

SYMBOLISM

Symbolism:

An Arts-Based Phenomenological Study Through Reflective Artwork of Graduate Students

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, my partner, and my cohort members. Thank you to my parents, Dana and David, for encouraging me to follow my creative instincts from a young age. Thank you to my partner, Cameron, who never lets me sell myself short. Thank you to my cohort for riding the rocky seas. You all have shaped the person, and future art therapist, I am today.

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Abstract

Symbolism has the potential to be found in anything and everywhere if someone will allow themselves to explore this idea. While symbolism exploration has been occurring for decades, art therapy has provided a wonderful opportunity for people to explore symbolism within artwork. The purpose of this study was to understand the use of symbols within professional identity. This study hypothesized that symbols and themes of nature would be used in artwork to explore professional identity within a graduate art therapy program. The method used was an art-based phenomenological study. Exploring the integration of lived experiences and professional knowledge, this study found that professional identity is an ongoing evolution. This evolution can be guided by implementing new training for graduate students and emerging professionals to prepare for the field of art therapy.

Keywords: symbols, professional identity, person of the therapist

Chapter I

Introduction

“After all, we did not invent symbolism; it is a universal age-old activity of the human imagination.” - Sigmund Freud

Symbolism has the potential to be found in anything and anywhere if someone allows themselves to explore. Symbolism is the art or practice of using symbols especially by investing objects with a symbolic meaning or by expressing the invisible or nonmaterial (Mühlenbeck & Jacobsen, 2020). Symbolic meaning can be found in universal themes such as product branding. Symbolic meaning can also be found on a personal level, such as someone having a special connection with red roses or their favorite number. Symbols allow for a deepened understanding of oneself as an individual.

This deepened understanding can help a person learn more about who they are individually and professionally. Although there is research conducted about symbols and identity, there is only a small amount of research in regard to professional identity of art therapists. While symbolism exploration has been occurring for decades, art therapy has provided a wonderful opportunity for people to explore symbolism within artwork. Symbols can come about in artwork in order to draw attention to emotions or feelings (Skroce, 2017). Professional identity and symbols can connect employees to who they aspire to be (Byron & Laurence, 2015). Symbols and art therapy allowed for the exploration of the benefits of symbolism in treatment goals (Nuttall & Pelletier, 2020).

This arts-based study aims to help gather information to help identify the role of symbolism within the first- and second-year cohorts in the graduate program within a large metropolitan university. During a graduate program, students go through stages of change, gain

insights, and create professional identity. Through the use of reflective artmaking, this study will help to understand the development of professional identity for future art therapists. Symbols of confidence, growth, self-awareness, and hope are all reported and examined.

Operational Definitions

Active imagination: is a term used by Jungian theory that refers to the mobilization of one's psyche through image(s) and their related associations or lived experiences (Schaverien, 2005).

Art therapist: a master's level clinician that uses the creative process to enhance and improve the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages (American Art Therapy Association, 2020).

Art therapy: an integrative mental health and human services profession that enriches lives through art-making, the creative process, psychological theories, and human experience (American Art Therapy Association, 2020).

Collective unconscious: the lived experience of all humans; specifically universal experiences that someone is not consciously aware of (Hermans & Van Loon, 1991).

Identity: identity is what represents the whole person, who they are, and the connections they feel in relation to society (Filiault et al., 2019).

Jungian Theory: a theoretical framework that supports how each person strives to balance the conscious and unconscious (Hermans & Van Loon, 1991).

Person of the Therapist Training (POTT): Training model developed in the 1980's that focuses on the inner workings, using humanity, and ability to be fully present in a therapy session (Aponte & Kissil, 2017).

Personal symbol: a symbol that represents or holds value on an individual level (Hermans & Van Loon, 1991).

Self-awareness: occurs when an individual focuses on the inner ideas and actions of the self, which lets the individual become more aware and open to others (Elkis-Abuhoff et al., 2010).

Signifier: can be any material or nonmaterial thing (e.g., sounds within a language, material objects used in art, or a movement in a ritual) that represents a concept or meaning (Mühlenbeck & Jacobsen, 2020).

Symbol: an entity that stands for something and can be thought or perceived as an external representation of mental concepts created by using materials or nonmaterial signifiers (Mühlenbeck & Jacobsen, 2020).

Symbolism: the art or practice of using symbols by investing objects with a symbolic meaning or by expressing the invisible or nonmaterial (Mühlenbeck & Jacobsen, 2020).

Universal symbol: a symbol that represents an object or subject to a larger audience (e.g., religious motifs, product branding, or animal species) (Hermans & Van Loon, 1991).

Chapter II

Literature Review

What is Symbolism?

According to Byron and Laurence (2015), symbols are defined as physical materializations that hold the wisdom to represent a bigger meaning. Symbolism is the art or practice of using symbols especially by investing objects with a symbolic meaning or by expressing the invisible or nonmaterial (Mühlenbeck & Jacobsen, 2020). Symbols hold the significance to bring people into reality, structure, and the content that a symbolism tries to convey (Mühlenbeck & Jacobsen, 2020). Symbolism has the potential to be found in anything and everywhere if someone allows themselves to explore this idea. Following the idea that symbolism can potentially be found anywhere, the earliest forms of material symbolism were found in cave markings that represented structures and the environment (Mühlenbeck & Jacobsen, 2020).

In a study about the personal meaning of symbols by Hermans and Van Loon (1991), the researchers divided symbols into two categories of personal and universal symbols. A universal symbol can represent an object or subject to a larger audience (e.g., religious motifs, product branding, or animal species), while a personal symbol holds meaning of significance on an individual level (Hermans & Van Loon, 1991). This categorization led to the realization that symbols hold the power to transform their meaning differently at varying times and stages in life (Hermans & Van Loon, 1991). Hermans and Van Loon (1991) stated that the question of how much importance a symbol can carry was unable to be defined due to such variances in a symbol's meanings, timing, and symbolic interpretation.

Through this study, it was evident that symbols could continue to evolve personally and universally. According to DeLoache (1995), the most individualizing factor between humans and other creatures is how humans find evolving ways to use symbols. This level of understanding can provide the base knowledge for how humans interpret the world around them.

Symbols on this individual level can allow for self-exploration. Both universal and individual symbols hold meaning and can tell stories of one's lived experience. This has led to understanding symbols use and symbolism within psychological theory. The works of Carl Jung and analytic theory have provided a plethora of content specifically addressing symbolism.

Carl Jung

Carl Gustav Jung, a Swiss psychologist and the founder of analytic or Jungian theory advanced the understanding of the role and impact of symbolism and symbolic thinking in the psyche (Meymandi, 2010). Jung's work helped to define two types of imagination: engaged (applied and focused) and active (voluntary and at will) (Meymandi, 2010). He layered his understanding of imagination with existing theories of the conscious and unconscious mind to gain a deeper understanding of the psyche. In the typical model of the layers of the mind, according to Jung and his theory, shows that the further "up" someone goes from the collective unconscious and travels through the personal conscious, the farther "away" someone strays from the symbolic side towards the top levels of the ego of conscious awareness (Mayes, 2016). The collective unconscious is defined as the lived experience of all humans; specifically universal experiences that someone is not consciously aware of (Hermans & Van Loon, 1991).

Jung did his own self-explorations and expanded his theories beyond the Western approach (Schaverien, 2005). Symbols can come from a place of awareness or unconsciousness but can still hold important meaning for people. Carl Jung was able to bring about the idea of

artwork holding symbolic meaning and that we are symbolic people due to his own personal self-explorations within his artwork (Schaverien, 2005).

Symbols in Artwork

It was reported that Carl Jung would feel stuck in analytic theory and would create models, take time to paint pictures, or make mandalas to explore his own ideas of personal reflection and insight (Schaverien, 2005). This approach of using the creative process to illicit new pathways or understandings is foundational in art therapy. Art therapists facilitate directives and create a space that aid clients in exploration and insights to themselves (AATA, 2020). The actual experience of the client immersing in the making art is much more important than that of the final product. Schaverien (2005) states that active imagination pertains to the experience of the person instead of the medium being used. Although, aesthetics of the final product is an important part of the analysis because it can give insight to the active imagination (Schaverien, 2005). The purpose of that imagination is to connect and bring forth the uncomfortable, unknown, and symbols, which can be processed within a therapeutic setting (Filiault et al, 2019).

Carl Jung helped lay a foundation for people to practice in their artwork, imagination, and use of symbols. Within an arts-based self-study by Skroce (2017), the symbolism of an octopus was analyzed in hopes to reflect a direct correlation with Skroce's anxiety as a student growing into her career. This creature kept appearing in artwork and brought about the attention of the researchers' inner feelings (Skroce, 2017). This study provides a clear arts-based process of self-exploration using a personal symbol.

Even artwork related to the safety and enclosure of boxes within art therapy has been examined (Farrell-Kirk, 2001). This symbolism can relate back to the protection that boxes have

served in relation to chests, coffins, and memory boxes (Farrell-Kirk, 2001). This symbolism can be a beneficial tool to use with clients and connect them to protection and safety.

Symbols and Professional Identity

According to Filiault et al. (2019), identity is what represents the whole person, who they are and the connections they feel in relation to society. People may often wear multiple ‘hats’ related to their individual, professional, academic, or creative identity. Mayhan (2005) stated that Jung found it important that one’s creation of uniqueness and individuality emerges from that person’s transition towards wholeness. This process is often seen through the use of symbols that come through the unconscious. This connection of individuality and exploring symbols can help people understand who they are.

In a pilot qualitative study conducted by Ridley (2015) involving high school freshman participants, the researcher gathered responses from an exhibition featuring mirrors that were adorned based on the question of identity. The purpose of this specific study was to find common themes within the students’ self-reflection with results showing that mirrors can be a potential tool for exploring sensitive topics and self-reflection about identity (Ridley, 2015). This study proved that mirrors adorned with writing, fake flowers, and/or collage materials can be a useful tool in exploring self-identity.

In a qualitative study conducted by Byron and Laurence (2015), the researchers gathered data from employee interviews and inventoried workspace objects to analyze if objects in a work setting, or lack thereof, could symbolize who that employee is as an individual or who they aspire to be. The results found objects such as diplomas, family photographs, and chatskis, were symbolic representations; and that the personalization of office spaces can positively affect the employees’ work connections as well as self-regulatory functioning (Byron & Laurence, 2015).

