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How do Arts Programs Facilitate Emotion Regulation in the Prison Setting?

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Abstract

Reentry and prison arts programs provide an opportunity for rehabilitation that facilitates healthier emotion regulation (ER), relationship building, and self-esteem. To measure the effects of arts-based interventions on ER, formerly incarcerated people completed a questionnaire that included three different measures: the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire Short-Form (CERQ-Short), the Emotion Regulation Strategies for Artistic Creative Activities (ERS-ACA), and the Self-expression and Emotion Regulation in Art Therapy Scale (SERATS). Results showed that there were significant differences between males and females on their scores on ER subscales, where women more often than men employed positive ER strategies. In support of my hypotheses, higher scores on positive ER strategies on the CERQ-Short, predicted higher scores on positive ER strategies measured by the ERS-ACA. Conversely, the tendency of a participant to utilize maladaptive ER strategies measured by the CERQ-Short led to lower scores on measures of positive ER strategies measured by the ERS-ACA. Furthermore, all arts participants were found to more often utilize positive reappraisal, an ER strategy believed to foster long-term cognitive benefits, over positive refocusing (distraction). Finally, there was no significant difference found between the more years spent in a prison arts program, and higher scores on positive ER measures. The study suggests that there are promising effects of arts programs of ER for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated populations. Further research can hopefully determine whether positive ER strategies can reduce recidivism rates.

Introduction

"While incarcerated I found myself drawing a lot as a means to better cope with feelings of guilt, shame and worthlessness that dominated my life behind bars. Drawing and painting became my therapy. I drew to understand the feelings that swirled inside myself yet could not label with words. For me, art was more than just a vehicle for self-expression, it became an imaginary space where wrongs could be made right and redemption was attainable.

The arts allowed me to create a beautiful garden where I could meet face to face with the victim of my crime. In my art piece, I could tell Mrs. Phyllis Porter how sorry I was for causing her death, asked for her forgiveness and made amends to her. It was only through this unique space that the arts had created that I was able to start the process of self-forgiveness and rehabilitation. No other program could offer anything similar to what an art piece did for me—not even the therapy sessions with a psychologist or social worker could come close to such experience.

Today, I continue to find myself involved with the arts in very unique changing ways. From sculpting or taking a painting class in the winter months to spending time in the garden creating plant arrangements in the summer months, I continue to reinvent myself through the arts. I am constantly in a state of growth and change. It is through the arts that today I am more in tune with the world I live in and those around me. The arts keep me grounded, present, aware and connected" (EJ01, 2022).

It is rare for the broader population to interact with the voices of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people. Stigma consumes those who have cycled through the penal system, creating a fictitious barrier that separates "us" from "them". Art however can provide a window into the emotions and experiences of people who are or have been incarcerated without ever

having to step foot inside of a prison. There is no better way to communicate the potential impact of arts programs on the lives of those who've been affected by mass-incarceration than to view artwork created in prison and reentry program, and it's important to communicate the efficacy of arts programs to those who are skeptical of their impact and potential to create meaningful and long-lasting change.

The Prison System in the United States Today

While incarcerating more people than any other country in the world, the United States has failed to implement a system that accomplishes the goals of imprisonment. The justice system aims to remove threatening individuals from society to safeguard communities and the public, and then rehabilitate incarcerated people to deter recidivism, or reoffending (Moore, 1996). The United States makes up five percent of the world's total population but maintains twenty-five percent of the world's prison population (Stoltz, 2013). The levels of incarceration in the U.S. are 6.2 and 7.8 times those of Canada and France respectively, and the U.S. has been globally shamed for its inhumane prison conditions (Stoltz, 2013). There is no other free country that, on such a large scale, denies liberty and basic human rights to so many of its citizens (Stoltz, 2013).

There are an estimated 1.8 million people behind bars in jails, prisons and detention centers in the U.S. today, a declining number since the country saw the peak prison population of 2.3 million in 2008 (Kang-Brown et al., 2021). While the prison population dropped from 2.1 million in 2020 to 1.8 million in 2021, largely due to the coronavirus pandemic and limited prison capacities, little effort has been made to sustain de-incarceration in the U.S (Kang-Brown et al., 2021). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime puts forth two arguments in favor of prison reform: de-incarceration efforts will gradually repair families and communities who

have been deteriorated by mass-incarceration and, second, economic costs of the current penal system in proportion to it effectively reducing crime and rehabilitating the incarcerated must be considered (Brewster, 2014).

Mass incarceration is an expensive and ineffective means to manage crime rates and promote public security. The U.S. spends nearly 200 billion dollars annually on law enforcement and correctional facilities that only perpetuate criminality and weaken communities where the crime rate is high (Stoltz, 2013). If the current punitive system was effective in accomplishing the goals of imprisonment, the U.S. would not have the highest recidivism rates in the world. Nearly 44% of individuals released back into society are reincarcerated within their first year out of prison, with two thirds of individuals likely to be reincarcerated at some point in their lives (World Population Review, 2022). The U.S. spends roughly $31,286 per year for each person who is incarcerated. So for the 1.8 million people incarcerated today, that amounts to nearly 6 billion dollars spent on the prison system annually, and these costs are only exacerbated by the likelihood of reincarceration. A key question is why the rate of incarceration has not declined, especially with politicians promising prison reform and community rebuilding.

The “tough on crime” mentality and anti-drug laws in the U.S. have contributed to the increase in imprisonment rates, especially the imprisonment of women and inner-city minorities (Moore, 1996). A 2007 United Nations Report estimates that of those incarcerated in the U.S. at the time, two thirds of the individuals were charged with nonviolent crimes, such as property and drug offenses (Stoltz, 2013). Similarly, a 2016 Brennan Center Report analyzed the charges and sentences of those incarcerated in the U.S. and found that nearly 40% of inmates were convicted of an offense that posed no public-safety threat (Cullen, 2018). The criminal justice system could treat these non-threatening individuals in a less costly and damaging way. Putting individuals

charged with nonviolent crimes into a harsh penal system with violent offenders, risks solidifying maladaptive behavior and criminality that could lead to recidivism and the eventual imploding of secure family and community structures upon their release.

