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Surface Pattern for Textiles

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In the wake of the Covid-19 lockdowns, it is more important than ever to normalise incorporating positive mental practices into the routines of citizens of the United Kingdom, in order to continuously improve mental health. This involves reviewing what types of mental health support are currently available and how suitable they have been to date, and how useful they are in assisting people who have developed or have experienced worsened mental health issues as a result of the pandemic. I will explore if there is the potential to create a system of support in which more people than ever would be able to engage with art, tackle the stigma surrounding engagement with creative practices and how, theoretically, removing those negative cognitions could create a brand new environment for positive mental experience. Throughout my personal journey with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, I found there to be many false assumptions of the practice which led me to hold unreasonable expectations for the outcomes I was to experience. This realisation encouraged an investigation into how as a society, we can incorporate the themes that lead to positive outcomes within psychological therapy, and apply it to all aspects of life so it continuously benefits us and our wellbeing.

Due to the indiscriminate manner in which SARS-CoV-2 manifests as severe illness, HM Government imposed restrictions on movement in order to protect the most vulnerable in our society. However, the challenges that these precautions would create on the mental health of the wider public, was another crisis that our postmodern society was not prepared for. The inserted graph (Fig. 1) examines a trend in emergency psychiatric admissions during the 1917/18 H1N1 viral pandemic; and compares the findings with the current electronic health records of the active SARS-CoV-2 pandemic timeline. Although at the peak of the H1N1 viral transmission there was a significant drop in recordings of this type, visible from 1918-21 there is a clear steady increase in admittance. If the data in this graph is to be believed, then it is likely that we are headed for a mental health emergency. It is therefore prudent that this specific comparison is heeded by HM Government, as *“In medicine, as in life, we are often confronted with repeating patterns, and turning to historical records in attempts to explain the aspects of current events is something we should not forget to do. It is rightfully said that those who do not learn from the past are destined to repeat it.”* (Vukojević, et al., 2021, p. 3). This extract further amplifies the necessity for awareness and vital action to help those who will inevitably be struggling in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. However it should also be noted that 1918 marked the end of the Great War, meaning psychiatric admissions due to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder may be a factor influencing this data.

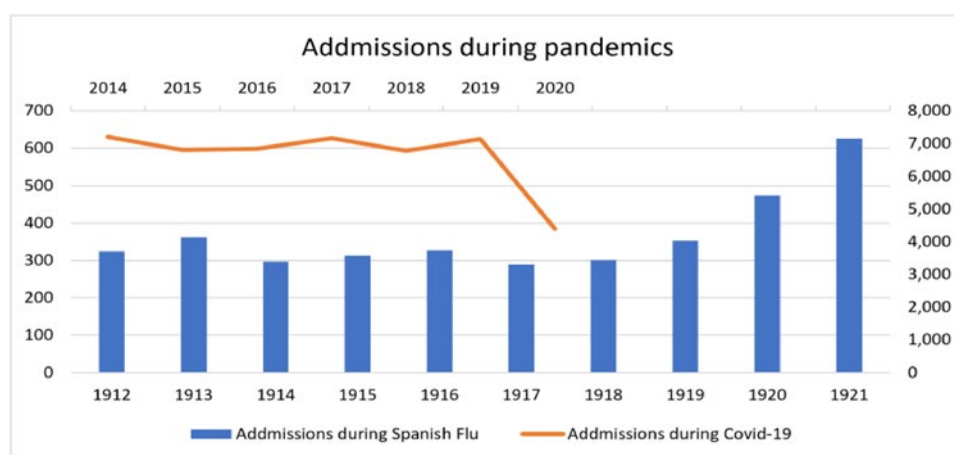


Figure 1

The guidance given by HM Government to assist people with their mental health during the first lockdown of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, was officially withdrawn on the 19th of July 2021 and is currently redirecting visitors to the official Mind Charity website. In March of 2020, it was announced that 36 charity locations would be benefiting from an extra £5mil in funding (GOV.UK, 2021), however with only 6 of those services being Mind constituted, and the official 2018/19 report from Mind receiving only 28% of their funding through Government grants and trusts (Mind UK, 2021); it is clear that not enough was being done to support leading mental health charities. The National Health Service has issues of its own surrounding funding, with the mental health budget being only 11%, yet services of this type using 23% of NHS activity (The Kings Fund, 2015). The World Health Organisation also states “*Current predictions indicate that by 2030 depression will be the leading cause of disease burden globally*” (WHO, 2011). Although these estimations were compiled a decade ago, the number of U.K. adults officially diagnosed with symptoms of depression doubled over the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic (ONS, 2021); It is therefore apparent that the predictions stated could come to fruition earlier than first thought.

