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Media Consumption Effect on Therapuetic Aesthetics

William Gracik
wgracik@lesley.edu

How Does Media Consumption and Screen Time Usage Affect Our Therapeutic Aesthetics? A

Literature Review

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William Charles Gracik

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Donna C. Owens

Abstract

This paper conceptualizes and proposes the current thesis topic: how does media consumption and screen time usage affect our therapeutic aesthetics? The thesis is a critical review of the literature that focalizes on highlighting key themes between both concepts. Literature findings convey an increase of screen time during the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature collected tentatively suggests four key findings: media multitasking serves an emotional and sensory gratification purpose and less of a cognitive functional one, an increased risk of psychiatric disorders with excessive media use, social media consumption as a behavior is highly associated with the hedonic pleasure system, and media consumption as a behavior is highly influenced by our therapeutic aesthetics. The literature also tentatively suggests mindfulness as a preventative factor from the potential unhealthy byproducts of social media consumption. The thesis further explores how the expressive arts therapies serve as interventions between excess screen time use due to its innate properties of mindfulness, naturalism, and aestheticization.

Keywords: aesthetics, screen time, social media, mindfulness, sense, creativity, imagination, perfectionism, media, digital media, expressive arts therapy

How Does Media Consumption and Screen Time Usage Affect Our Therapeutic Aesthetics? A

Literature Review

I wake up and my phone is right there calling me to check it before any of my anxieties can come into my consciousness. I go to the kitchen and breaking news is plastered across the television about something traumatic half-way across the world. I go to the gym and there are more televisions than there are gym-goers; not to mention that I am already listening to music, so there is no dead silence. Anecdotally, I notice how a pandemic has affected my mental health, emotions, and relationship to screen-time consumption, which feels to have exemplified an already existing problem of avoiding silence. However, how is this increase of constant media consumption affecting the ability to emote with regard to mental health? This paper conceptualizes and proposes the current thesis topic: how does media consumption and screen time usage affect aesthetics? The thesis is a critical review of the literature. The topic focalizes on how digital media and social media consumption impact mental health, emotional self, and sensorial self. The reason for choosing the literature review is in order to gain further insight surrounding technology and mental health on a macro level. The thesis topic is especially relevant and fills a gap of literature as mental health services are currently being provided primarily virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The primary population served at my internship site is adolescents with anxiety disorders, depression, and substance use disorders. The populations served are receiving services completely through technology which may directly impact their treatment. In addition, the mental health field and expressive arts therapy profession has never navigated itself as a profession of telehealth at this magnitude. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected mental health of the clientele but also the format in which they receive services. In addition, how is screen time consumption being affected due to COVID-19 outside of therapy? This preliminary inquiry led to a search of "COVID-19" and "screen time" through web database searches in order to analyze its prevalence. Research conveyed similar findings of an

increase in screen time use during COVID-19 (Sultana, 2021). According to Sultana (2021), "Due to the restrictions imposed to contain the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, different population groups have adapted to varying screen time levels, which may have profound implications on their physical and mental wellbeing" (p. 1). Prior to the pandemic, I pondered on the relationships between therapeutic aesthetics, media consumption, and mental health. Once witnessing the pandemic's impact on the mental health of clients at my internship site and the expressive arts therapies field, it further solidified my choice of inquiry. Empirical studies included in the thesis convey an increase in the number of people and their screen time consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic with a prolonged duration of use (Sultana, 2021). This revelation gave solace to me as it validated the universality of my experience but also raised further questions about the mental health of at-risk populations. The search emphasized the importance and relevance of my thesis topic: what is the relationship between aesthetics and media consumption?

<div align="center">**Literature Review**</div>

Aesthetics

Preliminary literature review research was limited due to the context and various use of the word *aesthetics* as a search term across different fields. The search term did not give an accurate representation of what is under scope because of the multiple fields the word *aesthetic* is used in. Therefore, to encapsulate the accurate scope of the literature under analysis, this paper will additionally differentiate *formal aesthetics* from *therapeutic aesthetics*, give historical context of therapeutic aesthetics, and explain the philosophy behind anesthesia.

Formal Aesthetics vs. Therapeutic Aesthetics

There first must be a differentiation made between formal aesthetics and therapeutic aesthetics to continue analyzing the scope of this literature review. The theoretical perspective of therapeutic aesthetics within the expressive arts therapies is essentially a rejection of the concept of formal beauty

(Knill et al., 2005). The use of the word aesthetics, outside of expressive arts therapies, is used

differently within several fields, including philosophy (Goebel, 2019), cosmetic surgery (Eggerstedt et al.,

2020), religion (Caple & Baffelli, 2019) and landscaping (Gosal & Ziv, 2020). The semantic understanding

of formal beauty came up continuously in the research hence the need for this further reframing and

differentiation of therapeutic aesthetics from other forms of aesthetics. In alignment with expressive

arts therapy, by letting go of presuppositions about aesthetics, one can continue to acknowledge the

cultural tendency to be what Knill et al. (2005) call *aestheticized* in your everyday life. Knill et al. (2005)

explain that the process of understanding therapeutic aesthetics pertains to a life-long journey of

becoming acclimated to the sensory and emotional self (Knill et al., 2005). This concept relates to the

thesis topic because the ability to emote and evocate sensation is what is being analyzed alongside

screen time usage.

