

Art Therapy Promotes the Well-Being of Older Adults

Abstract

This study sought to answer if the creative process can give someone a new outlook on life and promote gerotranscendence. The investigation was on the role that art therapy has in increasing the well-being of older adults. Well-being has many dimensions, including satisfaction with life. Ryff (2014) considers well-being a multi-faceted concept, encompassing the dimensions of self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth. Tornstam (2005) proposed a theory of gerotranscendence in late adulthood. He suggested that people gradually shift “from a materialistic and rational perspective to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally followed by an increase in life satisfaction” (p. 41).

I answered this question through a critical review of literature, studying the GO! Arts Program (Cantu & Fleuriot, 2018), viewing art in a museum, together with discussion, journaling, and art making (Bennington, Backos, Harrison, Reader & Carolan, 2016), and a literary art intervention group (Cesetti, Vescovelli & Ruini, 2017). Based on my review of these approaches with older adults, art therapy can be a solution to the many problems of aging. Creative engagement has been shown to improve psychosocial and mental well-being, to cultivate a sense of competence in older adults, to foster a heightened ability to focus, and yield many more benefits to their successful aging (Stephenson, 2013). Art making and the creative process is clearly an effective nonpharmacological treatment that enhances mental well-being through fostering development of a more positive identity in older adults.

On a theoretical level, this calls for a greater emphasis in the existing system of art therapy with older adults. Communities can become stronger since their citizens would be healthier. Institutions could utilize art therapy practices to promote gerotranscendence in older

adults, resulting in an overall more positive view on aging.

References

- Bennington, R., Backos, A., Harrison, J., Reader, A. E., Carolan, R. (2016) Art therapy in art museums: Promoting social connectedness and psychological well-being of older adults. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 49, 34-43. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2016.05.013>
- Cantu, A. G., & Fleuriet, K. J. (2018) Making the ordinary more extraordinary: Exploring creativity as a health promotion practice among older adults in a community-based professionally taught arts program. *Journal of Holistic Nursing: American Holistic Nurses Association*, 36(2), 123 –133. DOI: 10.1177/0898010117697863
- Cesetti, G., Vescovelli, F. & Ruini, C. (2017) The promotion of well-being in aging individuals living in nursing homes: A controlled pilot intervention with narrative strategies. *Clinical Gerontologist*, 40(5), 380-391. DOI: 10.1080/07317115.2017.1292979
- Ryff, C.D. (2014) Psychological well-being revisited: Advances in the science and practice of eudaimonia. *Psychother Psychosom*, 83, 10–28.
- Stephenson, R. C. (2013) Promoting well-being and gerotranscendence in an art therapy program for older adults. *Art Therapy*, 30(4),151-158. DOI: 10.1080/07421656.2014.846206
- Tornstam, L. (2005) *Gerotranscendence: A developmental theory of positive aging*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.