In our inclusive and liberal society it is important that the people who require the use of mental health services find one that suits their individual needs. Psychotherapy can be characterised by four main theoretical frameworks;

“The structuralist understanding of human performance, in its extreme, views all behaviours, thoughts, and emotions as ‘determined’ by society.” (Morrall, 2008, p. 15)

This approach can produce better results if an individual has experienced affect theory, which is how a persons’ experiences with society can profoundly alter how they perceive future events (Hoffman, 2020). This would mean that if ones views align with that of socio-normative behaviour, it can be easier to rectify problematic mental patterns as they can be comfortably conformed back to their personal views of normality. However, it is important to note that “*therapy for the Structuralist may be either pointless or counterproductive, part of the problem rather than the solution, if personal and social ills are bred by how society is organised.*” (Morrall, 2008, p. 15) This tells us that if the clients’ main issues are regarding how dysfunctional they feel the structure of their life is, or the world immediately around them, then trying to get them to conform to socially acceptable behaviours would create a polar opposite effect; and thus would leave the subject with a negative view of therapy.

“The interactionist position is that, while there are structures in society, humans can and do give ‘meaning’ to their own lives, and that allows them to transgress the boundaries of these structures.” (Morrall, 2008, p. 15)

Using this framework means that a person can find themselves feeling enriched, as if successful, they feel that they have courageously broken out of some of the behavioural patterns created by society, to build routines that work better for them. This can also be a method of introducing sociological imagination, in which someone questions their routines and finds deeper motivations within their life that they feel helps their brain positively process the surroundings.

“The constructionist position, takes the interactionist stance further by positing that ‘reality’ is not what it seems and can be ‘deconstructed’.” (Morrall, 2008, p. 15)

Morrall tells us that the constructionist method helps the client to create their own ‘epistemology’, which is a view that encourages the person to actively determine which incoming knowledge they feel is based on ideology or the opinions of others, rather than factual information. This framework uses a very postmodern way of thinking. However, it may be best suited for a liberal society such as ours, where many religions are widely accepted, in which this method would be further suited for, whilst still helping people that would like to escape some social or cultural norms.

"Fourth is the perspective of realism. Realism is an amalgam of structuralism, and interactionism and constructionism. There is for the realist an acceptance of 'facts', but these facts are obscured by cultural meanings." (Morrall, 2008, p. 15)

This technique utilises sciences such as anthropology and neuroscience to help understand our primordial instincts; which draw us to themes such as religion and collective social behaviour, in order to help us understand the mechanisms that control our own behaviours. However, it is important to be aware that *"Science and the scientific method have so far proven to be inadequate in finding and therefore explaining reality."* (Morrall, 2008, p. 15) Ultimately, this means that the therapy could find itself at a dead end if there is an aspect of reality that science is currently not able to fully explain, or that the client is not able to fully comprehend. At such an impasse looking into a person's beliefs may help them to understanding their own motivators.



Figure 2

As a creative student, when researching ways to help improve mental health I was naturally drawn to art therapy and its numerous applications. *"We suggest that art therapy is a term which has been used to describe a collection of diverse practices, held together fundamentally by their practitioners' belief in the healing value of image-making. It has meant and still means many different things to different people, including to art therapists themselves."* (Waller & Gilroy, 1992, p. 3)

This extract highlights the heterogeneous nature of art practices and how it is possible to find a method which would work with each individual. People respond differently to artistic practices due to several reasons, the primaries being affect theory and prejudices within stereotypes. *"No more good will come of giving people a lot of rules for looking at pictures than of telling people how they should put art into their pictures. In each case a fatal prejudice is introduced."* (Bell, 1939, p. 28) This extract gives further insights into how damaging the criticism of viewers can cause a 'fatality' for the artist, and therefore cause a negative response in regards to their own artwork. The stereotype that the general public will have automatic prejudice against all forms of artwork, means that many who do not necessarily see themselves as instinctively creative types, will refrain from producing certain forms of artwork to avoid their own judgemental views as well as the ones from others. *"If one could bring oneself to look at the gap, allow oneself to see both the ideal and the failure to bring up to it in one moment of vision, and without the urge to interfere and alter oneself to fit the ideal, then the ideal seemed to somehow enter into relation and produce something quite new something that had nothing to do with being pleased with oneself for living up to an ideal, or miserable for having failed to."* (Milner, 1950, p. 90). From this evidence, it is explained to us that the ideals of an outcome can ultimately be a main factor in the views of oneself and their artistic ability. Removing that feeling of failure and focusing on the process of making and growth instead of the outcome, could potentially be what assists someone in being able to express their subconscious thoughts and therefore being able to process them. Depicted in figure 2, is a painting by Henry Matisse called 'Dance', and is an example of how emotions can be displayed through image making to express underlying feelings to the viewer.