Incarceration is meant to force people to take responsibility for their actions, and then provide them with rehabilitative opportunities to reshape their thinking and behavior in preparation for reentry into society. Prisons, however, rarely offer avenues for socioemotional support, without which maladaptive behavior and cognition are likely to change. Prisons were initially created as disciplinary institutions to mediate problems of mental illness, poverty, and marginality (Morris & Rothman, 1995). Society has evolved to provide resources for the poor and marginalized through various programs such as food stamps and aid to dependent children and families. Despite these programs, individuals suffering from mental illness, members of various racial and ethnic minority groups, and individuals from lower socioeconomic groups, are overrepresented in the prison system. The 1.8 million incarcerated people in the U.S. face dehumanizing treatment while in prison and then further barriers upon release into society. This does not begin to account for the collateral damage of imprisonment inflicted upon the families and communities of those individuals.

Effects for Minority Communities

Families are splintered by mass incarceration, but the effects of imprisonment are not distributed equally among communities. Black and Latin-e individuals are overrepresented in the prison system, and their families and communities suffer significantly from imprisonment of their loved ones. For children born in 2001, it is predicted that one in every three Black males will go to prison in their lifetime, compared to one in every six Latin-e males, and one in every

seventeen white males (The Sentencing Project, 2018). This skewed distribution of prison sentences weakens communities, who historically have experienced other serious disadvantages.

The deeply rooted political inequality and systemic racism that exists in the U.S. criminal justice system undoubtedly reinforces stereotypes about ethnic, racial and religious minorities that only serve to magnify disparities in the prison system. Even when the Civil Rights Movement terminated the Jim Crow Era in 1965, politicians from both parties continued to prioritize crime on their political agendas which disproportionately targeted Black and Brown communities (Stoltz, 2013). This trend has continued through targeted police-violence, discriminatory policies and legal institutions founded upon racial inequality.

Mass incarceration is prominent in inner-city and impoverished neighborhoods due to heavy policing and harsher drug laws, which can further weaken already fragile communities. (Moore, 1996). African American and Black adults are 5.9 times more likely, with Latin-e adults being 3.1 times as likely, to be incarcerated compared to their white counterparts (The Sentencing Project, 2018). Since minority communities heavily populate inner-cities and impoverished areas, higher imprisonment rates are also negatively correlated with lower socioeconomic status. Incarceration perpetuates the cycle of poverty experienced by these communities by removing care providers from the home and creating barriers to employment upon release from prison.

Impact of Incarceration on Children and Families

The majority of people in prison are males of working age, many of whom have children and families to support (Watts & Nightingale, 1966). In a traditional nuclear family where the father-figure is the main economic figure, incarceration reorganizes and disturbs structured family roles and exacerbates existing conflicts in the home. Less so for white families, Black and

Latin-e communities often operate in a collectivist framework where one individual financially supports the extended family in addition to their nuclear family (Moore, 1996). In this case, the removal of the income stream due to incarceration not only burdens the nuclear family, but also the extended family arrangement (Moore, 1996). The result of mass-incarceration is more single parent households, nontraditional family units, and households with primary caregivers other than the biological parents (Moore, 1996). The removal of caregivers is not only financially devastating, but emotionally traumatizing.

There are roughly 2.7 million children in the U.S. who have a parent in prison (Children of Promise, 2021). Given the role of women as primary caregiver and nurturer, the rise of incarceration rates for females can threaten the development of children. Between 1993 and 2004, the female prison population increased by 468%, plateauing and remaining constant today (Gussak, 2009). When a primary caregiver is removed from the home by incarceration, especially if the primary caregiver is dependable and provides financial stability, children are likely to be deprived of economic and emotional support. One consequence of this is that often individuals in the family turn to other, perhaps more dangerous social and peer groups in absence of their loved one. These alternative support groups can expose young people to criminal behavior, which threatens perpetuating familial imprisonment (Moore, 1996). In order to protect the well-being of children, communities that experience high rates of incarceration need structures that provide security for those affected by the imprisonment of a family member.

Punishment versus Rehabilitation

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to incarceration and punishment, especially when offenses range from petty, nonviolent crimes, to more violent offenses. Punishment takes an “eye for an eye” stance where revenge is justified in an effort to give a person “what they deserve” for

having violated a moral or legal code (Berseth & Bouffard, 2012). The threat of incarceration serves as a reminder that crime will not be tolerated or excused, and punishment is meant to serve as a deterrent to future offending. Punishment often involves pain or suffering, even though evidence shows that pain is an ineffective deterrent among previously convicted individuals (Sayre-McCord, 2001; Berseth & Bouffard, 2012). To maximize the potential for positive outcomes and to best utilize taxpayer and institutional dollars, research studies and policy advocates suggest a shift towards rehabilitation (Gussak & Virshup, 1997; Sayre-McCord, 2001; Djurichkovic, 2011; Oren et al., 2019).

Incarceration is intended to force people to take responsibility for their actions, and then provide them with rehabilitative opportunities to reshape their thinking and behavior in preparation for reentry into society (Sayre-McCord, 2001). However, the current legal system often fails to provide rehabilitative measures that prepare incarcerated individuals for their release, which perpetuates reoffending and further weakening of communities. While punishment applies a Band-Aid to the gushing wound that is mass incarceration, rehabilitation explores ways to instill lasting, permanent change in the lives of those who have cycled through the penal system.

Prison is a dehumanizing and objectifying experience, and without a process of rehabilitation, individuals cannot relinquish themselves from the hold that prison maintains over their lives. Previously incarcerated individuals struggle to reenter society as functional and reformed community members because of the stigmatization that accompanies a prison sentence. Their isolation from the outside world and the removal of the potential to participate in the job market creates overwhelmingly negative barriers to successful reentry (Watts & Nightingale, 1966; Moore, 1996; Haney & Zimbardo, 1998; Makarios et al., 2010; Liem & Kunst, 2013). If

people are given the opportunity to engage with rehabilitative measures while incarcerated, the barriers faced upon release would be less emotionally burdensome and debilitating.

Rehabilitation in prison can take many forms. Group mental-health counseling, addiction counseling, educational and vocational programs and arts programs can all be adapted to fit into the prison setting, although not all penitentiaries offer these experiences (Gussak & Virshup, 1997). In general, rehabilitation has been abandoned in the U.S. criminal justice system, but reinstating this goal is crucial to allow formerly incarcerated people to then reenter their communities. The Department of Justice estimates that nearly 700,000 people are released from federal prison each year, and nearly 95% of those incarcerated in state-facilities are released eventually (Hughes & Wilson, 2003) (Kang-Brown et al., 2021). If most of the 1.8 million people in prison will eventually be released, an important question is what is being done to implement restorative and rehabilitative measures to both reduce recidivism rates and also ease the reentry process for incarcerated people, their families and their communities?

