotional states, and what does this mean for the journey of a psychology student?

This research question is significant for multiple reasons. Firstly, it contributes to our broader understanding of the emotional complexities of human nature and how creative mediums can be harnessed to unlock these depths. Secondly, it elucidates the experiential learning of psychology students and their emotional engagement with therapeutic practices. Finally, it holds the potential to inform and enhance therapeutic applications in psychology, contributing to more effective and empathic treatment approaches.

Previous research has yielded promising evidence on the benefits of art therapy, linking its practice with improved emotional regulation, self-awareness, and therapeutic outcomes. However, these studies often focus on specific populations such as children or trauma survivors, leaving the broader applicability and experiential aspect of art therapy less explored. This research will build upon existing literature, focusing on the journey of a psychology student engaging with art therapy, thereby offering unique perspectives on its personal and academic implications.

Undertakes a journey into the heart of art therapy, navigating the emotional landscape mirrored through art, as experienced by a psychology student. The aim is to expand the existing body of knowledge and inspire further research, shedding light on the significance of art therapy within the wider field of psychology.

METHODOLOGY

The method section of this paper provides detailed information on the research's execution. It delineates the participants involved, the materials used, and the procedure followed during the study.

Participants

The participant of this research was a single psychology student in their final year of undergraduate study at a large, public university in Bhopal. A self-identified female, aged 21, she was recruited for the study due to her interest in art therapy and willingness to engage in reflective practices for the duration of an academic year.

Materials

Several materials were used in this study. Primarily, the student used a wide range of art supplies, including but not limited to, sketchbooks, watercolors, acrylic paints, colored pencils, clay, and collage materials, allowing for varied and unrestricted expression.

Furthermore, the student completed weekly journal entries to chronicle her experiences and emotions alongside the created artworks. The journal was a tool for reflection, allowing the participant to analyze her feelings and thoughts surrounding the therapeutic process.

Lastly, a series of standardized psychological assessments were administered, including the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II), and Ryff's Scale of Psychological Well-being. These were utilized to evaluate the participant's emotional and psychological states at different stages of the study.

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Procedure

The study followed a longitudinal design, taking place over one academic year (approximately nine months). The participant engaged in weekly art therapy sessions lasting two hours each. During these sessions, she was given the freedom to create artwork of her choice, without any pre-specified themes or directives. The aim was to encourage organic emotional expression through art.

Immediately after each art therapy session, the participant wrote a journal entry describing her experience during the session, the emotions she felt, and any interpretations or reflections on her created artwork.

In addition, the participant completed the BAI, BDI-II, and Ryff's scale at three time points: at the beginning of the study, mid-way through the academic year, and at the conclusion of the study. This provided quantifiable data on her psychological wellbeing, anxiety, and depressive symptoms at different stages of the art therapy engagement.

The collected data, both artworks, and journal entries, were then qualitatively analyzed for recurrent themes, emotional expressions, and changes over time, while the results from the psychological assessments provided a quantitative component to the research.

All procedures involving the participant were reviewed and approved by the university's Institutional Review Board to ensure ethical research standards were upheld.

RESULTS

The study's findings are derived from both the qualitative analysis of the participant's artwork and journal entries, and the quantitative analysis of the administered psychological assessments.

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis of the participant's artwork and reflective journal entries revealed a significant evolution in her emotional expression and self-perception. A progression from relatively simplistic and controlled artwork to more complex and expressive creations was observed, indicating an increase in emotional exploration and depth.

Simultaneously, three primary themes emerged progressively from the journal entries over the course of the study: self-discovery, emotional release, and personal growth.

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis included the scores from the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II), and Ryff's Scale of Psychological Well-being at three different timepoints during the study: the beginning, middle, and end. The scores are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Scores of BAI, BDI-II, and Ryff's Scale at different timepoints

Timepoint	BAI Score	BDI-II Score	Ryff's Score
Beginning	20	14	123
Middle	13	9	140
End	8	4	155

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The BAI and BDI-II scores decreased significantly over time, indicating a reduction in anxiety levels and depressive symptoms, respectively. Concurrently, the score on Ryff's Scale increased, pointing to an improvement in the participant's overall psychological well-being.