History of Therapeutic Aesthetics

It is applicable to contextualize in history the term therapeutic aesthetics for the thesis due to

the search results coming up; the field of expressive arts therapy was born out of modernism into an era

of postmodernism and the avant-garde (Knill et al., 2005). In addition to the era significance, I find it

pertinent to discuss the etymology of therapeutic aesthetics to gain further historical context.

Aesthetics, according to the American Psychological Association (n.d.) is the "philosophical study of

beauty and art, concerned particularly with the articulation of taste and questions regarding the value of

aesthetic experience and the making of aesthetic judgments." The history of this word was applied in

contradicting ways between sensation provocation and absence of evocation (Knill et al., 2005). I find

that a useful way to understand therapeutic aesthetics within the scope of this literature review is with

regard to the etymology because it serves as a starting point that highlights, in my opinion, the most

important part of aesthetics, sensation. "Sensation" and "feeling" as search terms, are the first words

extracted from Knill et al.'s (2005) concept of therapeutic aesthetics: "the practice of expressive arts

therapy is an aesthetic practice. Such a practice depends upon the exercise and cultivation of sensitivity:

an opening of the sense on the part both of the therapist and of the patient or client" (p. 202). Knill et

al.'s (2005) definition is what is used for the context of this literature review. Sensation and feeling are

used within the scope of the literature review as they encapsulate the research question: how does

media consumption and screen time usage affect our therapeutic aesthetics? In order words, how is the

increase of screen time and media usage during COVID-19 effecting the ability to feel and sense?

Alternatively, if present, how do our therapeutic aesthetics effect the amount of screen time use during

quarantine?

The traditional philosophy of art created a separation of the intellect from the emotional and

sensorial self, breaking up the embodied experience in which all three are the full self; the full embodied

incorporation and emphasis on sensorial flow is the basis of expressive arts therapies therapeutic

aesthetics (Knill et al., 2005). Halprin (2003) elucidates, "In this new aesthetic, form was to follow

function; the question became how could design facilitate and reflect an experience of the 'pure' nature

of things" (p. 69.). It encourages being in the moment and allowing the art to create itself through the

artist (Betensky, 1995). Continuing, Knill et al. (2005) found "the play of imagination must be placed at

the center of the human capacity" (p. 11). This new concept proposes being in the moment and leading

with the senses, while giving up pre-existing notions of what should and shouldn't be in art making. Knill

et al. (2005) explains,

> We must, in any case, be willing to give up our presuppositions as to the nature of the work of
>
> art and allow ourselves to be surprised by what unexpectedly comes. Otherwise we run the risk
>
> of forcing the fragmentary character of our clients' experience into the unity of an aesthetic
>
> formalism, a project that would only create a new idol of the work alongside that of the "Self."
>
> (p. 70)

"Perfectionism", "beauty", "form", "mindfulness", "imagination", "play", and "creativity" were added as

search terms because they encapsulate the theoretical perspective of the etymology of therapeutic

aesthetics conveyed by the literature.

Anesthesia

Anesthesia is a further breakdown of the theory behind Knill et al.'s (2005) definition of

therapeutic aesthetics. Aesthetics and anesthesia both have the root word of esthesia. Anesthesia,

according to the American Psychological Association (n.d.) is the "the loss of sensitivity to stimuli, either

in a particular area (local) or throughout the body and accompanied by loss of consciousness (general)."

To continue, Imaginal play is applicable because it allows the individual to let go of control and

knowledge. Halprin (2003) explains the three levels of awareness and response to aesthetics in the

"physical body, emotional body, and mental body" (p. 104). The three levels of awareness also depict

levels of anesthesia. Knill et al. (2005) add to this experience, "The contrary quality, then, would not be

ugliness but rather an-aesthesia – a dullness, an inability to respond" (p. 138). McNiff (2009) explains

low-skill high-sensitivity as a practice that encourages the opening up of the sensorial and emotional

resistance because of the lack of pressure of form perfection.