Rehabilitation Through Art

The implementation of arts programs in prison and for formerly incarcerated citizens upon release offer promising benefits for those who cycle through the penal system. Arts programs foster an outlet for emotional release, and participation in arts programs yields fewer disciplinary infractions and stronger community relationships (Djurichkovic, 2011; Littman & Sliva, 2020). Many people find themselves with a prison sentence because of their inability to self regulate emotions and control their anger and aggression. Since imprisonment leads to harmful outcomes for individuals subjected to the isolating and oftentimes violent prison environment, it is important to provide safe spaces for practicing self-expression and self-regulation in order to counterbalance the negative effects of incarceration (Djurichkovic, 2011).

Art making facilitates self-expression and communication, socialization and community relationships, and enhances personal identity, all of which are important experiences for current and formerly incarcerated individuals to learn how to control their emotions (Oren et al., 2019).

Arts Programs in Prison and Their Overall Positive Benefits

It is important to note that not all prison-arts groups consider themselves art therapy programs, nor do all teaching artists meet the qualifications to call themselves art therapists. However, art is a therapeutic tool that can be used to mediate the process of healing across disciplines (Djurichkovic, 2011). The American Art Therapy Association website defines art therapy as "the therapeutic use of art making, within a professional relationship, by people who experience illness, trauma, or challenges in living" (American Art Therapy Association). Whether or not prison arts programs identify themselves as art therapy, the goals of art therapy are accomplished by most prison arts programs, the most common being dance and movement workshops, theatre, visual art, music and writing classes. Visual art can take the form of drawing, painting, sculpture and collaging, and writing classes can include poetry, fiction and nonfiction writing, personal narratives and letter writing. In prison arts groups, the art therapist, a teaching artist or group leader provides a professional relationship that participants rely on for initiating self-growth and cognitive change.

Arts programs may offer opportunities for healing that vocational or educational programs cannot provide. Much of the incarcerated population are imprisoned because they suffer from some form of mental illness, and the cycle of reincarceration is in part perpetuated by the unavailability of effective rehabilitative programs (Gussak, 2017). Arts programs help generate self-insight by bringing repressed and emotionally difficult feelings to the surface; by making these feelings tangible, participants begin to cope with the reality of isolating prison life

and past trauma (Djurichkovic, 2011). Art therapy is able to bypass both conscious and unconscious defenses, which allows unresolved emotions and experiences to come into the participants consciousness in order to be addressed and worked through (Gussak, 2009). Art and art therapy is less intrusive than verbal therapy in that art-making may access complex emotions that are not available to participants through other forms of therapy (Gussak & Virshup, 1997; Gussak, 2009). Arts programs in prison are a viable way to increase the effectiveness of rehabilitative and therapeutic measures, while prioritizing the safety and security of participants.

Since prison is an inherently isolating and dehumanizing space, traditional therapy and mental health work requires a level of vulnerability that is not conducive in prison. Incarcerated people in need of mental health services are seen as weak and vulnerable, which makes them targets for attacks and violence (Gussak, 2017). If incarcerated individuals live in fear of how their therapy-experiences will affect them when in the general prison population, they will avoid counseling services as a survival mechanism. In many prison arts settings, correctional officers are not present for the sessions, which encourages greater participation and can yield greater therapeutic outcomes (Gussak & Virshup, 1997). Furthermore, verbalizing emotionally distressing memories can often be too traumatizing or difficult for individuals in prison, and art offers a less abrasive way to acknowledge and express these emotions. Art has the power to initiate change and teach adaptive cognition and behavior without requiring verbal interpretation or expression (Gussak & Virshup, 1997)(Gussak, 2009). Arts programs therefore offer participants a safer and more adaptive way to express their anger, foster frustration tolerance, and enhance problem solving and cooperation abilities that make for a safer prison environment (Gussak, 2017).

Prison arts programs can save institutional dollars and lessen the need for disciplinary control when artistic and creative activities are made available as an outlet for emotional release (Djurichkovic, 2011). Participation in arts programs is positively correlated with optimal disciplinary outcomes, and negatively correlated with behavior infractions. Whereas aggressive tendencies and violence are *threatening*, angry and volatile artwork are *non-threatening*, which allow individuals to appropriately redirect anger in socially acceptable ways (Gussak & Virshup, 1997). Fewer disciplinary infractions and greater cooperation also reduce the need for over-employed prison guards, which saves institutional dollars (Littman & Sliva, 2020). Rehabilitative opportunities such as arts programs reduce the need for funding directed towards maximum security and segregation services, suicide and self-harm services, and psychotropic medication that is overprescribed to emotionally disturbed inmates (Djurichkovic, 2011; Littman & Sliva, 2020). After implementing experimental arts programs in the 1980s, the California Department of Corrections experienced an annual savings of over $100,000 for institutions with prison arts programs (Djurichkovic, 2011). Arts programs have the potential to effectively achieve the goals of the criminal justice system while keeping institutional savings in mind, but arts programs must fit themselves into the rules and regulations of prison. These effects of arts programs for prison and reentered populations include increased self-confidence and self-esteem, helping rebuild community, and teaching important emotion regulation skills.

The Relationship Between Arts Programs and Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem

Exposure to artistic and creative activities not only aids people in their ER abilities, but also leads to higher levels of self-confidence and self-esteem that influences interpersonal relationships and social engagement (Djurichkovic, 2011; Littman & Sliva, 2020). Higher self-esteem is a necessary component of mental health and social functioning, as self-esteem

influences choices made, goals set, and the ability to handle emotional or stressful situations (Djurichkovic, 2011). There is a significant difference in achievement motivation between incarcerated people with an arts education in comparison to those without, and accomplishing positive goals leads to greater self-confidence and self-worth (Brewster, 2014). For some participants, prison arts programs may be the first opportunity available to them to reshape their identity around more positive achievements and communities, which can potentially influence their decision-making skills and behavior upon release.

Prison is a prolonged period of loneliness and isolation, and there must be resources and opportunities for the incarcerated to fill their time with constructive activities in order to rebuild a more positive self-image, rather than reinforce a negative one. A prison sentence is often accompanied by the loss of identity, and people may work to preserve their individuality by altering their physical appearance or affiliating with a certain peer group or gang (Gussak & Virshup, 1997). Arts programs foster agency, and experiences with the arts can have the potential to reshape a person's identity around a more positive sense of achievement, rather than around the crime they committed or have been accused of (Djurichkovic, 2011; Haeyen & Noorthoorn, 2021). Without opportunities to rebuild self-confidence and self-esteem while in prison, released individuals will reenter society with the same self-destructive tendencies that landed them with a prison sentence in the first place. This can lead to reoffending and the further destruction of communities that most often engage with the penal system. Recreating a kinder and more forgiving self-image is not only an important element of adaptive emotion regulation, but is a crucial stepping-stone to reconnecting with families and communities.