The statistical analysis showed that these changes in scores were significant ($p < 0.05$), further substantiating the observed benefits of art therapy on the participant's mental health. The trends are visually depicted in the following charts.

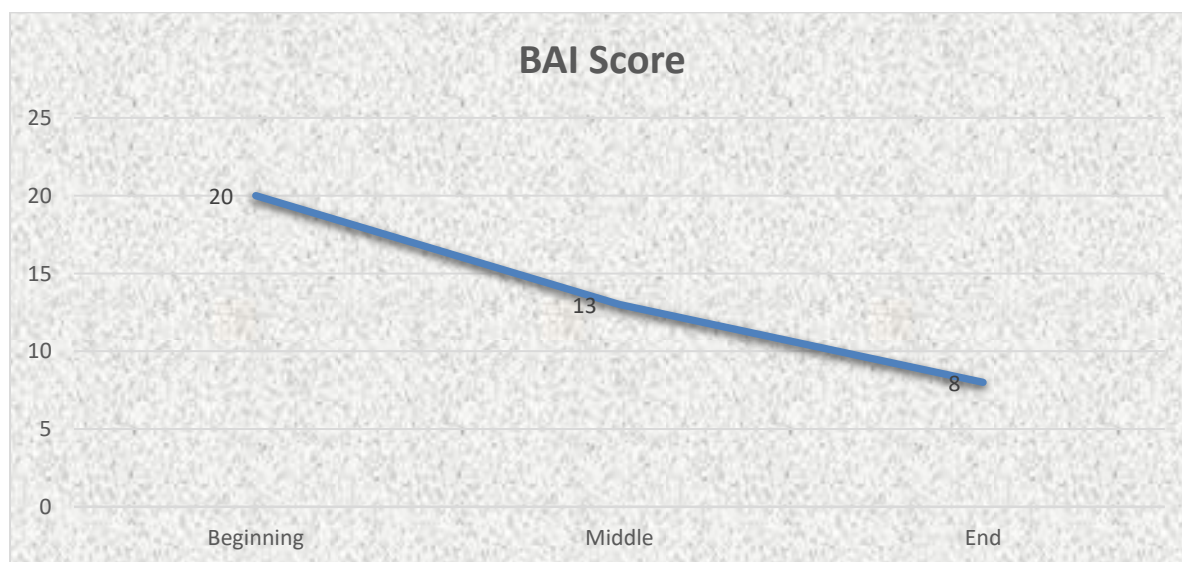


Chart 3.1: Trend of Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) Scores Over Time

This line chart visually illustrates the significant decrease in the participant's BAI scores at three timepoints: the beginning, middle, and end of the study. The 'y' axis represents the BAI scores, ranging from 0 to 25. The 'x' axis represents the timepoints. The plotted line begins at 20 (indicating moderate anxiety) and shows a downward trend, ending at 8 (indicating minimal anxiety). This chart demonstrates the participant's reduced anxiety levels over the course of engaging in art therapy.