Person of the Therapist

Person of the Therapist Training (POTT) model was developed in the 1980's centered on the concept that the therapeutic relationship and processes are a "person-to-person human encounter" (Aponte & Kissil, 2017, p. 3). POTT emphasizes therapist presence as a necessary function to gain insight, develop sensitivity, and create effective clinical experiences. This reduces the therapist's process of grappling with personal struggles *as a condition* for being effective in the therapeutic setting (Aponte & Kissil, 2017). The POTT model employs signature themes centering around the therapist's ongoing struggles in their professional work (Kissil & Nino, 2018). This model has expanded to beyond clinical settings to include academic institutions, clinical training, and clinical supervision.

Nino et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study with 54 master's-level graduate marriage and family therapy students enrolled in a nine-month POTT course. The purpose of this study was to examine what each student believed they had professionally gained from the course. The analysis from this study concluded that six primary themes: increased awareness, emotions, improved clinical work, humanity and woundedness, meta-awareness, and factors that contributed to the learning process.

Self-awareness was understood as students feeling more self-attuned and observant of themselves in a clinical setting. This included acknowledging and accepting their emotions as a part of their work (Nino et al., 2015). In reporting about the theme of improved clinical work, Nino et al., (2015) found that the students were gaining more confidence, which led to the students feeling more control and authority in session. Students felt more comfortable in trying new things more often and developed stronger boundaries with clients and other staff. Another significant theme, humanity and woundedness included experiencing vulnerabilities, flaws, and

making mistakes. These were considered to be a part of being a human, allowing students to resonate with the struggles of their clients. As for meta-awareness, Nino et al. (2015) reported that the students found therapy was not just a “fix”, but that therapy allows for the client to take control of their life. Finally in the factors that contributed to the learning process, students said that receiving real time feedback from a supervisor and within group sessions was beneficial.

Kissil et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study involving 18 students from a single cohort of a POTT course. This study aimed to provide a more concrete understanding of the relationship between the personal self-of-the-therapist and the professional self-of-the-therapist. A content analysis was used to review the information which found that three dominant themes emerged: therapist’s qualities, use of self, and understanding of therapist and the therapist’s role. Another three themes of personal changes arose: increased self-awareness, management, and self-acceptance.

In this study conducted by Kissil et al. (2018), results showed that 15 out of 18 participants reported personal changes they observed within themselves--confidence, empowerment, and trust. Thirteen participants listed use of *self* in their growth noting self-awareness which led to better tracking of their own emotions, naming and claiming those emotions in session, relating to their clients, and better tracking of triggers. Finally, ten students reported *understanding* of therapy and therapist which connected to the importance of being with their client versus fixing them. For the themes of personal change, 12 out of 18 participants reported an increased self-awareness which led to a better understanding of how to relate to others within a session. Fifteen participants listed management in emotional response. In closing, 13 participants experienced self-acceptance.

In a qualitative study focused on therapist-counselor development conducted by Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992), 100 participants were interviewed by researchers to gather information to create a narrative stage model, a persuasion to future readers, to show the ‘important’ themes of development. These themes helped the researchers to be able to identify what Ronnestad deemed as ‘important’ characteristics of future therapists. The results found 20 themes of therapist-counselor development. The six main themes will be discussed below.

The first theme is the engagement in professional development as a sign of growth towards individuality within the profession (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). The second theme is the reduction of rigidity in training over time. The third theme is the importance of professional reflection as the profession gains individuation. The fourth theme is confidence building. It was noted that new therapists seek external support while senior therapists seek internal support. Next, the fifth theme is the development of a working style and role that align with cognitive and personal patterns. The final theme is the internal process of applying learned material.

In a qualitative study conducted by Bischoff (1997), 13 therapy students participated in order to understand professional development within the first three months of their clinical experience. Students kept track of important data and experiences in a monthly log. Results showed that development of confidence in a therapist role and clinical abilities were the primary themes along with two additional themes. Some students experienced *imposter syndrome* and this was counteracted by validation of staff and clients. Additionally, students determined their own internal gauge of effectiveness of sessions they facilitated. Students looking internally for support felt more confident in their clinical experience than those reliant on external support and praise. The final additional theme was the development of personal and professional boundaries.

Students explored boundaries between therapist-client, professional-personal self, and boundary clarification.

Symbols and Art Therapy

As defined by the American Art Therapy Association (2020), art therapy is an integrative mental health and human services profession that enriches lives through art-making, the creative process, psychological theories, and human experience. It uses art materials as a way to promote healing, open communication, and provide insights to experiences. In the book *Art Therapy: An Introduction*, Judith Rubin (1999) explained the meaning and *idea* of art therapy has been around much longer than the term itself. Humans have a natural tendency to make and create, as evidenced by ancient art findings that can contain universal meanings. The use of symbols in art making is foundational to the field. Cave drawings, fertility figures, Egyptian death rituals, African ritual mask making are a few examples that can all be tied back to these beginning ideals of art therapy (Rubin, 1999).

Nuttall and Pelletier (2020) conducted a case study with a 12-year-old client with acute methylmalonic acidemia to understand if there was meaning within repetitive symbols in art therapy sessions. This male client depicted themes of reaching out for assistance, a female superhero, and general struggles (Nuttall & Pelletier, 2020). The repetition of symbols was a way to explore treatment goals in connection to empowerment, sorting out trauma, stabilizing anxiety, and reaching out for a savior-figure (Nuttall & Pelletier, 2020). This study can provide an example to what role symbolism can play in art therapy sessions and how it can be translated into treatment goals for the client.

An art-based phenomenological study by Ponsford-Hill (2018), used self-portraits and reflective journaling from 15 art therapists to gain an understanding of the use of art making to

explore self-connection. The researcher found emergent themes of mind, body, and spiritual connections, self-care, and appreciation. Ponsford-Hill (2018) concluded that art making demonstrated the potential for individuals to deepen their self-connection. The participants reported that the artworks accurately captured their experiences in ways that words or writing could not (Ponsford-Hill, 2018).

For art therapy graduate students, Elkis-Abuhoff et al. (2010) noticed that students with little work in patient populations can have a complex journey finding their professional art therapist identity. Self-awareness within identity is an important form of insight that allows individuals to be more open and aware of values and attitudes (Elkis-Abuhoff et al., 2010). Self-awareness can be found through the use of art making (Fish, 2012).

From the literature explored, there is little information that directly related to the roles of symbolism and graduate students. The literature provided a foundation in understanding symbols and how they are used, both universally and personally with Carl Jung's contributions to symbol formations and imagination. Research studies that identified symbols within artwork, specific materials and tools, as well as research studies were gathered and presented. The Person of the Therapist training was overviewed in order to understand how this particular model provided graduate students with confidence, self-awareness, and competence (Kissil et al., 2018). Symbol use and art therapy was briefly presented to explore self-care techniques of future and current therapists in the field (Elkis-Abuhoff et al., 2010). This literature will be the base of an arts-based phenomenological study in hopes to address and start filling in the gaps of the role of symbolism and the art therapy profession.

Chapter III

Methods

Design of Study

Arts-based research uses the artistic process of making artwork in all of its various forms as the main way of learning and understanding for both the researcher and the participants (McNiff, 1998, p. 29). A phenomenological study aims to understand the lived experience of the participant. This researcher employed a phenomenological arts-based design using the art making directive “What kind of therapist are you” in order to examine the role of symbols for first- and second-year graduate art therapy students currently enrolled in a graduate program. This directive seeks to explore professional identity, development, and emergent symbols that may represent this stage.

Location of Study

Each participant completed the directive independently, within a space that is free of distractions and interruptions.

Time Period Study

The study was in February 2021.

Recruitment, Enrollment, and Participants

Participants were sent an email to ask for voluntary participation in the study. This email was sent two times. Participants were required to directly email stating an interest in participation. Following this email, the informed consent was provided and signed via email. Once signed and returned, participants received an electronic information form that included the operational definition of a symbol and the art directive “What kind of art therapist are you?” (Appendix A). Also included in this form was the data collection document (see Appendix B).

Recruitment included first and second year graduate art therapy students at a major university. The pool of potential participants were primarily Caucasian females ages 20s-40s.

Investigational Methods and Procedures

Participants began the arts-based study with individual art making sessions. This artwork was completed within a private environment that was free of distractions and interferences. Participants kept track of artwork information by filling out on a data collection form. This form was standard with an operational definition of a symbol and also stated the art directive of “What kind of art therapist are you?”. The form was for the logging of time, materials, and any additional comments the participant would like to share. Any materials could have been used to complete this directive. Materials were provided by the participants' own personal resources.

Participants completed artwork in February 2021 and artwork was physically collected and photographed. Artwork was returned back to participants within two weeks of being photographed. Data collection sheets were also physically collected, and information was gathered in order to begin a thematic analysis.

Informed Consent

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board and the informed consent completed by all participants (see Appendix A).

Data Collection and Analysis

At the end of the study period, participants had one week to deposit their artwork and data collection forms using their participant ID number to a secure space within the university building. Artwork was professionally photographed and returned back to the participant.

The data collection forms were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative study that places importance on gathering and analyzing data in order to find patterns/themes (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Possible Risks Precautions

Possible risk is the loss of confidentiality. In order to minimize the risk or hazards of this study, each participant was assigned a number that coordinated with all of their data collected for this study. Physical artwork was stored in a locked cabinet and was returned to participants after being photographed. The forms, data, and photographs were compiled into a secure computer drive that was used for the thematic analysis.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations included the location the participant chose to complete this study and the age of participants being middle-aged college adults. There was also no set time limit for the artwork, so this factor was open to interpretation by the participant.

Chapter IV

Results

This arts-based phenomenological study collected artwork from 11 voluntary participants from a graduate art therapy cohort of a large metropolitan university. Of the eleven participants, ten identified as female and one participant identified as male. Nine participants are second year members of the cohort while the other two are members of the first-year graduate cohort. The ages range from early twenties to mid-forties. This study had a 100% retention rate of participants.

For this study, the average amount of time spent working on the artwork was three hours. The average amount of sessions used to complete the artwork was two and a half individual sessions. A session was defined as structured time working on the directive. On average, participants used five different materials within the created image. The lowest number of materials used in one piece were two, with the most being nine. Of those materials used, three participants created 3D artwork while the other eight created 2D works.