The Relationship Between Arts Programs and Community and Relationship Building

Prison arts engagement not only contributes to self-respect and self-confidence, but evidence links prison arts participation to more optimal social engagement and personal relationships, as well (Littman & Sliva, 2020). Positive relationships are a crucial component of successful and permanent reentry; reentered (formerly incarcerated) citizens need to rely on stable and safe relationships with family, community members and mentors that will support them through their readjustment to life post-incarceration (Littman & Sliva, 2020). Without these positive relationships, formerly incarcerated individuals risk returning to environments that once introduced and reinforced poor decision making and behavior. Prison arts programs nurture the foundation for positive relationships and relational tools that can be used for success upon release.

The modeled relationship with the teaching artist and arts group is an important opportunity for learning about relationship building. By serving as a mediator between the participant and society, teaching artists design program goals to reconnect participants to their families and communities (Gussak, 2017). For some participants, the teaching artist and an arts group may be their first experience with fulfilling, secure, and adaptive relationships. Arts programs are also typically held with a larger group, which is more conducive to the prison setting compared to one-on-one counseling or appointments. Thus, there are opportunities for incarcerated people to form bonds with their peers, and these relationships provide social and emotional support through an otherwise dehumanizing and tumultuous time. Bonding with a teaching artist and other arts participants prepares the incarcerated to approach healthy relationships on the outside.

When evaluating the effectiveness of arts programs and other rehabilitative measures, it is important to consider how programs also positively impact those on the outside of prison who

suffer the collateral damage of mass incarceration. For families of incarcerated individuals, arts programs that allow for outside engagement offer a non-threatening and accessible glimpse of the real work being done by their loved ones to reform their behavior. However, it is not only families and loved ones of the incarcerated who benefit from experiencing incarcerated artwork. Providing opportunities for the community to engage with prison artwork fosters understanding, empathy, and forgiveness, easing the reentry process for all those affected by incarceration. After attending an art exhibition curated by incarcerated artists, viewers reported feeling more connected to, and understanding of, the prison population (Littman & Sliva, 2020). These outcomes indicate the power of the arts to bridge across often impermeable spheres that only deepen the divide between incarcerated and non-incarcerated populations. Another important outcome of prison and reentry arts programs is their influence on participants' emotion regulation (ER) abilities.

The Relationship Between Prison Arts Programs and Emotion Regulation (ER)

Positive ER is important for any person's well-being and social functioning, but especially important for those who've been incarcerated. Emotions are flexible responses that people utilize after evaluating and experiencing different situations or challenges, and ER can be defined in different ways as it serves different purposes (Gross, 1998). A common understanding of ER is a process by which individuals control which emotions they experience, when they experience them, and how they express them (Gross, 1998; Matthews, 2021). ER *strategies* are "processes that influence the intensity, duration and type of emotion experienced" (Fancourt et al., 2019, para. 5). Emotions help individuals navigate social experiences and relationships; emotions give insight to others' behavior and intentions as well as inform us of whether something is good or bad (Gross, 1998). Typically, the goal of ER is to maximize positive

emotions and minimize negative emotions, but sometimes people must minimize positive emotions in order to stay focused and concentrated on a goal (Kobylinska & Kusev, 2019). For example, a student preparing for finals may want to attend a birthday party, which will lead them to experience positive emotions with friends, but instead they choose to stay in the library studying for the evening, which is less enjoyable and more stressful. While sadness and disappointment can arise from missing a party, ER helps the individual stay focused on studying and performing well on a test. Which emotions we experience, and how we modulate them, depends upon our goals and intentions.

Positive ER is a key factor in a successful reentry process, and reentered people have endured an especially traumatizing experience in prison, which makes healthy ER even more crucial. A prison sentence often spurs negative changes in the incarcerated person because of the prolonged exposure to a debilitating and isolating environment that is characterized by hate, violence, anger, and loss of autonomy (Hongo et al., 2015). To counterbalance these negative consequences of prison, it is necessary to have safe, reformative, and expressive activities available to people. Arts programs and art rehabilitation are one tool that can be used to teach positive ER to current and former incarcerated people in order to ensure a more permanent reentry process.

Arts programs can be implemented and maintained to provide the incarcerated with an outlet for emotional engagement and ventilation (Hongo et al., 2015). In prisons, any opportunity for self-expression reduces emotional stress. Gibbons (2010) found that incarcerated females experienced significant catharsis, or the newfound ability to release and work through repressed emotions, after engaging with different arts programs made available in prisons in Australia. For incarcerated women specifically, an arts environment has been observed to help them gain

insight into the feelings and experiences that cause emotional distress, as well as learn tools and strategies to self-soothe and self-regulate (Merriam, 2008). Arts programs do provide emotional benefits for both men and women. Littman and Sliva (2020) found prison arts programs to be connected to many social and emotional outcomes including enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem, greater goal accomplishing and task-completion, emotional control, well-being, and overall decreased anger and hopelessness.

It is possible that different types of arts programs lead to varying emotional outcomes for prison and reentry arts participants. Koch et al. (2015) conducted a study of movement and action-oriented programming on violence reduction and emotional processing with a group of incarcerated people in Germany, and participants reported increased body and social awareness as well as decreased anger and aggression. A study by Haney and Zimbardo (1998) also supports that movement-based programs decrease violent and aggressive tendencies. When people learn to manage and control feelings of anger, this leads to greater self-awareness and the reliance on healthier and more appropriate ER strategies.

It is likely that anyone can feel a sense of control and emotional relief when engaging in arts-related or creative activities. Arts programs in prison contribute to social and emotional development, both of which are strongly influential on how people understand and express emotions. Brewster (2014) found a significant correlation between more time involved in a prison arts program and greater emotional control, and consistent participation in the arts has been linked to reduced disciplinary reports, greater intellectual and emotional flexibility, emotional control, and self-confidence for incarcerated people. According to Brewster (2014) the development of these skills can be applicable to life after release as well, as arts participants in prison learn a greater willingness to make mistakes and experiment, apply and respond to

constructive criticism, and self-reflect. Acquiring specific ER strategies and coping mechanisms while in prison will support the incarcerated in connecting to social support networks upon release.