Method

The literature was searched through Lesley University's library search engine, Google Scholar,

Microsoft Academic, Base, Core, Science.gov, Semantic Scholar, Baidu Scholar, and EBSCO. The literature

was searched for relevant peer-reviewed academic articles. The study selection aimed for a balance

between quantitative articles, qualitative articles, literature reviews, and arts-based research. The

therapeutic aesthetic terms—"sensation", "feeling", "perfectionism", "beauty", "form", "mindfulness",

"imagination", "play", and "creativity"—were searched in EBSCOhost database with the media terms—

"social media", "digital media", and "screen time." Themes that arose within the literature were, media

multitasking, connection, mindfulness, hedonic pleasure system, psychiatric disorders, anxiety,

posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance use disorders, depression, schizophrenia, eating

disorders, and attentional skills diminishment.

Media Multi-tasking (Sens* and "Social Media")

Limited research on aesthetics and its relationship to media appears in the literature. For example, a search of English language peer reviewed journals in the EBSCOhost database using the search terms "aesthetics" and "media," with no date parameters, yielded irrelevant results to the thesis topic. Upon altering, a search of English language peer reviewed journals in the EBSCOhost database using the search terms "sens*" and "social media," with no date parameters, yielded 253 academic journal articles whose definition of aesthetics matched the therapeutic aesthetics under scope in the literature review.

The theme of media multitasking and its relationship to aesthetics arose within the literature (Baumgartner & Wiradhany, 2021; Gorman & Green, 2016; Yoon et al., 2021). Through a qualitative online interviewing study, Yoon et al. (2021) explain, "We established a link between social media use and multitasking in the general population, and also unpacked the role of the sensation-seeking personality trait in this relationship" (p. 1). The article conveys that there is a positive correlation between social media use and multi-tasking (Yoon et al., 2021). What are the impacts of the behavior of multi-tasking, inherently consequential from social media use, on therapeutic aesthetics? According to Yoon et al., sensation-seeking personality traits are present in "people who have a stronger motivation for forming and maintaining relationships through social media and can be characterized as sensation seekers whose trait(s) may subsequently trigger simultaneous engagement in multiple media activities" (p. 4). Individuals who tend to have this sensation-seeking personality trait have a higher likelihood to media multi-task. Continuing, the article explains that there are certain populations of people who are more likely to engage in sensation seeking behavior. Under the lens on a therapeutic aesthetics, the natural desire to sense can be seen through the behavior sought out in social media use and multi-tasking.

Yoon et al. (2021) found "sensation-seeking traits correlated to social motivation to return to social media" (p. 3). Social media users who are more likely to engage with various platforms are potentially more likely to switch between platforms and content in order to *feel more*. Baumgartner and Wiradhany (2021) further dissect media multitasking and its effect on aesthetics. Through the analysis of 15 data sets between 36 and 144 different media multitasking combinations, Baumgartner and Wiradhany (2021) convey that "media multitasking occurs more frequently among media combinations that provide instant emotional gratification" (p. 1). The article conveys that media multitasking as a behavior takes form in a range of media source combination examples including "watching TV while sending a text message to listening to music while gaming" (p. 4). Media multitasking is highly correlated with seeking immediate emotional gratification. Are we using media in excess ways as a tool to get our *needs met* emotionally and sensorially? This article highlighted an aspect of aesthetics and media that was not initially apparent in the preliminary research findings.

Baumgartner and Wiradhany (2021) convey, "Individuals tend to pair those media combinations that result in lower cognitive demands" (p. 8). This cognitively adaptive behavior choice allows for the simultaneous use of media in order to prevent cognitive overload. They continue "media multitasking combinations that draw on the same sensory modality are less frequently combined" (p. 8). The article expounds by explaining that out of the five senses, hearing as a sensory modality is rarely used simultaneously in a media activity (p. 8). The article discusses cognitive overload and stress response as being aspects of importance in regard to multi-tasking. According to Baumgartner and Wiradhany (2021)

> individuals might also choose cognitively nonadaptive media combinations if these promise immediate emotional gratification. In the presence of constant media distractions, individuals may fail to control their behavior and engage in media multitasking behaviors that might be cognitively highly demanding but emotionally gratifying. (p. 9)

The article highlights that media multi-tasking doesn't serve as an efficacious form of cognitive media

consumption but provides emotional gratification. Baumgartner and Wiradhany (2021) explain

"Research on the uses and gratifications of entertainment media has repeatedly shown that media are

predominantly selected to gratify hedonic pleasures (Bartsch & Viehoff, 2010) and that media use can

have positive effects on well-being" (p. 9).

Media multitasking doesn't support task performance or efficient media processing but it can

support emotional needs. Opposing perspectives on media multitasking are present in the literature.