Although the appreciation of processes and simultaneously becoming less objective about ones outcomes have positive reactions within art therapy, there are some studies which disagree with the application of free expression. *“Untrammelled scribbling and messing are as unlike spontaneous, expressive use of art materials (and as unlikely to lead to it) as aimless chatter is unlike free association in psychoanalytic treatment.”* (Waller & Gilroy, 1992, p. 9). Although this can be true for people who have had a history of training within the arts sector, encouraging an individual to experiment with artistic mediums as a starting point can be as productive as someone who is unlikely to be conversational, having a casual chat with their therapist. As mentioned before, many people refrain from partaking in creative activities due to fear of failure or judgement, so theoretically if the space was provided free from those negating emotions, the individual would feel more comfortable expressing their subconscious and underlying issues inhibiting them from living to their full capabilities. Another psychological approach to therapy through artistic activities, stems from a Freudian perspective which provides countenance towards the practice. *“So through a process of transformation, the artist turns his personal phantasies and day-dreams into works of art which contain both manifest and latent content.”* (Freud, 1917, p. 377). This study talks about the personal goals and aspirations of an individual and the potential benefits of immersing them in a positive creative environment. Freud tells us that encouraging a person to engage with artistic mediums in this provided space, would invoke positive emotions that could continue to alter subconscious behaviour towards stimuli, outside of the sessions.



Figure 3

During the peaks of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, there was an overall increase of engagement with creative activities throughout the U.K. population. This was caused by varying factors, which I will deconstruct and use the results of my investigation to potentially help every-day stresses in the wake of the pandemic. For much of the populous, the accessibility of creative endeavours was increased; this was due to the restrictions on in-person activities, meaning that many professionals moved their practices online to continue to stimulate engagement. *“Many arts and cultural providers began offering virtual activities to keep people engaged in digital arts activities (e.g., virtual museum tours), online groups (e.g., internet book clubs and virtual choirs), and streamed*

performances (e.g., concerts and plays).” (Wan Mak, Fluharty, & Fancourt, 2021). Many artistic industries have been steadily increasing their online presence due to demand. However, in this example it was imperative for many businesses to adapt to being entirely online in order to survive in the unprecedented conditions. However, this resulted in greater usage of the new and existing services, as almost half of the population that took part in a web panel report for HM Government participated in a creative activity within the last four weeks before the questionnaire (DDCMS, 2020). That figure went down to 42% of the population, however, as this study focused on arts within the home exclusively.

During the government mandated lockdowns, much of the British population experienced a rise in the amount of free time they had available. In February of 2020, the average number of hours that an individual would work was 36.9 a week, during the first peak of the lockdown in April 2020 that figure decreased to 30.6 hours a week (ONS, Average actual weekly hours of work for full-time workers, 2021). It is important to mention that these statistics do not include travel time, which in the U.K. is on average 59 minutes per day (TUC, 2019). This brought the average amount of disposable time available to individuals during the first SARS-Cov-2 pandemic to almost 11 hours a week, as many were working from the comfort of their own homes. This meant that most people had over one full working-day extra per week with which to engage in activities that they would not normally find the time for. Many of these pursuits were creative in nature, which ultimately helped to improve overall mental wellbeing. This can be seen through the investigation of creative activities on emotions, which explains how varying benefits can be achieved through positive exposure to artistic practice. *“Artistic creative activities have been shown to modulate emotions (rapidly-changing reactions to events in the external or internal environment), influence our moods (more generalised, less intense states of feeling lasting longer periods), and affect our mental health.”* (Fancourt, Garnett, Spiro, West, & Müllensiefen, 2019). From this research, we can further examine the longevity of the applications of art on a person’s wellbeing; increasing the general mood of an individual could significantly improve the immediate response of their brain to different scenarios. This investigation explores Emotional Regulation Strategies (ERS’s), which are skills that help an individual positively alter the way that their brain responds to negative stimuli. *“In studies of broader artistic creative activities, the role of specific ERSs have been discussed as part of wider measures of emotional impact. For example, a study of drawing compared venting with distraction as a means of regulating emotion through drawing and visual art has been found to improve resilience and resistance to stress.”* (Fancourt, Garnett, Spiro, West, & Müllensiefen, 2019). This example shows us that the application of creativity in a routine can become a useful ERS which helps to improve overall mental wellbeing. The study also details a four stage procedure which models the ideal process for which a person would participate in, to achieve the desired outcome of the creative engagement. *“First, the ‘goal’ of engaging in a creative activity refers to what somebody hopes to achieve before they start engaging in the activity (e.g. wanting to calm feelings of anxiety). Secondly, the ‘tactic’ refers to the creative activity they choose to engage in to achieve this goal (e.g. painting for an hour). Thirdly, the ‘strategy’ refers to the type of mental process used to regulate the emotions (e.g. distracting the person from their anxiety). And finally, the ‘mechanism’ mediates the induction of emotions (e.g. the visual imagery conjured which occupies their thoughts). This process then leads to experiential, behavioural or physiological emotional responses to the creative activity.”* (Fancourt, Garnett, Spiro, West, & Müllensiefen, 2019). This extract goes into detail about each subconscious step of creating, and break it down into the fundamentals of applying artistic engagement as a way of processing negative emotions and how it has an effect on a person’s stimuli reaction to external situations.