Specific Emotion Regulation Strategies

There are many ER strategies (ERS) and each has different implications for affect, overall well-being and quality of relationships (Gross & John, 2003). It is likely that different emotion regulation strategies are strengthened by different arts programs, and it's important to emphasize adaptive ERS for incarcerated and reentered people. Garnefski et al. (2002) identifies nine cognitive ER strategies, but he deems some to be more effective than others. Garnefski et al. (2002) identifies, self-blame, other-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, putting into perspective, positive refocusing, positive reappraisal, acceptance, and planning as distinguishable ER strategies. These ER strategies can also be separated into more and less effective means of restructuring cognitive and emotional experiences (Fancourt et al., 2019; Kobylinska & Kusev, 2019).

It is important to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy regulation strategies to decrease symptoms related to psychopathology and support people in regaining control of their emotions while in prison. Rumination, suppression, catastrophizing, other-blame and self-blame are generally considered unproductive ER strategies (Fancourt et al., 2019). Rumination is common in individuals with anxiety, and it can be characterized as intrusive, dominating, and excessive unproductive thinking (Abbing et al., 2019). Rather than moving on from a negative event or negative feelings, rumination leads people to focus too much cognitive energy on upsetting situations. Suppression is a response-focused strategy that inhibits emotional expression by minimizing duress after focusing more on an outcome rather than distressing

feelings at the root of conflict (Kobylinska & Kusev, 2019). Catastrophizing explicitly focuses on the negatives of a situation or the worst-case outcome (Garnefski et al., 2002). Other-blame is the tendency of individuals to identify other people or events as the cause of a more personal experience, whereas self-blame occurs when individuals attribute internal causes to external problems (Garnefski et al., 2002). Both other- and self-blame skew the relationship between one's personal responsibility and the outcome of a situation. Rumination, suppression, catastrophizing, other-blame and self-blame are often associated with feelings of depression, anxiety, or other symptoms of psychopathology (Garnefski et al., 2002). While considered to be less effective in terms of long-term emotion control, these ER strategies can serve an adaptive function in certain situations.

Conversely, acceptance, positive refocusing, positive reappraisal, and putting into perspective are considered stronger and more effective ER strategies due to their emphasis on positive thoughts and productive thinking (Kobylinska & Kusev, 2019). Acceptance infers that an individual has accepted their emotions or the reality of a situation that may be out of their control and chooses to move on with a positive attitude nonetheless (Czamanski-Cohen & Weihs, 2016; Abbing et al., 2019). Positive refocusing refers to concentrating on comforting ideas rather than concentrating on a situation that causes discomfort (Garnefski et al., 2002). Positive refocusing can be thought of as distracting someone from a stressful situation with happier thoughts and activities. Positive reappraisal entails changing the meaning associated with an event in order to alter its emotional impact so that it is not as burdensome (Fancourt et al., 2020). "Putting into perspective", or putting a situation into perspective, allows people to consider new relationships to distressing situations that are not as overwhelming (Fancourt et al., 2020). Putting into perspective supports people in finding neutral ground on an issue or

experience that was once negative (Gross & Thompson, 2007). While these strategies are considered more productive ER strategies, distinct differences may exist in terms of long-term effectiveness and emotional repair.

If we think of ER strategies as tools in a toolbox, we can pick and choose between different ones depending on the situation we are confronted with. When we experience disappointment, rejection, or when things do not turn out as planned, we have to be able to dig through our toolbox to find the appropriate ER strategy to assist us to cope, self-regulate, and move on. When people have multiple, adaptive ER strategies at their disposal, they are able to control the influence that their emotions have over them. When people are not as well equipped with adaptive ER strategies, they may experience disordered thinking and psychological duress, which is due to the inability to flexibly regulate emotions (Kobylinska & Kusev, 2019). There are many strategies available to individuals to help regulate their emotions, but some are more effective than others.

A comparison between positive refocusing and distraction is helpful to understand the difference between positive refocusing and positive reappraisal. Distraction and positive reappraisal are often compared to one another, especially in therapeutic contexts and arts programs, as the former emphasizes short-term emotional relief and the latter addresses more permanent cognitive change. For the purpose of this study, positive refocusing is treated as synonymous with distraction, as both require an individual to maintain their attention on unrelated or positive thoughts after a negative experience, although distraction can also mean that an individual has redirected their attention and cognition to more *neutral* thoughts and stimuli.

Distraction and refocusing are believed to be unproductive in-regards to long-term emotional stability when the primary aim is avoidance of a situation or feeling (Garnefski et al., 2002). Wolgast and Ludh (2016) specifically identify “distractive refocusing” as a strategy that individuals utilize to think about something other than the stimulus or situation at hand (Wolgast & Ludh, 2017, p. 118). Distractive refocusing represents a hesitation or unwillingness to remain focused on the emotionally stimulating object or situation, which limits a person's ability to then alter its emotional impact and meaning (Wolgast & Ludh, 2017). Instead of working through difficult emotions and experiences while in prison, it is sometimes easier to avoid them all together.

Distraction may improve mood in the short term, but it does not necessarily support an individual in better approaching difficult emotions and experiences in the long-term (Drake et al., 2011; Shafir et al., 2015). Avoiding emotionally distressing or traumatizing events may put a Band-Aid on the situation temporarily, but it does not address the underlying, core issues that cause emotional dysregulation. If people are searching for more permanent strategies to cope with cognitive distress and work through past memories, refocusing may not be the most effective strategy to accomplish this.

To contextualize distraction and refocusing in the framework of arts programs, an individual may distract themselves with their art in order to avoid thinking about a distressing event, memory or idea. Instead of creating a piece of artwork that is symbolic of their inner emotions and experiences, a person may opt to paint or draw a picture that has nothing to do with their feelings. In the context of prison art programs, a participant may attend their arts class and, instead of writing a poem about the path that led them to prison, write a poem about nature or the ocean. Given the dehumanizing and turbulent environment of prison, spending time distracting

oneself from their current reality may be more adaptive in that moment than working to change the trauma or emotionality associated with certain stimuli. Reappraisal on the other hand, may have more long-term, adaptive effects, but distraction may be preferred in high stress situations when a person needs to avoid a situation or feelings that send them into emotional distress (Shafir et al., 2015). When an individual can understand and implement different ER strategies that best serve them in the moment, *they* become in control of their emotions, rather than controlled by them.