According to Poplawaska et al. (2021) "media multitasking can be seen as both a strategic behavior

undertaken to accomplish one's goals as well as a self-regulatory failure" (p. 1). The article serves as a

devil's advocate and critique to the majority of research findings on the topic of media, sensation, and

media-multitasking by highlighting an alternative. "Research shows, for instance, that American youths

spend on average 7.5 hours every day with media, and 29% of that time is spent processing different

forms of media simultaneously" (p. 1). They continue "media multitasking might help attain one's

present goals yet be conducive to a cognitive strategy that leads to lesser attentional shielding goals" (p.

3). The article argues that current literature measuring the topic of social media use and media

multitasking efficacy puts too large a value of productivity and is measured on unreliable subjective

evaluations on performance. Poplawaska et al. argue,

> personal self-regulation and external regulations, can affect the effectiveness of multitasking.
>
> Self-regulation ability can also help identify the state in which we begin to fall into the illusion of
>
> productivity or become addicted to social media. People are able to identify when the
>
> multitasking mode of functioning is starting to become burdensome for them and therefore
>
> change their operating strategy. (p. 7)

The article raises alternative viewpoints and criticisms of the topic of media multitasking, social media

use, and self-regulation, which aids in painting a broader picture of the thesis topic.

Connection (Feeling* and Social Media)

There continued to be limited research on aesthetics and its relationship to media arising in the literature. A search of English language peer reviewed journals in the EBSCOhost database using the search terms "feeling*" and "social media," with no date parameters, yielded a significant number of items whose definition of aesthetics matched the therapeutic aesthetics under scope in the literature review. The theme of connection continues to grow in relationship to aesthetics within the literature (Hoffman et al., 2017; Jeong et al., 2019; Poon & Jiang, 2020). Through the analysis of 425 questionnaire responses collected from Prolific Academia given to respondents, Jeong et al. (2019) found that

> the more the users use social media, the more often they are exposed to opposite opinions and the more uncomfortable they feel. In order to resolve these uncomfortable feelings, it appears that these users tend to take selective exposure more than affective behavior. (p. 1)

This research study conveys that the main reason social media users gravitate to specific topics is for a positive hedonic response (Jeong et al., 2019). Uncomfortable feelings that arose from the social media is the main indicator for emotional avoidance. Continuing, through a qualitative online interviewing study and through the regulatory focus theory, Hoffman et al. (2017) found that "the fit conditions of promotion-focused, more social behaviors, and prevention-focused, less social behaviors, produce higher feelings of connection compared to the nonfit conditions, owing to a subjective sensation that the fit conditions just feel right" (p. 1). The article approaches the psychological theory of aesthetics from a business and marketing outlook in order to get their clientele to feel right about their product. The article conveys that the main variable present in regard to behaviorally responding on social media is highly associated with connection (Hoffman et al., 2017). Although this finding depicts potentially obvious outcomes, the emphasis on connection being the focal point of social media serves as a foundation for further research; additionally, connection is highly related to the theories of expressive arts therapy (Hoffman et al., 2017).

Through a random assignment study which experimentally manipulated a group's social media experience by altering the number of likes from one to five in 11 online interaction partners, Poon and Jiang (2020) found "trait mindfulness significantly moderated the effects of feeling left out on social media on these maladjustment outcomes" (p. 3). The article further identifies themes of connection by addressing the feelings of inadequacy and loneliness by measuring themes of psychological distress, negative emotion, hostility, and antisocial tendency (Poon & Jiang, 2020). The article addresses a pivotal aspect of the literature review in regard to aesthetics because it identifies mindfulness as a mediating factor. Mindfulness according to the theories depicted previously in this paper is a fundamental aspect of aesthetics (Daly, 2019; LaCreta, 2018; Piper, 2019). Poon and Jiang (2020) support and highlight the potential use of the expressive arts therapies as an effective intervention due to the intrinsic qualities of therapeutic aesthetics. Through an arts-based, community-based participatory research (AB-CBPR) methodology (Crowder et al., 2020) a mindfulness meditation was conducted with educators. Crowder et al. (2020) found "themes of human connectedness and interconnection, self-care and nurturance, the healing qualities of the natural word, and the recognition that institutions need to provide space and resources to support educator well-being" (p. 3). The mindfulness-based art-as-meditation experiential conveyed the important mindfulness qualities inherent in the arts. The theme of connection through the active participation of shaping and forming art conveys mindfulness within the context of the thesis.

Psychiatric Disorders and Mindfulness ('mindful*' and 'Social media')

Previous literature review findings pointed the research towards a more focalized approach of analyzing mindfulness as a coping mechanism for excess social media use. A search of English language peer reviewed journals in the EBSCOhost database using the search terms "mindful*" and "social media," with no date parameters, yielded articles where the definition of aesthetics matched the therapeutic aesthetics under scope in the literature review. The literature review conveyed maladaptive outcomes from emotional decompression through technology use with an increased risk of psychiatric

disorders (Apaolaza et al., 2019; Easton, 2018; Gomer, 2016; Holeman et al., 2020; Mccauley, 2019; Rømer, 2015). The literature is further broken down to separate subthemes by psychiatric disorder including: anxiety, PTSD, substance use disorders, depression, schizophrenia, eating disorders, and attentional skills diminishment.