The thematic analysis produced a variety of symbols and themes. Symbols are defined as an entity that stands for something and can be thought or perceived as an external representation of concepts (Mühlenbeck & Jacobsen, 2020). Themes are defined as recurring ideas or thoughts (Mühlenbeck & Jacobsen, 2020). The symbols found within the participant artworks are as follows: *blooms, colors, shining light, dragonfly, clock, quilt, mandala, landscape, sketchbook, mountains, tornados, sunflowers, elements of nature, motion, movement, a therapists' jacket, the color yellow, patches*. The themes found within the participant artworks are as follows: *authenticity, wholeness, completion, growth, calmness, wonderment, organization, grounded, hope, enlightenment, awareness, open-mindedness, flow, journey, exploration, balance,*

connection to friends and others, optimism, artist, inspiration, peace, serenity, advocating for clients, patience, positivity, process, control, precision, cleanliness, motion, adaptation, skills, experience, transparency, imperfections, independence as self and therapist, holistic self and therapist, warmth, holding space for clients, emotions, security, and honesty. These symbols and themes were repeated by multiple participants: *colors, hope, landscape, warm colors, elements of nature, transparency, grounded, and blossoms/blooms.* Below details the artwork and responses of each participant.

Figure 1*Participant 1*

Participant 1 spent two hours and forty-five minutes total and five separate individual sessions on this art piece. The materials used were wooden loops, E6000 superglue, designed paper, metal pins, fake plants, rubber squares, and pearls. Participant 1 made a notation in the log that this artwork is a “sphere- I feel that I’m not a 2-D item, but 3-D and requires space.”

Another log noted “paper is a representation of people coming together. I see myself learning from my clients. Relying on my clients to help me blossom into something. Paper is a natural element. I am a natural person.” Next, “I wanted to add more earthy feel to this piece. I needed support and strength, so I added glue and rubber to stand by myself.” The addition of the pearl was described as, “the pearl is simple and humble. I evolve and continue to grow. White orb touches round hoops follow hoops to green plants up the stem and back to orb.”

The final notation from Participant One:

“Looking at the finished piece I feel calmness and a sense of wonderment. I feel very organized and grounded while looking at this. It reminds me of something, but I don’t know what. How does this help me describe me as a therapist? I see myself helping others find hope. I feel that I can enlighten others to wonder about life. I feel that I am aware of myself and others.

Organic and nature, or being natural, equals being true and authentic. Circles or a sphere equals being whole/complete. Green, white, and brown are colors of nature. Blooming equals continuing to grow and continuing to learn.”

Figure 2*Participant 2*

Participant 2 spent a total of one hour and one individual session on this artwork. The materials used were collage materials of watercolor paper, paint pours, and scrapbook paper, as well as glue sticks and tape. Participant 2 identified in their data collection form all of the items within the piece: *fish, waves, dragonfly, lamp post, quilt, bikes, clocks, windows, “explore”, and head with “open mind”*.

This participant noted that:

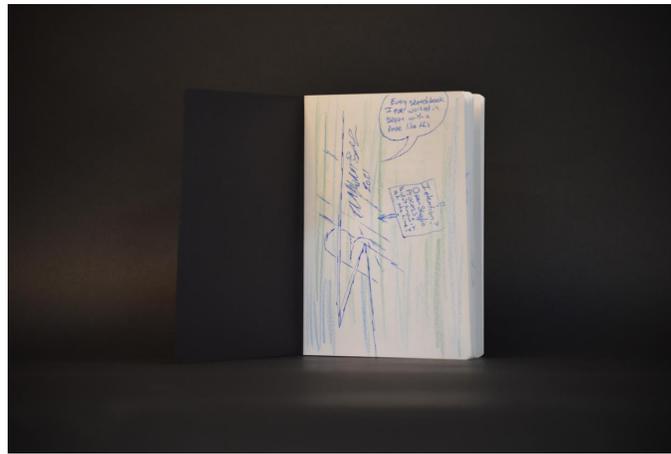
As an art therapist, I strive to have an open mind, go with the flow, to be there for the journey, and hopefully help clients learn things (explore, shine a light) along the way. Waves/paint pour background: like the water, getting into depths with clients. Fish: this consistent theme of being able to swim in the difficult tides of being a therapist; I CAN swim. Open head: both digging deeper with the client and having an open mind myself. Dragonfly: my self-symbol, which represents overcoming, something I hope I can help my clients do. Lamp: the focus on being just a spot of light for someone; if we can be a spot, we don't have to be all the light in that person's world. Windows: getting glimpses into people and working to open more windows to see more and work through more.

Clocks: the time is quickly approaching when being an art therapist will be official!

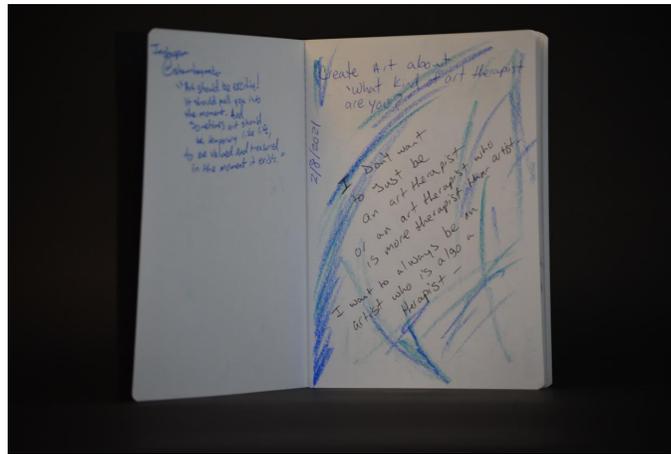
Quilt: using art in practice; also piecing things together with the client to find meaning and work through things. 'Explore': that's what we do; we explore with the client and hopefully make positive gains along the way.

Figure 3*Participant 3*

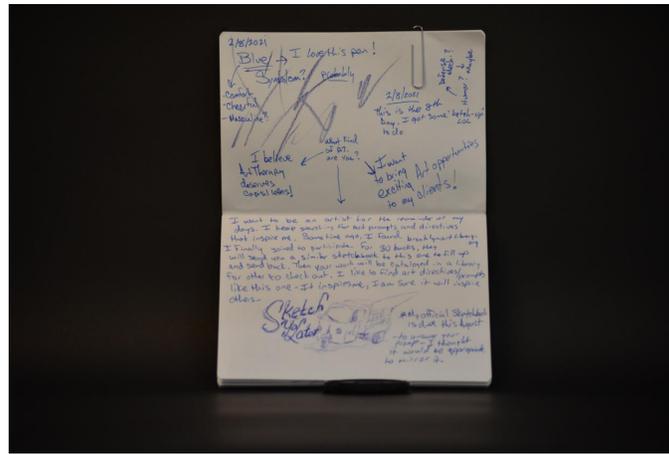
Participant 3 spent a total of thirty minutes and one individual session on this artwork. The materials used were paint swatches, glue stick, Mod Podge, tissue paper, origami paper, yarn, scissors to cut the paint swatches, paint brush for the Mod Podge, mixed media paper in white. Participant 3 identified all objects in the artwork: *mandala-like flower, grass, and sky* noting “I really had fun with this piece!” and “there is some "mandala-ness" in there, which I find aesthetically pleasing but I also think it has to do a lot with maintaining balance. There is also connection to close friends (via one of the materials). It's landscapy. Optimistic.”

Figure 4*Participant 4 Image 1*

Participant 4 spent a total of one hour and thirty minutes and two individual sessions on this artwork inside of a sketchbook. Materials used were a sketchbook, pen, colored pencils, and stickers. The participant identified all objects within the artwork: *words, colors, sketches, vehicle, tornado, books, locks, pen sketch, binders, icons (Coke), logos, Prismacolors, mountain, art therapy directive.*

Figure 5*Participant 4 Image 2*

Within the artwork the participant wrote “I don’t want to just be an art therapist or an art therapist who is more therapist than artist. I want to always be an artist who is also a therapist.”

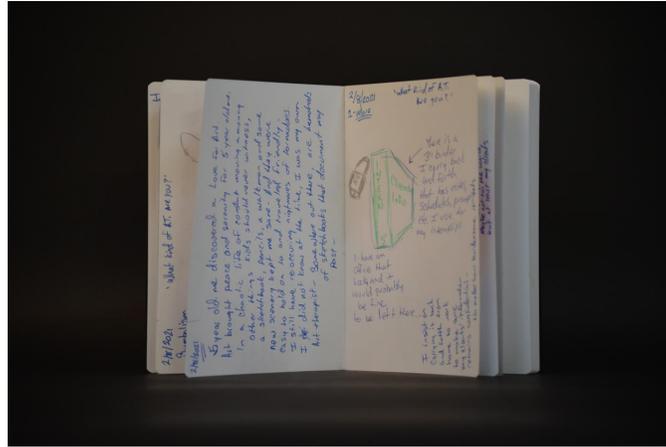
Figure 6*Participant 4 Image 3*

Within this artwork, the participant wrote:

“What kind of Art Therapist are you? I believe Art Therapy deserves capital letters! I want to bring exciting Art opportunities to my clients! I want to be an artist for the remainder of my days. I keep searching for Art prompts and directives that inspire me. Sometime ago, I found brooklynartlibrary.org, I finally joined to participate. For 30 bucks, they will send you a similar sketchbook to this one to fill up and send back. Then your work will be catalogued in a library for others to check out. I like to find art directive/prompts like this one. It inspires me, I am sure it will inspire others.”

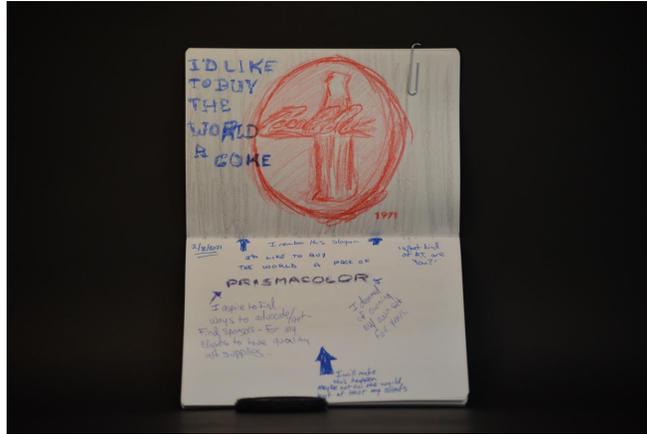
Figure 7*Participant 4 Image 4*

Participant four continued to write “Sketchbooks are symbolic for me. When you said you chased tornados, I thought that was just a metaphor.”