Arts involvement and creative activities further affect emotions and self-expression in ways that can be described by three different strategies: self-development, approach, and avoidance (Fancout et al, 2019). Self-development and approach strategies are adaptive strategies that positively modulate the emotional and behavioral response to emotionally arousing stimuli (Fancout et al, 2019). Self-development strategies are those that enhance a sense of self, self-esteem, and self-agency, and approach strategies are considered pathways that are defined by self-acceptance, problem solving, and the reappraisal of something in a more positive and productive way (Fancout et al, 2019). Approach strategies, however, include distraction, suppression, and detachment, all of which promote maladaptive cognition (Fancout et al, 2019). Distraction is only adaptive if there is a temporary avoidance of a certain situation with the "intention of getting back in contact with that emotion or the challenging situation in the near future" (Wolgast & Ludh, 2016, p. 118). Avoiding problematic memories or emotionally challenging situations entirely does not serve to change negative ER, and may risk reinforcing it by working to escape the problem rather than facing it.

Purpose of Study and Research Gap

The purpose of the current study was to better contextualize how prison arts programs have positively impacted reentered arts participants and their communities. This study investigated specific benefits from participation in arts programs, either in prison or upon reentry, in terms of reentered citizens' use of positive emotional regulatory strategies. In this study, ER was measured by three separate scales, all of which targeted a different aspect of ER that can be connected to arts involvement.

It is crucial to understand how individuals utilize ER strategies, and which specific strategies they utilize, in response to a negative or distressing event or feeling. The Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire Short-Form (CERQ-short), developed by Garnefski and Kraaij (2006), measures how individuals utilize ER more generally, not solely in response to arts involvement. By focusing on both maladaptive and adaptive ER strategies, it provides a window into how individuals perceive their actions in specific situations.

A second aspect of ER that was measured in this study directly connected to arts involvement. The Emotion Regulation Strategies for Artistic Creative Activities (ERS-ACA), developed by Fancourt et al. (2019), asks participants to reflect on how they feel when engaging in creative arts-based activities in terms of ER. Whereas the CERQ-short measures overall ER abilities, the ERS-ACA aims to compare how individuals exemplify more positive or negative ER strategies when doing art-related activities.

The final measurement of ER used in this study focused explicitly on how participants feel while engaged in their art or art therapy program. The Self-expression and Emotion Regulation in Art Therapy Scale (SERATS), developed by Haeyen et al. (2017), is one of few measures created to identify how art therapy programs help participants self-regulate. For some

arts participants, their arts program may have been the first venue available for exploring their emotions and the different expressions of their emotions. The SERATS considers how arts programs facilitate self-awareness and self-regulation, which participants may not have been granted without their arts involvement.

The CERQ-short and ERS-ACA have been used in relation to one another (Fancourt et al., 2019), and the three measures have been studied in isolation of each other, but this is the first study to investigate the three ER measures together for the same population of individuals. Each measure considers a unique aspect of ER, all of which are important for analyzing how arts programs encourage the reliance on more positive ER strategies. The CERQ-short analyzes how individuals handle negative life situations while the ERS-ACA analyzes how individuals manage their emotions when doing art. Both measures address what people experience when engaged with the arts, so high scores on the positive subscales measured by the ERS-ACA should correlate with high scores on the SERATS. The CERQ-short may not show how individuals see their arts involvement to have helped them reflect on how certain situations connect to specific emotions. If, however, participants demonstrate high levels of ER when doing art, as measured by the ERS-ACA and SERATS, it can provide evidence that positive ER strategies utilized in everyday life are related to the positive ER strategies utilized when participating in arts programs. It is important to consider how arts involvement teaches adaptive ER strategies that serve to benefit people even outside of the arts environment, which can be shown by measuring ER in different situations.

A second gap in the research that the present study addressed was the use of the three ER measures with a group of reentered people. Previous studies have examined the cognitive and emotional abilities of incarcerated people, but few studies have examined those abilities in a

group of formerly incarcerated people (Brazão et al., 2017; Lofti et al., 2018). People who have been in prison are especially vulnerable to maladaptive ER, as they have endured a dehumanizing and often traumatizing experience in the prison system that may have solidified and reinforced poor ER strategies, relational tools, and self-esteem (Liem & Kunst, 2013; Gussak, 2017; Littman & Sliva, 2020). Emotion dysregulation is responsible for many of the disorders in the DSM-V, and many people are in prison as a result of a mental illness (Gussak, 2017). Emotion dysregulation can be responsible for the inability to control anger and aggression, which can lead to poor decision making and problematic behaviors (Gussak, 2006; Blacker et al., 2008; Drake et al., 2011). The cycle of incarceration is perpetuated when individuals are not presented with an opportunity for rehabilitation. Arts serve as a rehabilitative measure with the potential to counterbalance the negative consequences of a prison sentence by teaching positive ER strategies, self-confidence, and healthy relationships. Evaluating the ER abilities of formerly incarcerated people is fundamentally different from evaluating the ER abilities of those who have never been incarcerated because most people have not been subjected to a system that serves to erode self-esteem and the dignity of the person. It is important to study the ways in which arts programs teach healthy ER and alleviate emotional distress for formerly incarcerated people, as this can ease the reentry process for the individual and their community.

While specific behaviors and ER strategies are associated with prison arts programs, less is known about which ER strategies are strengthened by which types of arts programs, and how the duration of time spent in prison or with an arts program impacts overall ER. Determining which specific programs are more likely to develop positive ER strategies, such as positive reappraisal, acceptance, or putting into perspective, is an additional contribution of the present

study. The hope is that more information about this question can better inform arts program directors of the types of activities that will most support incarcerated and reentered citizens.

It is rare, outside of the prison arts community, for formerly incarcerated people to be given the platform to share their experiences with arts programs. Empirical evidence from research studies can demonstrate the measured effectiveness of arts programs in-regards to emotion regulation, recidivism, and overall well-being, but research studies lack the emotionality of first-hand experience. For many of the participants of this study, this was the first opportunity for them to give back to the arts programs and program directors that have worked to support them in their reentry process. Similar to viewing emotional artwork and performances, personal testimony and storytelling expose the general public to the power of arts programs and the role they play in easing the reentry process for formerly incarcerated people. Because individuals are inextricably intertwined with their families and communities, the acquisition of positive learning experiences and ER strategies can result in a cascading effect that, in turn, strengthens not just individuals, but their networks as well.