There are therapeutic aspects lost and risk factors increased with mental health services as they are provided through a screen (Orlando et al., 2019). Adolescents are significantly susceptible to depression, social anxiety, and substance use disorders due to social media addiction and consumption (Tunney et al., 2017). Sultana (2021) emphasizes

> The available evidence suggests that screen time is associated with obesity, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, myopia, depression, sleep disorders, and several non-communicable diseases. This elevated burden of diseases is more prevalent among individuals who have sedentary lifestyles and other unhealthy behaviors that are likely to increase during quarantine or isolation due to COVID-19. (p. 1)

Active healthy lifestyles appear to help with combating the high levels of increased unhealthy screen time consumption (Colley, 2020). According to Colley (2020)

> More men (65%) and women (62%) rated their mental and general health as very good or excellent if they maintained or decreased TV time compared with those who increased TV time (57% and 43%, respectively), with the same evident for Internet use in women only (maintained/decreased: 61% versus increased: 44%). (p. 1)

The article conveys that decreased video game time, decreasing of any type of screen, and increasing of exercising of outdoors were all correlated with an increase of self-reported positive mental health (Colley, 2020, p. 1). In other words, active healthy lifestyles appear to help with combating the high levels of increased unhealthy screen time consumption.

Eating Disorders

According to Easton et al. (2018) "Initial studies have focused on concerns over potential

negative effects on psychological wellbeing including body image, self-esteem and eating disorders" (p.

1). They continue "A popular recent trend emerging on social media is that of posting and following

'Fitspirational' content - material that purports to motivate and showcase healthy lifestyle habits,

particularly relating to exercise and diet" (p. 1). Through the analysis of "20 young adults (14 females, 6

males, aged 18-25) who self-declared themselves to be Fitspiration followers," (p. 1) individual

interviews were conducted and conveyed common themes, both positive and negative amongst the

groups (Easton et al., 2018). Easton et al. (2018) identified four main themes within the research "1) A

tool with the potential to support healthy living, 2) Unrealistic, untrustworthy content, 3) Negative

effects on emotional wellbeing, and 4) Vulnerability and protective factors" (p. 9). They highlight the

usefulness of social media as a tool for knowledge and inspiration but warn the potential for negative

psychological and physical health even if users are aware of unrealistic material their consuming (Easton

et al., 2018).

Increased Risk of Anxiety

Anxiety as a symptom and disorder is conveyed by the literature to be associated with media

use and derived stress within the research (Apaolaza et al., 2019). As a clinical diagnosis, according to

the American Psychiatric Association (2013),

> Anxiety disorders include disorders that share features of excessive fear and anxiety and related
>
> behavioral disturbances. Fear is the emotional response to real or perceived imminent threat,
>
> whereas anxiety is anticipation of future threat. Obviously, these two states overlap, but they
>
> also differ, with fear more often associated with surges of autonomic arousal necessary for fight
>
> or flight, thoughts of immediate danger, and escape behaviors, and anxiety more often
>
> associated with muscle tension and vigilance in preparation for future danger and cautious or
>
> avoidant behaviors. (p. 189)

Self-esteem and social anxiety function as mediators from the positive effects of mindfulness on

compulsive media use (Apaolaza et al., 2019). The results confirm that compulsive mobile SNS use

increases stress and that mindfulness lowers these (Apaolaza et al., 2019). The article conveys a group

of associations and correlations from the findings. As an individual's mindfulness increases, there is a

positive correlation to where their self-esteem also increases; as an individual's mindfulness increases,

there is a negative correlation to their compulsive social media use; and, as an individual's self-esteem

increases, there is a negative correlation to their social anxiety (p. 3). In polarity, as an individual's social

anxiety increases, there is a positive correlation to where their compulsive social media use increases. In

addition, as an individual's compulsive social media usage increases, there is a positive correlation to an

increase in stress (p. 3). Individuals with lower self-esteem and social anxiety tend to use cellphones in

replacement of face-to-face relationships. The modification of communicative behavior for individuals

with anxiety disorders leads to more isolation and increased pathological consumption of media.

Increased Risk of PTSD

According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), "the essential feature of

posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the development of characteristic symptoms following exposure

to one or more traumatic events" (p. 274). They continue, "The clinical presentation of PTSD varies. In

some individuals, fear-based re-experiencing, emotional, and behavioral symptoms may predominate. In

others, anhedonic or dysphoric mood states and negative cognitions may be most distressing." (p. 274).