Figure 8*Participant 4 Image 5*

Within this sketchbook page, Participant 4 wrote:

“5-year-old me discovered a Love for Art. Art brought peace and serenity for 5-year-old me. In a chaotic life of constant moving among other things kids should never witness, a sketchbook, pencils, a Walkman, and some new scenery kept me sane. And they were easy to hold onto and travel friendly. I still have recurring nightmares of tornadoes. I did not know at the time, I was my own Art Therapist- somewhere out there, are hundreds of sketchbooks that document my past. There is 3-inch binder I carry back and forth that has notes, schedules, prompts, ETC. I use for my internships. I have an office that locks, and it would probably be fine to be life there... I insist on carrying it back and forth from home to work to make sure my clients' information remains confidential- no matter how burdensome it gets.”

Figure 9*Participant 4 Image 6*

On this page of the artwork, participant four wrote “I’D LIKE TO BUY THE WORLD A COKE (music notes). I remember this slogan. I’D LIKE TO BUY THE WORLD A PACK OF PRISMACOLORS. I aspire to find ways to advocate/get- find sponsors- for my clients to have quality art supplies. I dreamed of owning my own sets for years. I will make this happen maybe not for the world but at least my clients.”

Figure 10*Participant 4 Image 7*

This artwork has only a title in the bottom corner of “Up the Mountain.”

Figure 11*Participant 5*

Participant 5 spent a total of five and half hours within three individual art sessions. Materials used for this were pencil, canvas, eraser, oil paint, paint thinner, paint brushes, paper towel. Participant 5 identified their objects: *four outlines of different stages in the growth of a sunflower* adding the comment “the sunflower represents myself. The best way to express what kind of therapist I am is through a sunflower and characteristics of a sunflower. A sunflower represents patience, growth, positivity, and the process of what that looks like.”

Figure 12

Participant 6 Image 1

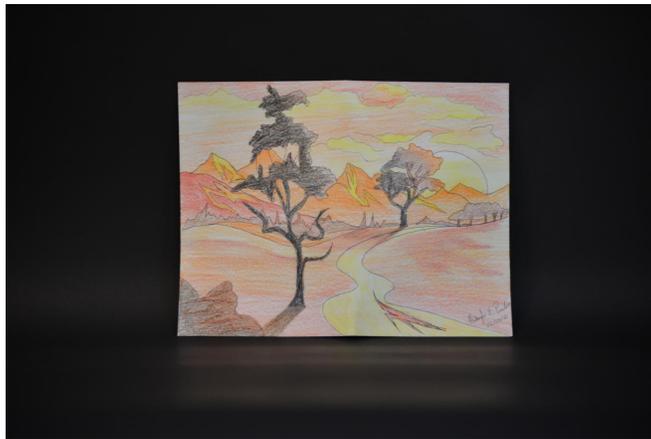


Figure 13

Participant 6 Image 2



Figure 14

Participant 6 Image 3



Figure 15

Participant 6 Image 4



Figure 16*Participant 6 Image 5*

Participant 6 spent a total of three hours and forty-five minutes over five individual sessions. Materials used in these artworks were paper, pen, crayons, Mr. Sketch markers, and pencil. Participant six identified all objects in the artwork: *clouds, sun, sky, tree, mountains, pathway, warm clouds, bubbles, dots, pink and orange, flowers, leaves, warm colors, scrobble, boat/ship, water, waves, cool colors, dots, branch, cherry tree, flowers.*

Participant 6 reflected:

“I believe warm colors were a theme in most of my artworks (4/5). Also control, precision, and cleanliness were common themes I noticed. I also remember seeing a lot of elements in all of my pieces such as water, earth, nature, etc... Motion and movement were also common symbols/themes in some of my works, but not all.”

Figure 17*Participant 7*

Participant 7 spent a total of four hours and two individual art sessions. Materials used were construction paper, glue, scissors, Sharpie, and magazine clippings. The participant identified all objects in the artwork: *“paper doll-like” jacket, “patches”, and buttons.*

Participant 7 made the following notations about the artwork:

“My piece is a paper doll shirt. I feel each day I am putting on my “therapist jacket” as I get ready to see my patients. I like to be prepared for whatever my patients need and am ready to be whoever they need me to be. That is where this jacket of many colors comes into play. My jacket is yellow because yellow as you know throughout this program has popped up time and time again as a symbol for myself. The jacket being yellow originally represents that at the end of the day I am still me and bringing those parts of myself to each patient. However, the patches I added to the jacket represent the adaptations I have made to this jacket throughout my time as a therapist. Each patient I see has their own needs, abilities, strengths and weaknesses that I learn about and learn from as I work with them. Each patch represents that as they are a representation of a skill, a lesson learned, or an experience I have gained from working with my patients that I want to add to my

“therapist” jacket. Therefore, I will have these new adaptations to take along with me in my continued therapy journey.”

Figure 18*Participant 8*

Participant 8 spent a total of nine hours and two individual art sessions on this piece. Materials included were acrylic and graphite. All objects were identified: *land, sky, windows, clouds, boundaries.*

Participant 8 made the following comments about the artwork:

“Opacity and transparency the literal nods to the metaphorical. I aspire to being transparent while maintaining strong, appropriate boundaries. The boundaries are separate shades of sky, integrated. Imperfection, unfinished areas- visible process relates to authenticity- I am not a perfect person and I am growing in my life and practice just as the piece is in visible process. Grounding line- having a firm base and strong sense of self independent from my identity as a therapist. I find my identity so strongly rooted in creativity and making that I find my base, my center in that process. Landscape- ground and sky, holistic self and holistic approaches. Horizon- progress and aspirational approach “moving towards the horizon.”

Figure 19*Participant 9*

Participant 9 spent a total of three hours and fifteen minutes and three individual art sessions for this piece. Materials used for this piece were paper, pencil, conte, and charcoal. Participant 9 identified all objects in the artwork: *me, hands, pastel details, bird, half circle, shading, and color* and stated “I would say I feel the flame is warmth, the bird is like the nurturing holding environment for clients. I didn't mind leaving a lot of it open for interpretation.”

Figure 20*Participant 10*

Participant 10 spent a total of one hour and one individual session on this artwork. The materials used for this were watercolors, paper, and paintbrushes. Participant identified all objects and related them to an emotion: “*red-anger, orange-apathy, yellow-hope, green-happiness, blue-tranquility, purple-fear, pink-anxiety, turquoise-sadness.*” An additional comment was made that “this piece is symbolic of emotions.”

Figure 21*Participant 11*

Participant 11 spent a total of one and a half hours and one individual art making session. The materials used were tissue paper and paint stix/quick stix, and paper. The participant identified this artwork as *abstract* noting that “I chose warm colors because I want to provide warmth and security as an art therapist. I also used transparent materials to layer and illustrate the transparency and honesty that I bring to sessions.”

Overall, participants in this study found time to make art for themselves to explore what kind of art therapist they hope to become. From the artwork and forms, some symbols and themes were repeated by multiple participants: *colors, hope, landscape, warm colors, elements of nature, transparency, grounded, and blossoms/blooms*. These findings will lead the path in exploring studies from the literature review, combining ideas of Person of the Therapist training as skills building, and how all of this combines to create professional identity that is ever evolving. By exploring the integration of lived experiences and professional knowledge, this study found that professional identity is an ongoing evolution.

Chapter V

Discussion

From the research that was introduced earlier in this paper, exploration of professional development is a crucial part of understanding professional identity (Aponte & Kissil, 2017). Exploring professional identity comes from engaging in different experiences, whether it be in a classroom or professional setting (e.g., internship site or career). These new experiences lead to new insights about oneself, which can be a positive influence on how people discover professional identity. Self-awareness within identity is an important form of insight that allows individuals to be more open and aware of values and attitudes (Elkis-Abuhoff et al., 2010). Self-awareness can be found through the use of art making (Fish, 2012). This was supported by the participants reporting that the artworks accurately capture their experiences in ways that words or writing could not (Ponsford-Hill, 2018).

Symbols

In a qualitative study conducted by Byron and Laurence (2015), found objects such as diplomas, family photographs, and chatskis, were symbolic representations helping facilitate future aspirations and maintain individuality. Within an arts-based self-study by Skroce (2017), the symbolism of an octopus was analyzed in hopes to reflect a direct correlation with Skroce's anxiety as a student growing into her career. This creature kept appearing in artwork and brought about the attention of the researchers' inner feelings (Skroce, 2017). This study provides a clear arts-based process of self-exploration using a personal symbol.

The octopus that emerged in the study conducted by Skroce (2017) was a self-symbol that moved throughout the study. Within this researcher's study, the same usage of self-symbols guiding the artwork was found in three of the eleven participants' pieces. Participant 1 used 3D

materials to express herself and noted that “sphere- I feel that I’m not a 2-D item, but 3-D and requires space.” Participant 2 shared “Dragonfly: my self-symbol, which represents overcoming, something I hope I can help my clients do.” For Participant 5, a sunflower was the symbol used and explained that “the sunflower represents myself. The best way to express what kind of therapist I am is through a sunflower and characteristics of a sunflower. A sunflower represents patience, growth, positivity, and the process of what that looks like.” Participant 7 used a yellow jacket to represent herself and noted that “my jacket is yellow, because yellow as you know, throughout this program has popped up time and time again as a symbol for myself. The jacket being yellow originally represents that at the end of the day I am still me and bringing those parts of myself to each patient. However, the patches I added to the jacket represent the adaptations I have made to this jacket throughout my time as a therapist.”

When examining the symbols and themes from this study, some were repeated by multiple participants: *colors, hope, landscape, warm colors, elements of nature, transparency, grounded, and blossoms/blooms*. The symbols pulled are notation of colors, landscapes, nature, and blossoms/blooms. When taking the aspects of nature, this can relate to change and growth, which is something these participants have endured over the past two years. This graduate program has filled its students with new knowledge as well as professional and personal experiences. All of these add up to create growth of self, and especially professional development. Professional identity and its development are an evolution that grows as a person does in their profession. Nature, blooms, and landscapes all change with the season, which is a direct correlation to professional identity as noted by the participants. This research would also like to note an outlier symbol that was mentioned: *tornados*. This symbol of tornados was

specific to internal and past experiences in the personal life of Participant 4. Professional development and identity in the field of art therapy requires personal development of the self.

This study demonstrated that art therapy graduate students used symbols without promoting. Are these creatively rooted groups more inclined to think about symbols and symbolism? Does a foundation in the arts give artists and art therapists a more extensive understanding and natural tendency to rely on symbols in their artwork?

Themes

Within the study conducted by Nino et al. (2015), six main themes: *increased self-awareness, emotions, improved clinical work, humanity and woundedness, meta-awareness, and factors that contributed to the learning process*, all emerged from the POTT model in master's level therapy students. A content analysis by Kissil et al. (2018), three themes of personal changes arose: increased self-awareness, management, and self-acceptance.