It is hoped that with the information gathered from individual arts participants who participated in the current study, the impact of prison arts and reentry programs will be validated and their mission supported. If arts programs can facilitate change and interpersonal growth for even just one person, the programs are worthy of support, according to Judy Dworin, program director and founder of the Justice Dance Performance Project, which was formerly the Judy Dworin Performance Project (JDPP) (Dworin, 2021). Arts programs around the country are underfunded, but arts programs specifically serving the vulnerable population of incarcerated and reentered citizens are highly scrutinized. To advocate for the widespread implementation of prison arts programs, it is important to understand their inherent value and far reaching impact.

Hypotheses

Since three different measures of ER were used in this study, the hypotheses for each measure are presented below.

Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ-Short Form)

Five hypotheses were related to the CERQ-short, which measures ER abilities in response to a negative or stressful stimuli or event.

Gender

Hypothesis 1 predicted that women would score higher on the positive ER strategies measured by the CERQ-short than males, and Hypothesis 2 predicted that women would be more likely than men to score higher on positive reappraisal.

Specific Arts Programs

Hypothesis 3 predicted that writing programs, as opposed to other arts programs (ie., dance and movement; visual arts; theatre and dance), would strengthen positive reappraisal as opposed to distraction, or positive refocusing. Following this, the scores on the positive reappraisal subscale of participants of writing programs and participants who had no involvement with writing programs would be compared to investigate a significant interaction.

Time Spent in Prison and Prison Arts Programs

Hypothesis 4 stated that the more time spent in prison arts programs would lead participants to score higher on the subscale of positive reappraisal to regulate their emotions. Hypothesis 5 predicted that the less time spent in prison arts programs would lead participants to score higher on the CERQ-short subscales of “rumination”, “catastrophizing”, “other-blame” and “self-blame,” all of which are negative ER strategies.

Emotion Regulation Strategies for Artistic Creative Activities (ERS-ACA)

Four hypotheses related to the ERS-ACA, which measures ER abilities when reflecting on engagement with artistic and creative activities.

Gender

Hypothesis 6 predicted that there would be no significant difference between females and males on the ERS-ACA measure.

Specific Arts Programs

Hypothesis 7 predicted that participation in dance and movement programs in prison, as compared to other arts programs, will yield higher scores on the ERS-ACA.

Time Spent in Prison and Prison Arts Program

There were two hypotheses related to time spent in prison and in prison arts programs and scores on the ERS-ACA. Hypothesis 8 predicted that there would be no significant difference between years spent in prison in scoring high on the ERS-ACA, and Hypothesis 9 predicted that the more years spent in prison arts programs would lead to higher scores on the ERS-ACA.

Self-expression and Emotion Regulation in Art Therapy Scale (SERATS)

Two hypotheses related to the SERATS, which measures self-expression and ER abilities pertaining explicitly to art therapy and arts involvement.

Gender

Hypothesis 10 assumed that there would be no significant difference between females and males in scoring high on the SERATS measure.

Time Spent in Prison Arts Programs

Hypothesis 11 predicted that the more years spent in prison arts programs would cause participants to score higher on the SERATS measure.

Relationship Among Emotion Regulation Measures

Six hypotheses were formulated about the relationship among the different measures of ER, relating both to adaptive and maladaptive ER strategies.

Adaptive Emotion Regulation Strategies

Hypothesis 12 predicted that there would be a relationship between higher scores on the positive ER strategies (ie., acceptance, positive refocusing, refocus on planning, positive reappraisal, putting into perspective) measured by the CERQ-short, and higher scores on the "self-development strategies" measured by the ERS-ACA.

Maladaptive Emotion Regulation Strategies

Hypothesis 13 predicted the converse of hypothesis 12, that higher scores on the negative ER strategies (ie., self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, other-blame) measured by the CERQ-short will lead to lower scores on the "self-development" strategies in the ERS-ACA. The last four hypotheses predicted relationships between specific strategies from the CERQ-short measure and the SERATS measure. Hypothesis 14 suggested that higher scores on "rumination" from the CERQ-short would lead to lower scores on the SERATS measure; Hypothesis 15 suggested that higher scores on "catastrophizing" from the CERQ-short would lead to lower scores on the SERATS measure; Hypothesis 16 suggested that higher scores for "self-blame" on the CERQ-short would lead to lower scores on the SERATS measure; Hypothesis 17 claimed that higher scores for "other-blame" on the CERQ-short would lead to lower scores on the

SERATS measure. Catastrophizing, self-blame, other-blame, and rumination are all considered negative and unhealthy ER strategies.

Method

Participants

The twenty-nine participants of this study were all formerly incarcerated and currently reentered people in the United States. The inclusion criterion for participation required that all individuals had been formerly incarcerated and had participated in an arts program either while in prison, or upon release. Twenty-four participants participated in an arts program while in prison, while five participants only participated in an arts program upon reentry, not while incarcerated. Of the 29 participants, 17 identified as male (59%), 11 identified as female (38%), and 1 identified as nonbinary (3%). Four participants participated in the interview portion.

Participants were recruited from the networks of reentry and prison arts programs, including primarily The Justice Arts Coalition (JAC), The Justice Dance Performance Project (JDPP), Art for Redemption, The Arts Commission, The Returning Artists Guild, among others. My participation in different arts communities was entirely virtual, either attending meetings on Zoom or talking one-on-one with people on the phone or over email. It was crucial that study volunteers did not feel treated as test subjects, as the incarcerated and reentered population are a vulnerable subset of people whose autonomy and rights have been previously infringed upon. It was important that participants and coordinating directors were able to better get to know me and my project prior to distributing any study materials. See Table 1 for a full description of who participated in the study.

Procedures

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Trinity College. The questionnaire was sent to participants over email. There were two ways that this email was received. Some individuals received the email containing the questionnaire directly from me based on their interest in participating in the study. An email containing the questionnaire was also sent to arts-based organizations who work with formerly incarcerated people, which was then forwarded to their network chain. Participation was done remotely and online, so as to ensure the anonymity and privacy of individuals, as well as reduce the potential spread of COVID-19.

Measures

Study Questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 54 questions, including context questions and questions from three ER measures. Upon clicking the link to the questionnaire, participants received an informed consent form (See Appendix A). Participants had to indicate either “I want to participate” or “I do not want to participate”. If participants clicked the former, they continued on with the questionnaire. If participants clicked the latter, the study concluded.

There was also an optional interview component for this study (See Appendix B). Upon completing the questionnaire, participants were redirected to a second survey form to collect their emails for the $10 Amazon gift card, as well as emails for anyone interested in participating in an interview. Participants were not required to input their email for the $10 gift card nor the follow up interview. Email addresses were not connected to responses recorded on the primary questionnaire.