Through the analysis of a 4,675 anonymous online survey samples taking two to four weeks after the

Boston Marathon bombings and again 6 months after, Holman et al. (2020) found that

> greater exposure to graphic (bloody) images was associated with higher W1 AS and increased
>
> PTSS, fear of future terrorism, and functional impairment at W2. W1 AS, W2 PTSS, and fear of
>
> future terrorism mediated the association between media and functional impairment. Graphic

image exposure is associated with mental-health symptoms linked to impaired functioning. (p.

111)

The article highlights that media exposure to collective trauma affects our emotions and increases our

risk for acute stress and posttraumatic stress disorder (Holman et al., 2020). The implications of

consuming violent media still impact mental health even if the violence is not experienced firsthand.

Violent media consumption can be loosely associated with an impact on the therapeutic aesthetics of

expressive arts therapy.

Attentional Skills Diminishment

Goorman and Green (2016) "sought to investigate the extent to which the deficits associated

with frequent media multitasking can be temporarily ameliorated via a short-term mindfulness

intervention previously shown to produce beneficial effects on the attentional abilities of normally

functioning individuals" (p. 1). Through the use of the Media Multitasking Index (MMI), 1,683

undergraduate students were assessed for their attentional functioning skills with association with

either heavy or light media multi-tasking. After categorizing undergraduate students into either high

media multi-taskers or low media multi-taskers, they were given a 15-minute guided mindfulness

meditation. The students were assessed for beneficial effects of the short-term mindfulness

intervention on attention. According to Goorman and Green (2016) "heavy media multitasking is

associated with decrements in certain working memory tasks" (p. 8). Results from this study conveyed

high media multitaskers disproportionately improved on attentional measures after the mindfulness

experiential when compared to the light media multitaskers. One critique the study addresses is that a

short breath mindfulness intervention improves attentional skills short term but does not measure long-

term mindfulness (Goorman & Green, 2016). The article addresses the difference between short term

mindfulness intervention and trait mindfulness.

Hedonia and the Pleasure System

The literature review found the theme of hedonia and anhedonia with the search terms of "mindful*" and "social media" (Apaolaza et al., 2019; Mccauley, 2019; Rømer et al., 2015). The literature found connections between the hedonic pleasure system and substance use disorders (Mccauley, 2019), depression and schizophrenia (Rømer et al., 2015), and social media use (Rieger et al., 2014). There is limited research on behavioral addictions due to a lack of peer-reviewed articles within the research (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Substance use and related disorders activate an individual's reward system (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). According to Rømer et al. (2015), "anhedonia, the lack of pleasure, has been shown to be a critical feature of a range of psychiatric disorders" (p. 1). Through novel neuroscience imaging research about the pleasure system, anhedonia in psychology is conceptualized as impairments in some wanting, liking, and learning neurological processes not just a subjective experience of pleasure (Rømer et al., 2015). Rømer et al. (2015) conveys "patients suffering from depression and schizophrenia show impairments in wanting and learning, while some aspects of conscious liking seem surprisingly intact" (p. 4). The article, through neuroscience imaging, identifies nuances in the pleasure system suggesting that anhedonia varies across psychiatric disorders (Rømer et al., 2015).

Rieger et al. (2014) offer an exploration of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experience on well-being: "We propose that the satisfaction of recovery needs can provide an important link that connects recent 2-factor models of entertainment with well-being after media consumption" (p. 1). Entertainment research is primarily on a hedonic experience of pleasure where media consumers are analyzed as hedonic agents striving for a positive affect (Rieger et al., 2014). Oliver et al. (2012) convey that "entertainment experience consists of more than mere pleasure and is characterized by mixed affect and more complex experiences such as feeling inspired, touched, or moved which have been described as 'meaningful affect'" (p. 366). Accordingly, an eudaimonic dimension of entertainment refers to feelings associated with purpose, meaning, morality, and virtues (Oliver et al., 2012). Rieger et

al. (2014) concretizes "Eudaimonic well-being refers to conceptualizations of psychological well-being

that go beyond the mere presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect but emphasize

the importance of self-determined behavior and psychological growth" (p. 3). Rieger et al. (2014)

defines recovery as "the process of replenishing depleted resources or rebalancing suboptimal systems"

(p. 3). They continue, stating "a number of studies have linked entertaining media use to recovery

outcomes such as increased vitality and cognitive performance" (p. 3). Media-induced consumption and

recovery provide effects of hedonic and eudaimonic reactions with a significant effect on well-being

(Rieger et al., 2014). Results from the study convey dimensions of relaxation and psychological

detachment from hedonic entertainment and a mastery of experience from euadaimonic

entertainment; both aspects offer increased psychological well-being with higher levels of vitality after

media consumption (Rieger et al., 2014).