Multiple participants made mentioned self-awareness and self-acceptance in their process. Participant 1 said "I see myself helping others find hope. I feel that I can enlighten others to wonder about life. I feel that I am aware of myself and others." Within the artwork from Participant 1, round looms were used and noted that "circles or a sphere equals being whole/complete." Participant 2 noted that "fish: this consistent theme of being able to swim in the difficult tides of being a therapist; I CAN swim." Participant 4 explained "I don't want to just be an art therapist or an art therapist who is more therapist than artist. I want to always be an artist who is also a therapist." While Participant 5 related to the self-symbol of a sunflower, it still held representation of their self-awareness, as noted by "a sunflower represents patience, growth, positivity, and the process of what that looks like." Participant 7 noted "I like to be prepared for whatever my patients need and am ready to be whoever they need me to be."

Participant 8 shared “I am not a perfect person, and I am growing in my life and practice just as the piece is in visible process. Grounding line- having a firm base and strong sense of self independent from my identity as a therapist.”

Within the theme of emotion as explored in Nino et al. (2015), Participant 10 noted “red-anger, orange-apathy, yellow-hope, green-happiness, blue-tranquility, purple-fear, pink-anxiety, turquoise-sadness.” An additional comment was made that “this piece is symbolic of emotions.”

As for themes in improved clinical work and noting the factors that contributed to the learning process, Participant 7 noted that “Each patch represents that as they are a representation of a skill, a lesson learned, or an experience I have gained from working with my patients that I want to add to my “therapist” jacket. Therefore, I will have these new adaptations to take along with me in my continued therapy journey.”

In this art-based study, the personal themes of hope, transparency, and being grounded are all traits that are being experienced by the participants in relation to their professional identity. There is a gap in the research about themes that emerge from professional identity, but there is hope found in the profession. Hope inspired by new knowledge and by the participants' patients/clients from their internship sites. Participant 1 shared “How does this help me describe me as a therapist? I see myself helping others find hope. I feel that I can enlighten others to wonder about life.” Transparency was mentioned multiple times in relation to how these participants want to work with their future populations: to be honest and open. Participant 8 shared that “I aspire to being transparent while maintaining strong, appropriate boundaries.” Participant 11 also added a comment “I also used transparent materials to layer and illustrate the transparency and honesty that I bring to sessions.” An overwhelming sense of grounding came about that related to personal growth as well as representing hopes for their future in the field of art therapy.

Time & Materials

This study provided an opportunity to explore professional identity through a creative process. While there was no time constraint on artwork, participants spent anywhere from thirty minutes to nine hours on this month-long exploration. While three hours was the average for this study, some participants used this time for long term or short term. Based on the three-hour average, this researcher determined that short term would be any participant that spent less than three hours and long term as anyone who spent over the three-hour average. From this notation, six participants were invested in the short-term art making and five were invested in long term art making. Also, within this study, participants were making the artwork at their own pace over an open number of individual sessions during the one-month period. The average number of sessions used were 2.4, with the most being five sessions and the lowest being one individual session. Based on the average number of sessions, most long-term art making participants used more than the 2.4 average sessions.

These results of session lengths and the variance among it sparks the question, “Does the skills and techniques an artist has determine the amount of time spent on the artwork?” Of the eleven participants, four of them only used one individual session to create their entire artwork. This short, more one and done setting, can relate to the studies conducted by Ridley (2015) and Ponsford-Hill (2018). Mirrors can be a potential tool for exploring sensitive topics and self-reflection about identity (Ridley, 2015). While these topics of identity are crucial for personal and professional development, do shorter sessions allow for a deep enough understanding to be found and discussed? Other influences in time an investment in this study could depend on personal life. All of these participants are graduate students enrolled in a full-time academic program and gaining internship experience. This full schedule could have deterred participants

from spending many hours on this project, but others may have also found this experience like a break from work and a chance to create for leisure.

For the other seven participants, their multiple art making sessions had building themes and symbols paralleling the long-term study by Skroce (2017). This led the researcher to ask the following questions: Does it matter if the participants identified as an artist? Would this make a difference in the length of time each person spent on the artwork?

When exploring the materials, the access that each participant was up to that individual. This researcher did not supply any materials, so what participants used were materials they already had on hand and are probably familiar with. The average amount of materials used were five and were primarily two-dimensional. This large of a number can suggest that the makers involved in this study felt comfortable in their art skills and techniques and explored that within their artwork.

This research found a direct correlation between the participant artwork made and their take on their own professional identity. Through the exploration of previous studies in the literature review, the authors noted that exploring identity led to new insights. This art-based study allowed for these eleven participants to gain new insights about themselves in a professional context. Relating this to the Person of the Therapist (POTT) training model, those studies proved that self-awareness, confidence, and competence came about in the participants. Five participants used direct symbolism in their artwork while eight participants, some overlapping from symbolism, used themes in the art that directly correlated to the POTT major themes. This type of training encouraged professional growth and provided the participants with new skills. Taking these new insights and adding those with the new skills, this study found that professional identity is an ongoing evolution. New experiences within a career or internship

create new insights. New skills come about from training, whether it be in the classroom or in the field. All of this newness, change, and growth came through in the use of symbols of nature and personal themes to show that professional development is ongoing.

Chapter VI

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, there are many questions that still need to be answered. There are still gaps in the research about symbols and themes that relate directly to professional identity, but this research created a study to bridge the gap in a small way. By exploring the integration of lived experiences and professional knowledge, this study found that professional identity is an ongoing evolution. This researcher poses the question for future inquiry, “How can this graduate program implement new trainings for graduate students and emerging professionals to prepare for the field of art therapy?” A new self-identity course based around the POTT model or reworking the foundation of the program could be a place to start in order to create confident and competent future students.

In replication of this study, it is recommended that the researcher includes questions about preferred materials, artist identity, and barriers experienced during the study on the data collection form. That additional information would aid in addressing questions that emerged as a result of this initial study.

As for this study, eleven participants were able to creatively explore their therapist identity. Most notably, symbols of nature and personal demonstrating that professional identity is ever evolving. One's identity grows and morphs as new experiences in life occur. Education levels, job changes, personal and professional challenges can all come together to create new ways we identify to the world around us. These experiences give people the opportunity to learn something new about themselves in the form of insights, or a deep understanding.

This study began to dig into the exploration of how the personal can affect one's professional development and identity. These eleven participants made the personal choice to

further their education and professional development in the field of art therapy: a field dedicated to helping others. The schooling and experiences within this program make way for students to grow and evolve. Creating a strong foundation in the academic programming that bases around the Person of the Therapist model can allow for students to graduate feeling more self-aware, confident, and competent in themselves, which will create a more well-rounded and confident art therapist. The more research made in art therapy, professional identity, and symbolism, the more successfully attuned, passionate art therapists to step into the field.

Chapter VII

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Appendix A

Indiana University (IU) IRB Informed Consent

INDIANA UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT FOR RESEARCH

IMPACT: Role of Symbolism within a MA Art Therapy Program Herron School of Art and Design, IUPUI

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Art therapists do research to answer important questions which might help change or improve the way we do things in the future.

This consent form will give you information about the study to help you decide whether you want to participate. Please read this form, and ask any questions you have, before agreeing to be in the study.

TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY IS VOLUNTARY

You may choose not to take part in the study or may choose to leave the study at any time. Deciding not to participate, or deciding to leave the study later, will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled and will not affect your relationship with Herron School of Art and Design, IUPUI.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this study is to understand the role of symbols for graduate students enrolled in a masters level art therapy program at Herron School of Art and Design, IUPUI.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are a first or second year graduate student in Herron School of Art and Design's graduate art therapy program.

The study is being conducted by Macey Smith, graduate student and will be overseen by Eileen Misluk, Assistant Professor and Art Therapy Program Director at Herron School of Art and Design in Indianapolis, Indiana.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL TAKE PART?

If you agree to participate, you will be one of ten participants taking part in this study.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE STUDY?

If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following things:

- Participants will be sent two recruitment emails.
- Once a participant agrees to participate through email, this informed consent will be sent out to be signed to agree to this study.
- Participate in individual art making sessions.

- Complete data collection form recording dates, time, material choice, and other notation as filled in by the participant.
- All artwork will be completed within the participants individual, private environment that is free of distractions and interferences.
- Participants will create personal artwork based off of the directive “what kind of art therapist are you?”
- Participants will keep track of art information on a data collection form and will physically turn in artwork.
- Artwork will be professionally photographed within two weeks of receiving the work and will be returned to participants.
- This study will begin in February and commence in April.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

There are minimal risks associated with this study. A potential risk of completing the artwork is being uncomfortable with the experiential process and art making prompt. There is a risk of possible loss of confidentiality.

To minimize the potential risks during the artmaking process, the participant is able to stop making art at any time and not submit their artwork for the study. Each participant will be provided a unique ID number that will be used for all study documents, to reduce the potential loss of confidentiality.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

The benefits to participation in the study that are reasonable to expect are engagement within art making, overall enjoyment of the process, and improved insight to self as it relates to professional identity.

WILL I RECEIVE MY RESULTS?

Artwork will be returned to participants two weeks after the artwork has been photographed.

HOW WILL MY INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. No information which could identify you will be shared in publications about this study. The researcher will maintain confidentiality of the participants by assigning unique identification numbers on the data collection forms which include: date and time spent on artwork, material choice, and any other information the participant wanted to share about the art. All electronic forms will be stored securely in the IU Google Drive that can only be accessed by Macey Smith and Eileen Misluk.

WILL MY INFORMATION BE USED FOR RESEARCH IN THE FUTURE?

Information for this study may be used for future research studies or shared with other researchers for future research. If this happens, information which could identify you will be removed before any information or specimens are shared. Since identifying information will be removed, we will not ask for your additional consent. Information may be openly accessed through the Herron School of Art and Design's master thesis dissertation website, but there will be no direct contact with future readers and the participants within this study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATION?

You will not be paid for participating in this study.

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO PARTICIPATE?

There is no cost to you for taking part in this study.

WHO SHOULD I CALL WITH QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

For questions about the study, contact the researcher, Macey Smith at (765) 635-5047, or Eileen Misluk at (317) 278-9460.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, to discuss problems, complaints, or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information or to offer input, please contact the IU Human Subjects Office at 800-696-2949 or at irb@iu.edu.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

If you decide to participate in this study, you can change your mind and decide to leave the study at any time in the future. The study team will help you withdraw from the study safely by not collecting the art work or data collection forms at the end of the study period.