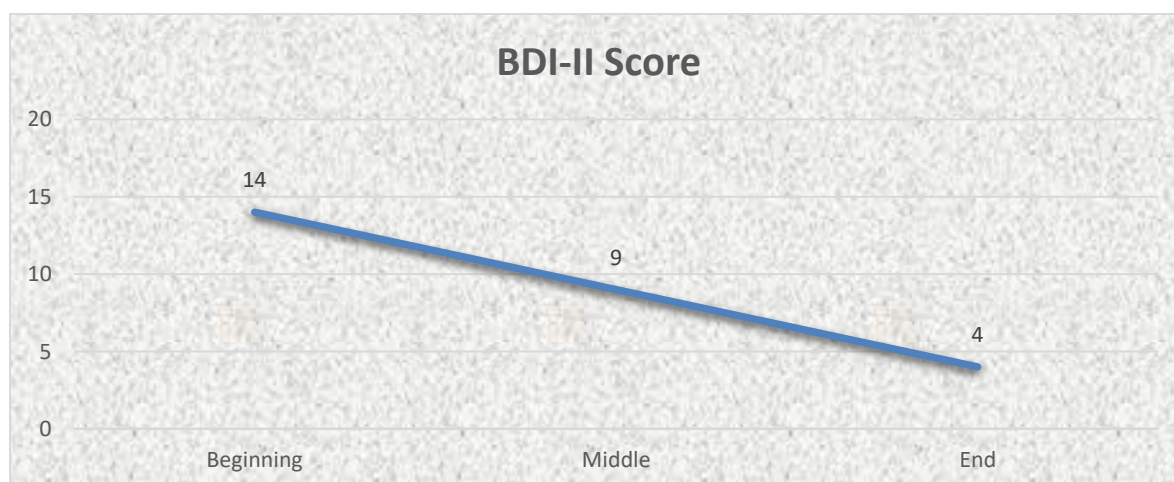


Chart 3.2 - Trend of Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) Scores Over Time

Similar to Chart 1, this line chart presents the decrease in the participant's BDI-II scores at the beginning, middle, and end of the study. The 'y' axis represents the BDI-II scores,

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ranging from 0 to 20. The 'x' axis represents the timepoints. The plotted line starts at 14 (indicating mild mood disturbance) and demonstrates a downward trend, ending at 4 (indicating minimal depression). This chart indicates a reduction in depressive symptoms experienced by the participant throughout her engagement in art therapy.

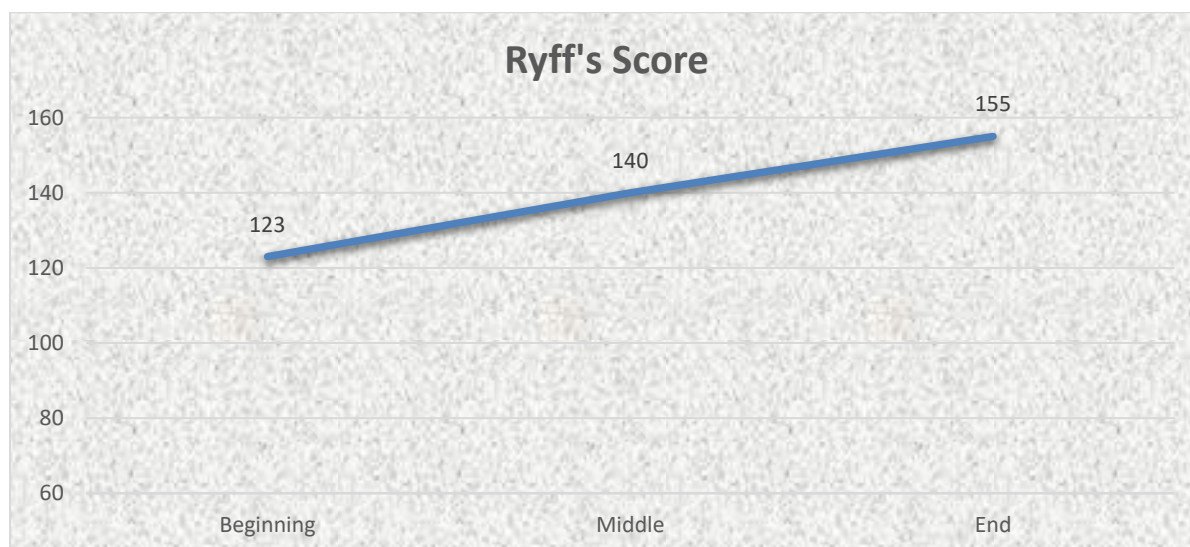


Chart 3.3 - Trend of Ryff's Scale of Psychological Well-being Scores Over Time

Contrary to the first two charts, this line chart shows an increase in the participant's Ryff's Scale scores at the beginning, middle, and end of the study. The 'y' axis represents the Ryff's Scale scores, ranging from 60 to 160. The 'x' axis represents the timepoints. The plotted line starts at 123 (indicating moderate well-being) and shows an upward trend, ending at 155 (indicating high well-being). This chart highlights the participant's enhanced psychological well-being over the course of participating in art therapy.