Neuroscience research has further enlightened the understanding of addiction as a failure of the

hedonic pleasure system in a broken pleasure sense (Be a Part of the Conversation, 2019). The midbrain,

where early reward processing occurs, attaches pleasure to an experience of survival. According to Dr.

Kevin McCauley,

> in addiction there is a defect in the reward learning system in the brain and the value that is
>
> given to the drug is way out of proportion to its actual survival value. The learning that occurs of
>
> the drug and everything that goes around with it is a pathological hyper form of memory. (Be a
>
> Part of the Conversation, 2019, 16:43)

Dr. McCauley asserts that the hedonic system and its relationship to addiction can be related to social

media abuse.

Interventions

The literature review found mindfulness as a key intervention which inspired further research of

the implications of it. The literature review highlighted key differences between types of mindfulness for

interventions. The first distinction the literature conveyed was between trait mindfulness (Poon & Jiang, 2020) and short-term mindfulness (Goorman & Green, 2016). Trait mindfulness is an individual characteristic that is embodied throughout everyday experiences (Poon & Jiang, 2020). Short-term mindfulness is a meditative practice associated with immediate physiological and psychological calming (Goorman & Green, 2016). Both trait mindfulness and short-term mindfulness practices help curb negative side effects from social media (Poon & Jiang, 2020) and social networking site usage (Apaolaza et al., 2019) and media multitasking (Goorman & Green, 2016). Through a study assessing children's experience of mindfulness delivered through either face-to-face or through a computer game, Tunney et al (2017) found that "'active ingredient', and potential mechanism of change, of the mindfulness exercises in this study is associated with the content of the exercises themselves and not with the human contact of being guided by a person (p. 3). Schlotz et al. (2020)

> "constructed the Aesthetic Response Assessment (AReA), a screening tool for the assessment of individual differences in responsiveness to art in English and German. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses suggested three first-order factors labeled aesthetic appreciation, intense aesthetic experience, and creative behavior, and a second-order factor aesthetic responsiveness. (p. 1)

The study creates an assessment tool for future research on the variables under scope within this thesis. There is a strong correlation between mindfulness and the expressive arts therapies within the literature (Daly, 2019; LaCreta, 2018; Piper, 2019). The connections between the inherit mindfulness of expressive art therapy highlight avenues for further research and interventions.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

Findings

This research project intended to provide evidence for the relationship between the aesthetics of expressive arts therapy and the media consumed in modern culture. Through a critical review of

current relevant peer reviewed literature, the project intended to highlight key themes between both

concepts. Preliminary empirical research found an increase in screen time use due to COVID-19 (Sultana,

2021) and a transition of the mental health field towards telehealth. Initial hypotheses predicted

maladaptive outcomes to the aesthetics for people who use media consumption excessively (Apaolaza

et al., 2019). However, the primary outcome of this project identified that the relationship between

aesthetics and media is multi-faceted and more complicated than hypothesized. The data collected

tentatively suggests four key findings. To begin, media multitasking, as a behavior of simultaneously

engaging in multiple media activities (Yoon, et al., 2021), serves an emotional and sensory gratification

purpose and not a cognitive functional one (Baumgartner & Wiradhany, 2021; Poplawaska et al., 2021).

The data collected also tentatively suggests an increased risk of psychiatric disorders with excessive

media use (Apaolaza et al., 2019; Colley, 2020; Easton et al., 2018; Goorman & Green, 2016; Holman et

al., 2020; Tunney et al., 2017). The third significant finding conveyed social media consumption as a

behavior which is highly associated with the hedonic pleasure system (Bartsch & Viehoff, 2010; Hoffman

et al., 2017; Jeong et al., 2019; McCauley, 2019; Rieger et al., 2014; Rømer et al., 2015). The final data

collected tentatively suggests mindfulness as a preventative factor from the potential unhealthy

byproducts of social media consumption (Apaolaza et al., 2019; Goorman & Green, 2016; Poon & Jiang,

2020). The primary outcome of this project conveys that media consumption as a behavior is highly

influenced by our therapeutic aesthetics.

Purpose

My preconceived notions that social media negatively effects our mental health all inclusively

served as a barrier to initial impartial research. This extreme notion, through the research project, was

deemed not as simple and created many avenues for further research. The literature provided a

personal enlightenment to the complexities of the topic I sought to address. Although the project was

originally intended as a critical review between aesthetics and media, in order to find a link to mental

health, the research project identified nuances within the concepts themselves. From the limited

literature on aesthetics and media, the review dissected the terms into searchable variables. Through

this dissection of aesthetics and media, it was possible to look at the relationship and its applicability to

the expressive arts therapies field. As anticipated, associations between excessive screen time and poor

mental health were highly correlated and prevalent within current literature. However, media use and

its relationship to our emotional and sensory self was multi-faceted.