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT

In consideration of all of the above, I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will be given a copy of this informed consent document to keep for my records. I agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Printed Name:

Participant's Signature:

Date:

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent:

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:

Date:

Appendix B
Data Collection Sheet

**Symbolism Study: Reflective
Artwork Form**

What Kind of Art Therapist Are You?

Protocol # 2012156485

Symbols- an entity that stands for something and can be thought or perceived as an external representation of mental concepts created by using materials or nonmaterial signifiers

Date	Duration	Materials Used	Identify All Objects/Items in Artwork	Any other information you would like for this researcher to know

Appendix C
Participant Artwork

Figure C1

Participant 1, Image 1



Figure C2

Participant 2, Image 1

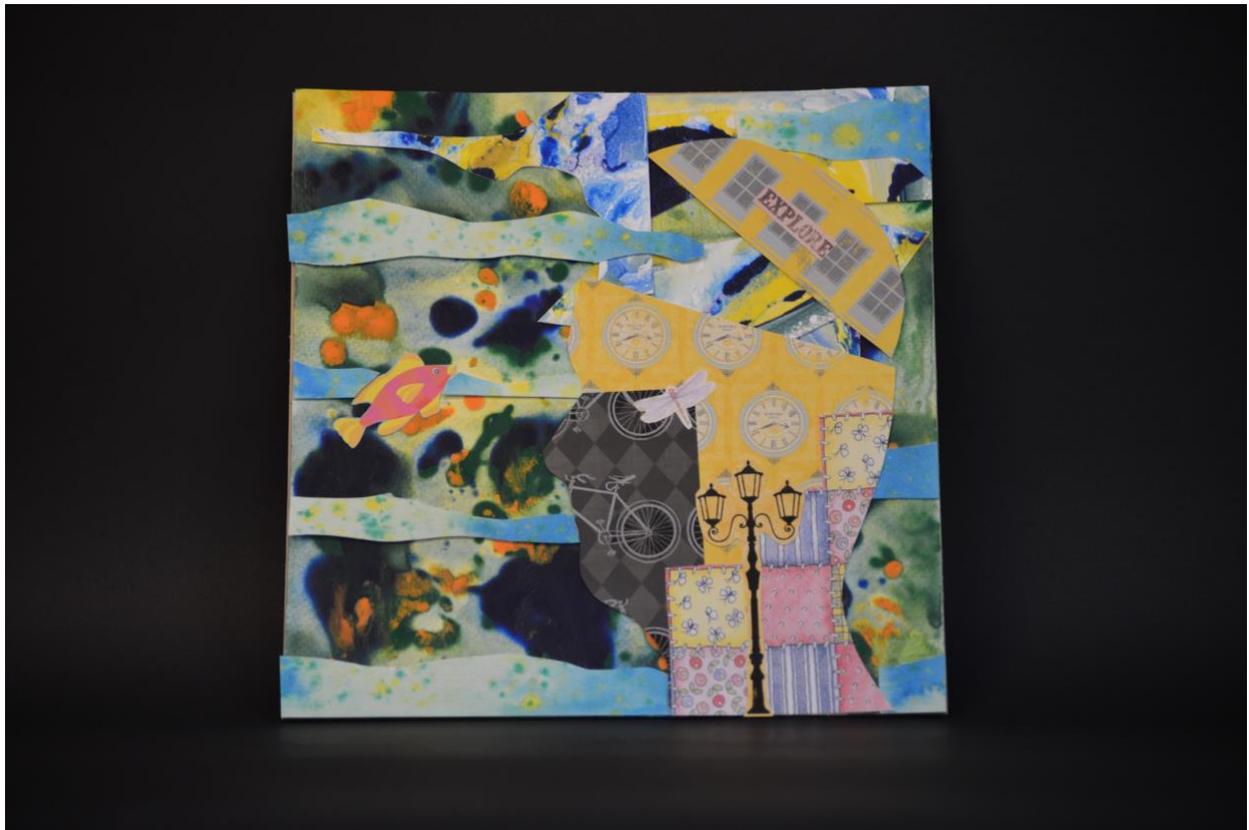


Figure C3

Participant 3, Image 1



Figure C4

Participant 4, Image 1

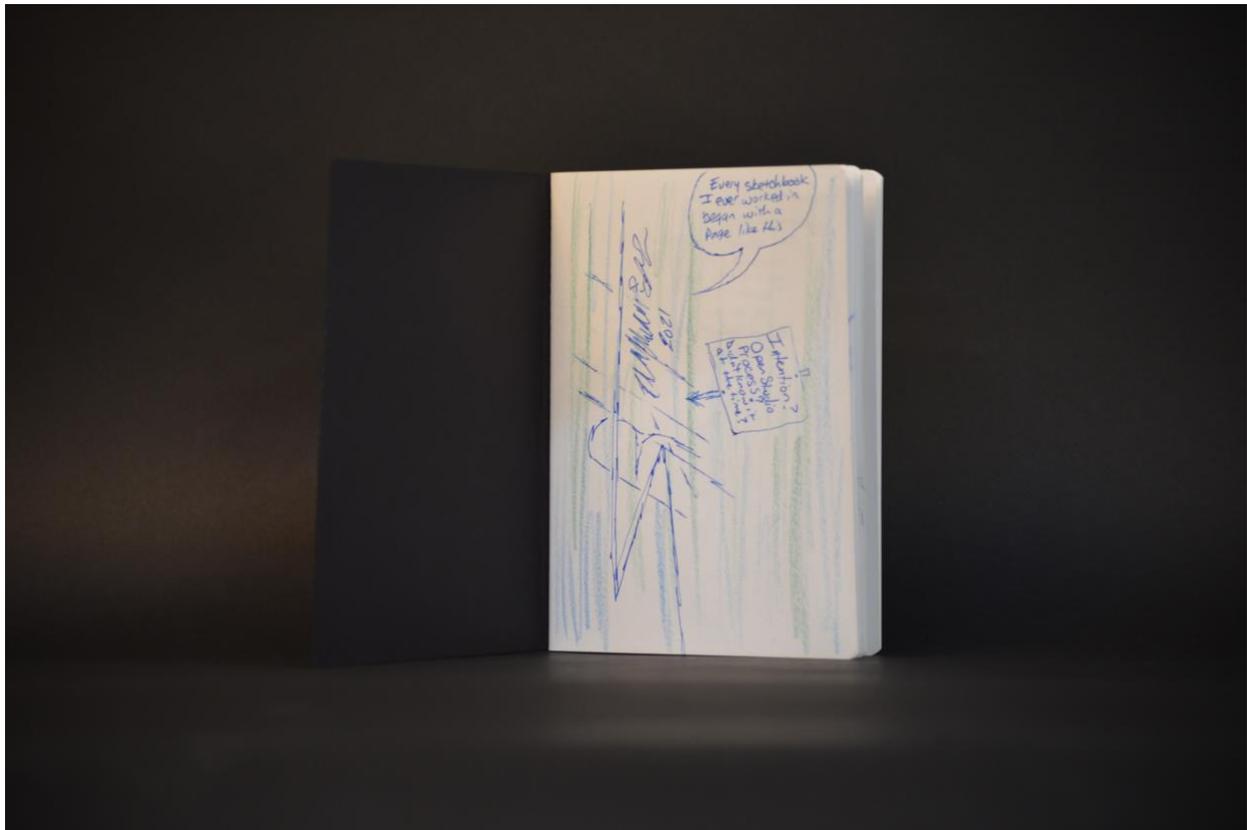


Figure C5

Participant 4, Image 2

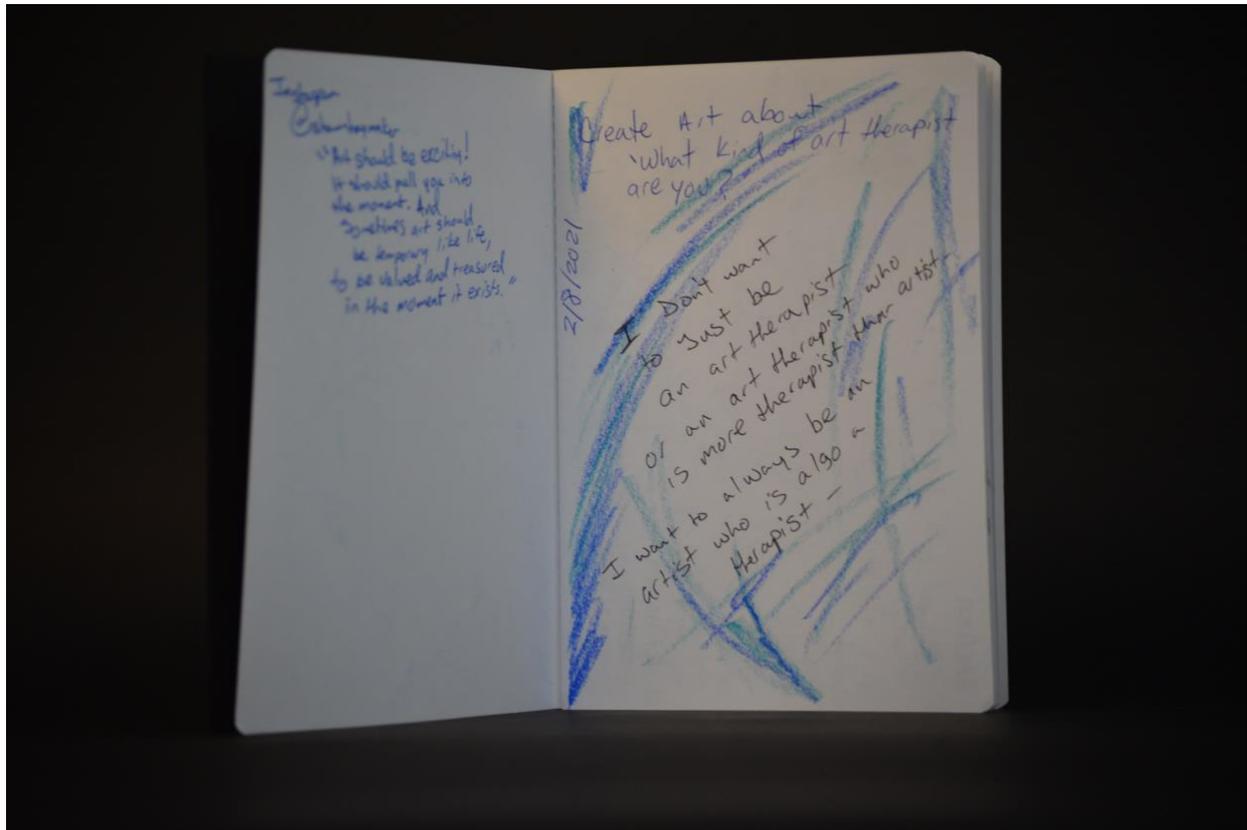


Figure C6

Participant 4, Image 3

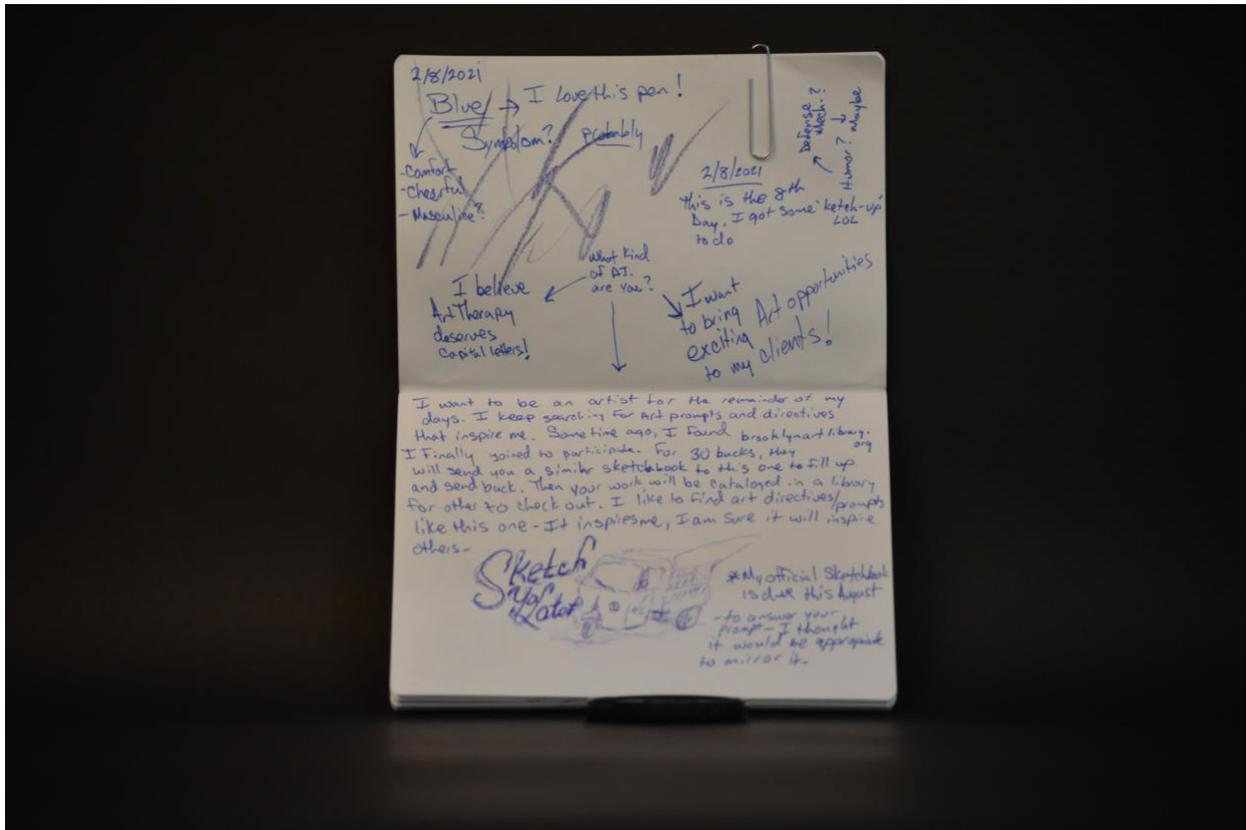


Figure C7

Participant 4, Image 4

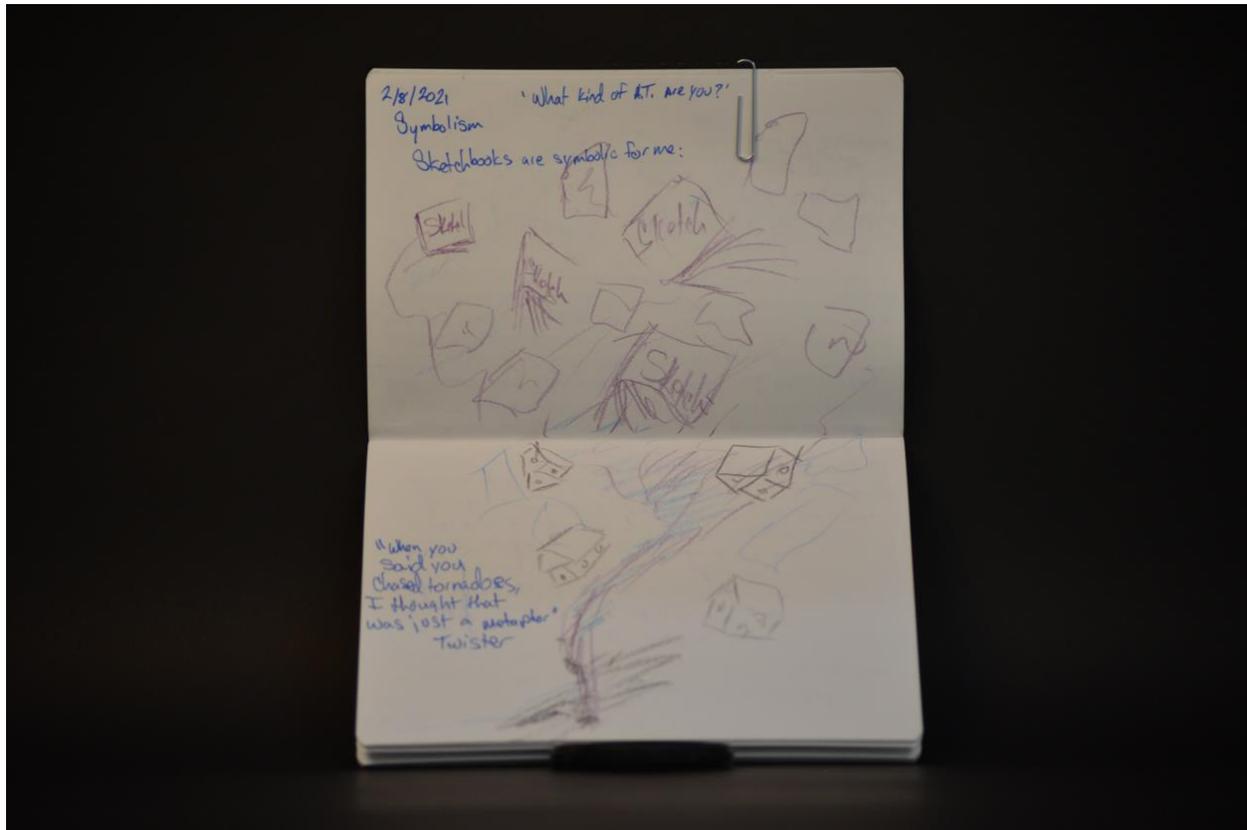