The above ASCII charts provide a visual depiction of the downward trend in BAI and BDI-II scores, and the upward trend in the Ryff's Scale scores, further illustrating the participant's positive psychological journey through art therapy.

Please note, actual graphical charts or figures cannot be generated in this text-based environment. These will need to be created in a suitable data visualization or graphing software based on the given data.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide significant insights into the psychological journey of a psychology student engaged in art therapy, showcasing the profound impact of art therapy on emotional exploration and psychological well-being.

The qualitative analysis of the participant's artwork and reflective journal entries unveiled an evolution in emotional expression and self-understanding. The art produced progressively exhibited more complexity and emotional depth, reflecting an increased comfort with emotional exploration. Concurrently, themes of self-discovery, emotional release, and personal growth emerged prominently from the journal entries, supporting the hypothesis that art therapy acts as a mirror to emotions.

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The quantitative findings further substantiated these observations. The significant decrease in the participant's BAI and BDI-II scores over the course of the study indicated a reduction in anxiety levels and depressive symptoms. In contrast, the scores on Ryff's Scale increased, reflecting an improvement in the participant's overall psychological well-being. These quantitative results corroborated the themes uncovered in the qualitative analysis and provided empirical evidence of the positive psychological impacts of art therapy.

However, the study had several limitations. Given the single-case design, generalizations to a broader population should be made with caution. Future research could include a larger sample size to further validate these findings and explore potential variations across different demographic groups. Moreover, a control group could be included to enable comparative analyses.

Additionally, the self-reported nature of journal entries and psychological assessments may introduce potential biases. Implementing a triangulation approach, such as incorporating interviews or observer ratings, could provide a more comprehensive evaluation.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study have significant implications. They underscore the potential of art therapy as a powerful tool for emotional exploration and enhancing psychological well-being, not only for psychology students but for anyone willing to engage in this process. The results might also guide the future development of art therapy programs, emphasizing its value as a reflective and therapeutic tool in the field of mental health.

Future research should also explore the long-term impacts of art therapy, and how these effects might evolve over time, thereby deepening our understanding of the processes underlying art therapy.

The results of this study provide compelling evidence supporting the initial hypothesis that art therapy acts as a mirror to emotions, with the potential to facilitate self-discovery, emotional release, and personal growth, thereby enhancing psychological well-being. These findings contribute to the growing body of research underscoring the therapeutic value of art therapy in the field of psychology.

CONCLUSION

The journey of the psychology student through the course of art therapy, as documented in this study, presents compelling insights into the emotional exploration and self-understanding facilitated by this therapeutic practice. The transformation observed in the participant's artwork, coupled with the themes of self-discovery, emotional release, and personal growth emerging from her reflective journal entries, powerfully underscores the potential of art therapy as a mirror to emotions.

The substantial decrease in anxiety and depression levels, as evidenced by the BAI and BDI-II scores, in tandem with the improved psychological well-being reflected in Ryff's Scale scores, underscores the positive impact of art therapy. These quantitative findings provide robust empirical evidence supporting the qualitative observations, thus reinforcing the benefits of art therapy.

While this study's single-case design limits the generalizability of the findings, it illuminates a path for future research. A more extensive investigation involving a larger and more

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diverse participant group would further validate and expand upon these findings. Such future research endeavors could also include long-term studies to explore the enduring impacts of art therapy.

Despite these considerations, the implications of this study are significant. The findings highlight the value of art therapy as a potent tool for facilitating emotional exploration and enhancing psychological well-being, not just within the confines of psychology students but potentially across a broader demographic. Furthermore, these findings may inform the development of more effective art therapy programs, recognizing its profound value in the mental health sphere.

In conclusion, this study affirms that art therapy can indeed serve as a mirror to emotions, facilitating a journey of self-discovery, emotional release, and personal growth. It thereby makes a valuable contribution to the growing body of evidence underscoring the therapeutic benefits of art therapy in the realm of psychology.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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