Limitations

There were many weaknesses within the literature review project. The first weakness is the lack

of substantial literature surrounding therapeutic aesthetics. Therapeutic aesthetics as a search variable

refers to the human capacity to feel and sense. The youthfulness of the field of expressive arts

therapies, where the therapeutic aesthetics is conveyed, provided for a limited number of research

articles addressing the philosophical concept. This limitation effects the quantity of appropriate

literature and raises concerns surrounding replicable and reliable sources. To continue, the topic looked

to address the increase of media consumption and its effect on our ability to emote with regard to

mental health. There is a difference between how media affects our emotions and our ability to express

our emotions. How media affects our emotions was significantly more present within the literature than

our ability to express our emotions. Summarizing, this thesis topic was limited due to a semantic failure

of a lack of literature for the concept of expressing our emotions.

Another limitation for this study includes its specificity to the United States and lack of cultural

consideration. For example, due to the thesis topic being centered around a philosophical concept, it

was a reoccurring theme to have ethnicity, or therefore a lack of, as a variable within the scope of

studies analyzed. This weakness conveys a potential ethnocentric outlook by ignoring the identity of

ethnicity within the research. The majority of the research within the literature on technology was

collected within the past couple of years due to the vastly changing nature of technology. Furthermore,

there is limited research on the implications of COVID-19 on this project which calls for further

development and analysis of data.

Implications (Unresolved or New Issues)

This project raised several issues regarding aspects of media and aesthetics not previously

understood. The behaviors of people interacting with media differentiate across type of media and type

of anhedonia. The DSM-5 disorders associated with anhedonia are a critical aspect of psychiatric

disorders but varies across them (Rømer et al., 2015). Anhedonia, synonymous with anesthesia for the

scope of this paper, can be a dysfunction in liking, wanting, or learning (Rømer et al., 2015). The

complexity of aesthetics within the human experience needs to be further broken down through

neuroscience tests before conclusions can be made. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of how

media is being consumed and the trajectory of screen time usage will help with the scope of the paper.

Areas for Further Research

I propose further research to explore the nuances of emotional and sensorial expressiveness

within the human experience. I challenge future research to conduct the studies through a socio-cultural

awareness of systemic structures of power and privilege. Further areas of research can explore people's

aesthetic responsiveness using the Aesthetic Response Assessment (AReA) (Schlotz et al., 2020). Studies,

with race, ethnicity, and identity addressed, can use the AReA with interventions of media types to

analyze aesthetic responsiveness of samples and subsamples. I propose further research and expressive

arts therapists to test aesthetic responsiveness before and after mindfulness interventions. Does

anesthesia occur after mindfulness interventions on specific populations? What types of themes within

media create larger aesthetic responsiveness across a specific population? How can neuroscience

literature and expressive arts therapy literature be used together to create conclusions and correlations

about these variables?

Conclusion

This project conveys that media consumption as a behavior is highly influenced by our

aesthetics. Furthermore, mindfulness as an embodied trait and practice can serve as a mediator to

developing maladaptive behaviors associated with media consumption. A practice of personal parallel

process responsibility was taken throughout the thesis project. For example, as therapist I am part of

the therapeutic relationship and process. In exploring the thesis process, I practiced healthy habits

related to technological decompression, mindfulness, and expressive arts. To concretize the record

keeping expectations, I maintained healthy media consumption, journaled frequently, and practiced the

expressive arts. Through the maintenance of these goals, I attempted to aestheticize myself into seeing,

hearing, and feeling throughout the thesis. Through a critical analysis of screen time and the expressive

arts in terms of mental health, I offer treatment recommendations of mindfulness interventions through

all mediums both online and offline. Due to screen time increasing for the average United States citizen

due to COVID-19, there is a larger need for mindfulness interventions. The thesis contributes culturally

relevant clinical practice of the expressive therapies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research outcomes

call for the implementation of more expressive arts therapies in telehealth due to their inherent

qualities that balance out the negative aspects of screen time. Readers of the thesis should take away

the importance of the expressive arts at in-person sites and telehealth therapy. The project attempts to

contribute to the expressive arts therapies field by highlighting mindfulness qualities within the

expressive arts therapies as effective interventions for combating excessive media consumption.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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Student's Name: <u>William Charles Gracik</u>

Type of Project: Thesis

Title: <u>How Does Media Consumption and Screen Time Usage Affect Our Therapeutic Aesthetics? A Literature Review</u>

Date of Graduation: <u>May 22, 2021</u>
In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor: <u>Donna C. Owens</u>