Figure C8

Participant 4, Image 5

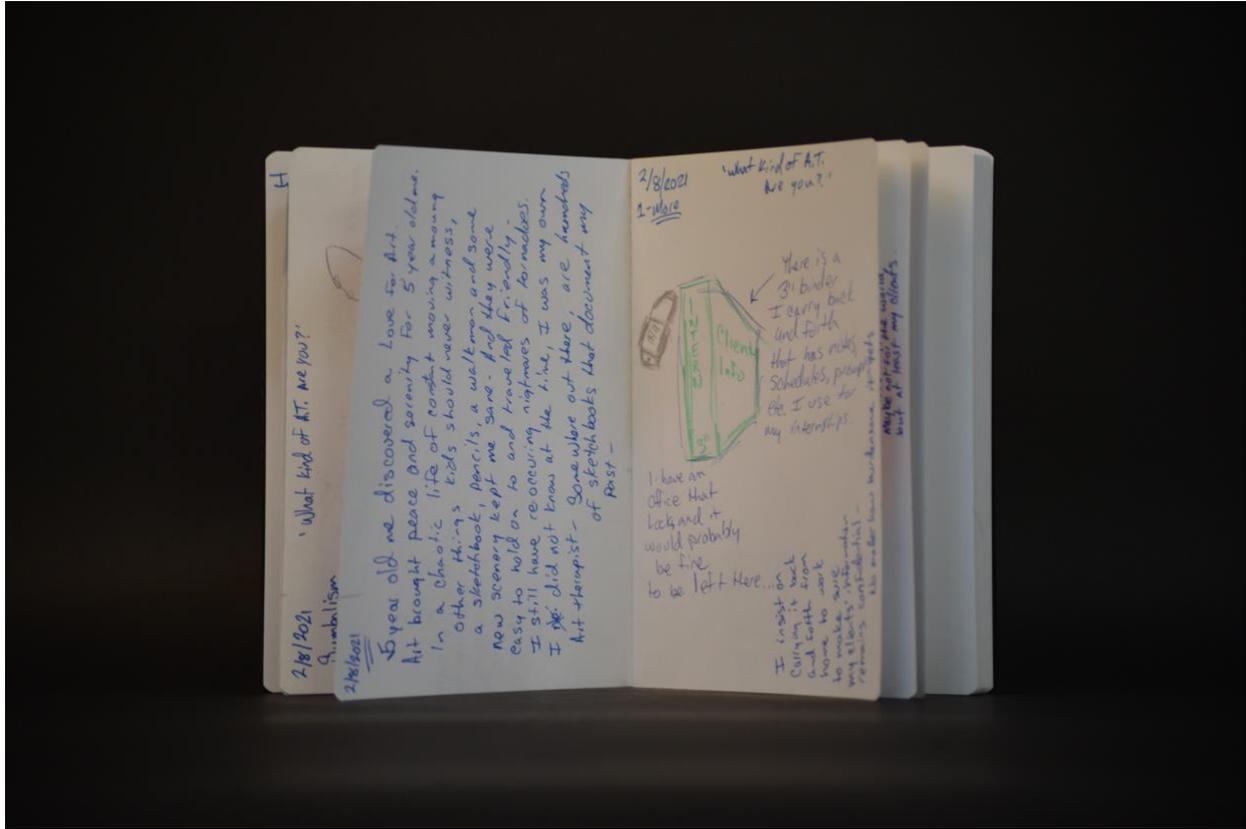


Figure C9

Participant 4, Image 6

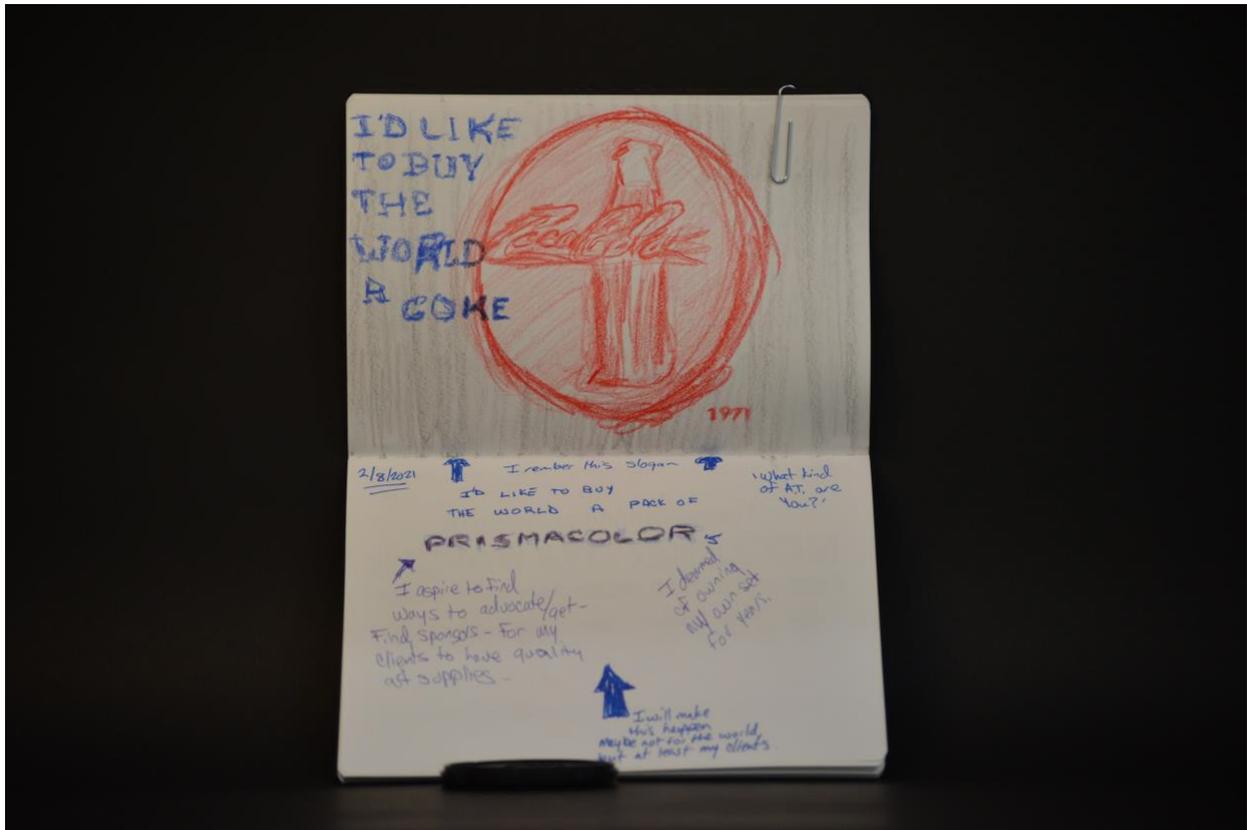


Figure C10

Participant 4, Image 7



Figure C11

Participant 5, Image 1



Figure C12

Participant 6, Image 1



Figure C13

Participant 6, Image 2



Figure C14

Participant 6, Image 3



Figure C15

Participant 6, Image 4

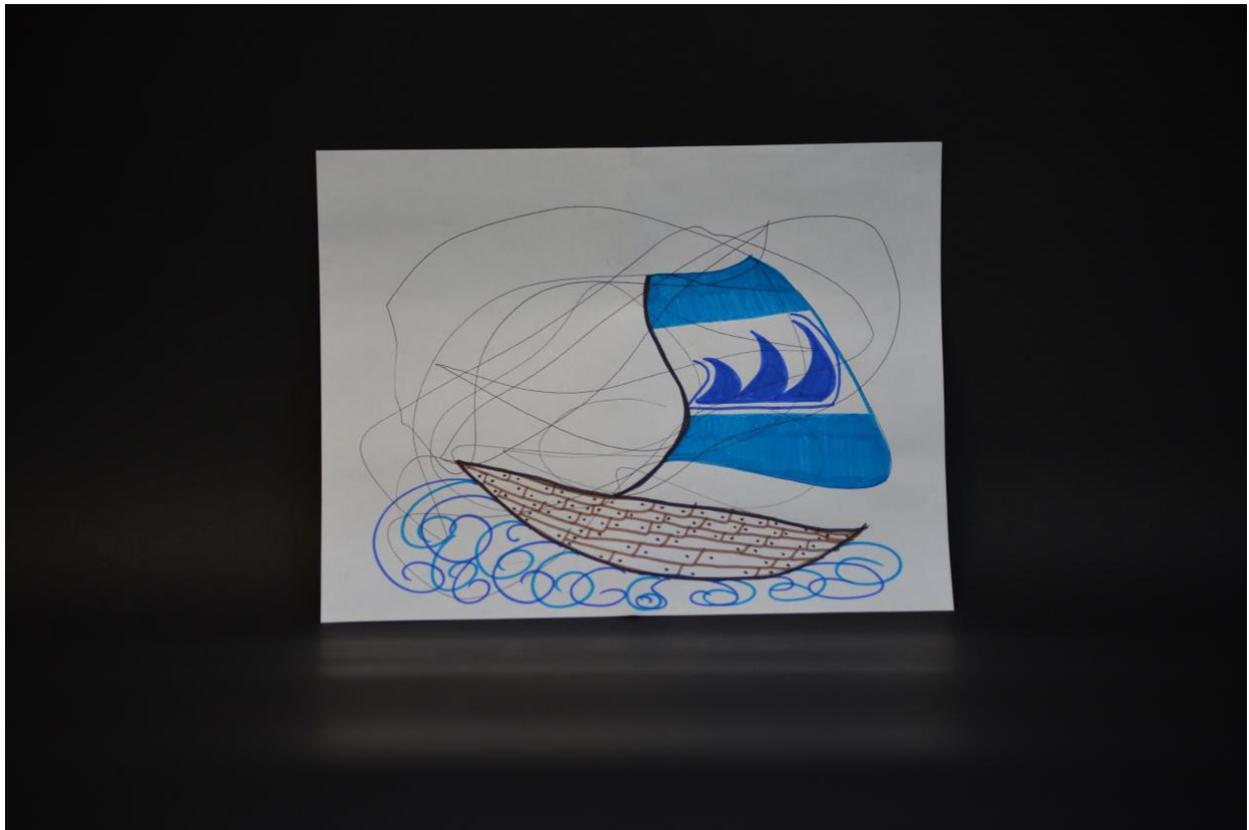


Figure C16

Participant 6, Image 5



Figure C17

Participant 7, Image 1



Figure C18

Participant 8, Image 1



Figure C19

Participant 9, Image 1



Figure C20

Participant 10, Image 1

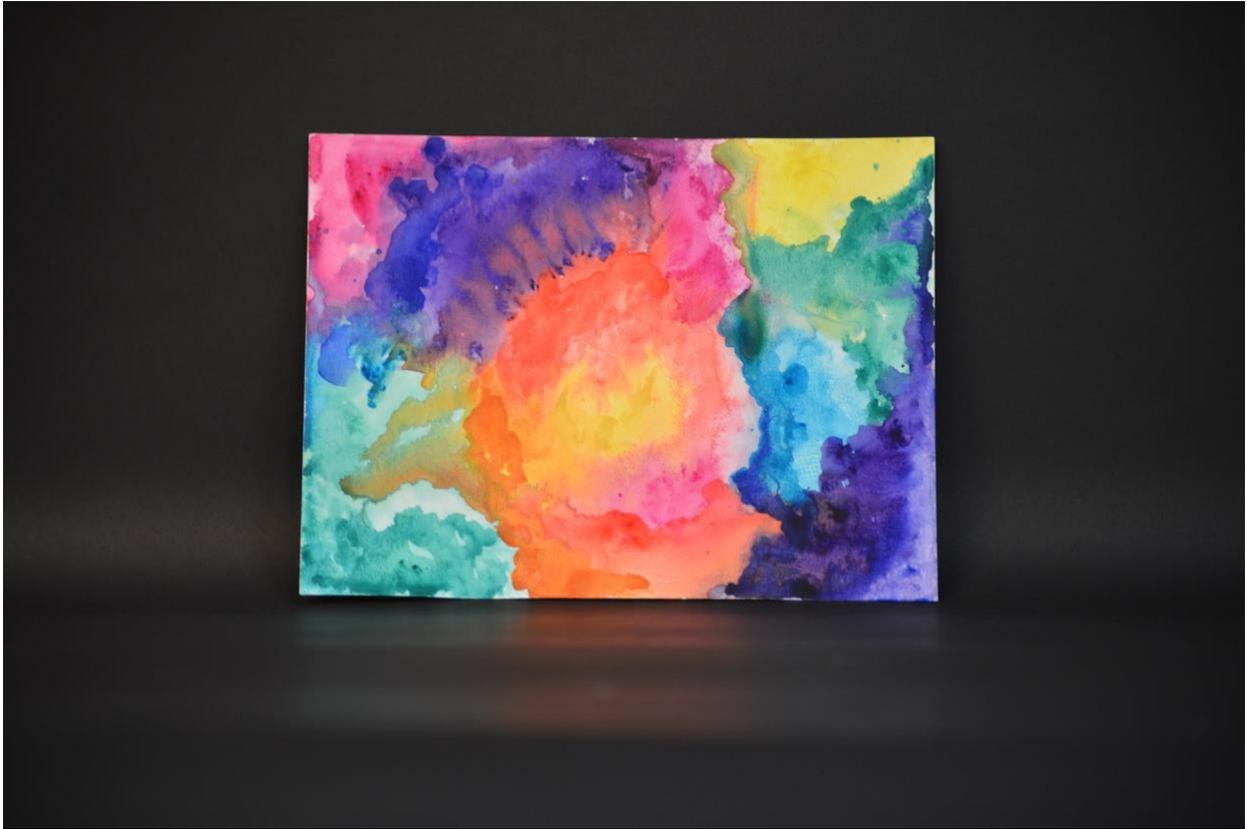


Figure C21

Participant 11, Image 1