This emotional regulation strategic methodology explained by (Fancourt, Garnett, Spiro, West, & Müllensiefen, 2019), breaks down the core theories behind Flow; which is the process of achieving an optimal mental state whilst carrying out a task or activity. *“Flow experiences in everyday life are reminiscent of Darwin’s image of the tiny, soft-bodied organisms whose calcareous skeletons slowly build rock-hard reefs on the ocean floor. Flow experiences, too, seem ephemeral, but they form habits and institutions that stand the wear of centuries.”* (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2012, p. 251). This extract highlights the importance of Flow theory in all evolutionary experiences, and how our subconscious reactions to our environment are a result of continuous interactions with external elements. From this we can begin to determine that exposing an individual to repeated positive experiences with an optimised mental state can have a constructive outcome on their subconscious mental routines and therefore increasing general mood. The participation in Flow is something we rarely experience unless specifically practiced, due to the numerous and varied interactions that we experience on a daily basis. With the societal stresses associated with our postmodern society, the

negative interactions generally outweigh the positives. *“In everyday life the opportunities for action are seldom evenly matched with our abilities to act.”* (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2012, p. 183) This example tells us that our routines are set up to encompass optimal experiences and its benefits. However, as discussed before in regards to ERSs, positive mental states can also be achieved by creatively altering the way that we subconsciously respond to interactions; which was previously demonstrated by a person engaging in a drawing activity as a way to remove stress, rather than vent their frustrations vocally. The wider issue surrounding the limitations for flow in our everyday routines is rooted in how our society behaves *“In general, the social environment does not dispose of sufficient extrinsic rewards to motivate people to spend the huge amounts of psychic energy necessary for mastering a set of complex skills, for confronting new challenges.”* (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2012, p. 373). This study tells us that individuals generally lack the motivation to pursue an emotionally rewarding skill or activity as a result of societal patterns that reward behaviours. An example of such a behaviour is working long hours in a job that you dislike only to be compensated with what the economy dictates is a comfortable amount.



Figure 4

Looking into how we can incorporate optimal mental experience into our routines has brought my investigation to the introduction of a four day working week, and the benefits this would create for the UK public. As mentioned previously, during the peak of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the average full-time individual was required to work 11 hours less a week. However, due to increased strain on mental health as a result of lockdown restrictions, it is hard to quantify the positive effects this shortened work week has had on mental health. It is important to note that the introduction of lower employment hours is not a postmodern revelation, *“Walter Reuther bargained for a four-day, 32 hour week in the 1950's, yet it is only since 1970 that the current rapid increase in interest within both the public and private sectors toward the idea of a shortened workweek has emerged.”* (Hartman & Weaver, 1977). The reason for this new interest would have been due to the inclusion of new hypothesis at the time, which will be compared to recent data on the live introduction of these schemes in various workplaces;

“Changes in productivity will have a significant impact on successful implementation of a four-day week.” (Hartman & Weaver, 1977)

These positive changes are characterised by an improvement in overall wellbeing of staff, and has recently been documented by members of the Icelandic council; which this year (2021) implemented a four day working week. It was reported *“Productivity remained the same or improved and worker well-being rose as workers felt less stressed and less likely to burnout”* (Corey, 2021). This is important as burnout can be a major cause of depressive symptoms which would result in general decreased mental and physical health and therefore lower productivity. Another recent study of these proposals in Japan also had significant outcomes, *“When Microsoft Japan tested the idea in 2019, productivity jumped about 40% and the vast majority of employees approved of the idea”* (Corey, 2021). This example also displays the benefits of the new system which is important to heed as an

increase in productivity benefits both employee and employer; it shows that job satisfaction has improved which will reduce instances of absenteeism and lower employee turnover.

Having researched the benefits of the four day work week, my investigation was brought to light potential negatives, suggesting why these proposals have not yet been implemented within the United Kingdom. One of the biggest factors is likely to be the initial financial costs of the changes. Most recently the Minister for Public Expenditure, Michael McGrath, announced that it would cost around €4.2 billion (£3.6bn) for Ireland to make the transition to shorter working weeks. This figure is likely to be one of the leading arguments against introducing these programmes in the near future, due to the United Kingdom being £2,223 billion in debt as of June 2021 (ONS, 2021). However GDP in Iceland increased from \$17.52 billion to \$21.71 billion since these benefits were implemented to 85% of their workforce. It is important to note though, that Iceland is currently in debt to the sum of \$17.35bn (£13.16bn) (Statista, 2021) which is only 0.59% of the current debt of the UK. Although the benefits are conclusive in regards to financial profit, initial investment is required to make drastic changes to the working patterns of most of the public, as these new shift requirements would not be suitable for all types of businesses.

After the recent United Nations climate change conference, the concerned parties have attracted much media attention about their plans to improve the planet for future generations. An important benefit of the shortened work week, is the positive impact it would have on reducing global emissions due to less commuting. *“Shifting to a four-day working week without loss of pay could shrink the UK’s carbon footprint by 127 million tonnes per year by 2025. This represents a reduction of 21.3%, and is more than the entire carbon footprint of Switzerland.”* (Mompelat & Minio-Paluello, 2021). This study speaks for the positive contribution that the policies would create for our environment, and would also assist in reducing stress for commuters as a result of lowered total traveling times. This positive outcome of contributing to lowering carbon emissions would also ease people in regards to climate change anxiety disorder as *“Acting on climate change has never been more popular in the UK, with 8 in 10 either ‘fairly’ or ‘very’ concerned about climate change.”* (Mompelat & Minio-Paluello, 2021) These fears can worsen daily stresses as the public increasingly more aware of how the actions of people in power affect the survival of human kind. Introducing a four day work week would have immediate positive repercussions in regards to employee satisfaction and secondary benefits on the environment and therefore the physical health of the population.

Although creativity can be described differently by each individual, the evidence in this investigation tells us that actively engaging in artistic practices would amalgamate many of the positives discussed and result in an overall improvement in the wellbeing of the general public. This could be permanently introduced by implementing a shortened work week without reducing pay, whilst also outlining a schedule for the increased free time in which the individual would participate in activities that could enhance their creative skills. This would be supervised by trained therapists using techniques from both psychotherapy and art therapy, and encourage the practice of Flow to aid in mental stimulation. Providing spaces which have been prepared for a range of artistic mediums and are free from judgement would create the appropriate setting for someone to be able to achieve optimal mental experience, therefore improving overall mood. This creative approach would also help to deconstruct the stereotypes attached to those who work within the design industries, having been designated as unviable and unnecessary during the pandemic (Tai, 2020). However as demonstrated in this investigation, the general public of the UK participated in divergent artistic practices more frequently than prior to the pandemic, due to having the time and freedom to.

This inquiry has explored the underpinning theories behind psychological therapy, its methods and how it can be incorporated within creative practices in order to be performed as art therapy, the stigma that we will face when participating in an artistic hobby, the resulting impact on our perception of ourselves, and the benefits to appreciating the process rather than focusing on the outcome. This also

involves the theories behind the study of optimal experience, which has been recognised in supporting people to improve their general wellbeing. Flow and the process of achieving this optimal mental experience is vital for people to enjoy rich and stimulating lives, especially with increasing fears of external factors such as climate change. The importance of artistic practices has been demonstrated throughout the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic and how these distractions positively impacted our emotions at an incredibly difficult time. Finally, demonstrated is the benefits to a shortened work week, which could reduce stress and increase positivity. Combining this extra free time with the practices discussed could create an environment that would bring together the productive mental outcomes of the theories.

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Image credits

Figure 1. Vukojević, J., Đuran, N., Žaja, N., Sušac, J., Šekerija, M., & Savić, A. (2021). 100 Years apart: Psychiatric admissions during Spanish flu and COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2. La Danse, Henri Matisse 1910. Retrieved on 10-12-2021 from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dance_\(Matisse\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dance_(Matisse))

Figure 3. Game Changer, Banksy; 2020. Retrieved on 10-12-2021 from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hampshire-56497104>

Figure 4. Another Arrival, John Duffin. Retrieved on 10-12-2021 from <https://www.cambridgegallery.co.uk/blog/category/Painting>