If participants indicated their interest in a follow up interview, they were contacted with the email collected from the questionnaire. Not all participants who were willing to participate in

a follow up interview were contacted. Participants had the choice of completing an interview either on Zoom or over the phone. Interviews lasted for approximately one hour. Upon starting the interview, participants guided the conversation based on what they were willing and wanted to share as well as what they believed was important for me to understand.

Context Questions. I created nine context questions for participants to answer based on their own personal experiences and information (See Appendix C). In order to ensure anonymity for participants who wanted to participate in the follow up interview, each participant was asked to create a Unique Identifier, which was a four-letter code created by the first letter of their mother's first name, the first initial of their father's first name, and their birth month. Participants were also asked: gender, the total number of months/years spent in prison, whether or not they participated in an arts program while in prison and if so then what type of program, the total number of months/years they participated in a prison arts program if they did participate, the total number of months/years since last released from prison, and finally whether or not they currently participate in an arts program and if so then what type of program.

Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire - Short Form (CERQ Short Form). Specific ER strategies were measured using the CERQ-short, developed by Garnefski and Kraaij (2006). The CERQ-short consists of 18-items that measure nine different ER strategies, and two items measure each of the nine ER strategies. The nine ER strategies are self-blame ($\alpha = .68$), acceptance ($\alpha = .73$), focus on thought / rumination ($\alpha = .79$), positive refocusing ($\alpha = .80$), refocus on planning ($\alpha = .79$), positive reappraisal ($\alpha = .81$), putting into perspective ($\alpha = .79$), catastrophizing ($\alpha = .81$), and other-blame ($\alpha = .77$). For the purpose of data analysis and comparison across measures, total scores for the positive ER and negative ER subscales were scored separately. The five subscales measuring positive ER strategies were acceptance, positive

refocusing, refocus on planning, positive reappraisal, and putting into perspective. The four subscales measuring negative ER strategies were self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, and other-blame.

Some questions from the CERQ-short were modified to better fit the population being tested. Participants indicated their likelihood to employ the different ER strategies using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=*Almost never* and 5=*Almost always.* (See Appendix D).

Emotion Regulation Strategies for Artistic Creative Activities (ERS-ACA). To measure the specific ER strategies employed when engaging in arts related and creative activities, the ERS-ACA (α = 0.93) was adapted for the population under consideration (Fancourt et al., 2019). The 18 questions from the ERS-ACA measure emotional discharge in three subscales: avoidance (α = 0.9), approach (α = 0.88), and self-development (α = 0.88) ER strategies (Fancourt et al. 2019). Participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale where 1=*Strongly disagree* and 5=*Strongly agree.* (See Appendix E).

Self-expression and Emotion Regulation in Art Therapy Scale (SERATS). To measure emotional outcomes resulting from participation in arts programs, the SERATS (α = measure was adapted for the population under consideration (Haeyen & Noorthoorn, 2021). Participants responded to nine questions using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=*Never true* and 5=*(Almost) always true.* Instead of 2=*Seldom true* I adapted the scale to read 2=*Rarely* true. The measure was designed to measure specific clinical outcomes resulting from art therapy (Haeyen & Noorthoorn, 2021). Because not all prison and reentry arts programs are considered art therapy programs, nor are all teaching artists considered art therapists, I removed the words “art therapy” from questions two, eight and nine and replaced it with art (questions two and nine) and arts class (question eight). (See Appendix F).

Results

Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ-Short Form)

For all analyses measuring any of the nine emotion regulation strategies identified by Garnefski and Kraaij (2006), the 18-item CERQ-Short was used.

Gender. To test the two hypotheses relating to gender and scores on the CERQ-short, independent samples t-tests were conducted to test one, the effect of gender on positive emotion regulation strategies measured by the CERQ-short and, two, the effect of gender on positive reappraisal scores. There was no significant difference between male (M = 47.14, SD = 10.53) and female (M = 47.82, SD = 7.51) scores on the positive emotion regulation strategies (ie. acceptance, positive reappraisal, refocus on planning, positive refocusing, and putting into perspective) measured by the CERQ-short, $t(23) = -.180$, $p = .859$. Likewise, there was also no significant difference between males (M = 12.25, SD = 2.86) and females (M = 12.27, SD = 3.26) on positive reappraisal scores, $t(25) = -.019$, $p = .492$.

Specific Arts Programs. A 2 x 2 mixed model ANOVA was conducted to explore whether writing programs, compared to other arts programs, would be more likely to strengthen positive reappraisal as opposed to distraction. The main effect for type of emotion regulation of both distraction and positive reappraisal was statistically significant, $F(1, 26) = 70.80$, $p < .001$. Participants across all arts programs scored significantly higher on positive reappraisal (M = 12.14, SE = 0.56) than on distraction (M = 7.20, SE = 0.50). However there was no significant difference between participants of writing programs (M = 10.16, SE = 0.58) and participants of other arts programs (M = 9.17, SE =0 .67) and their scores on positive reappraisal versus distraction, $F(1, 26) = 1.26$, $p = .272$. Contrary to my hypotheses there was also no significant interaction between type of arts program and positive reappraisal versus distraction scores, F (1,

26) = .038, p = .847. Respondents who participated in writing programs in prison did not score differently on the subscale of positive reappraisal (M = 12.688, SE = 0.73) compared to respondents who did not participate in writing programs in prison (M = 11.58, SE = 0.85). Similarly, respondents who participated in writing programs in prison did not score differently on the subscale of distraction (M = 7.63, SE = 0.65) from respondents who did not participate in writing programs in prison (M = 6.75, SE = 0.76).

Time Spent in Prison Arts Programs. In order to examine the effect of the amount of time spent in prison and prison arts programs, correlation tests were conducted using specific ER strategies as the variables. A correlational analysis was conducted to test the effect of the longer time spent in prison arts programs and higher scores on positive reappraisal. No correlation was found between the longer time spent in prison and higher scores on the positive reappraisal subscale of the CERQ-short, r(28) = .118, p = .275. A correlational analysis was also conducted to test the effect of the less time spent in prison arts programs and higher scores on the CERQ-short subscales of rumination, catastrophizing, other-blame, and self-blame. No correlation was found between the less time spent in prison arts programs and higher scores on the CERQ-short subscales of rumination r(24) = -.004, p = .492, catastrophizing r(24) = -.009 p = .484, other-blame r(24) = -.237 p = .133, and self-blame r(24) = -.237 p = .132.

Emotion Regulation Strategies for Artistic Creative Activities (ERS-ACA)

The next portion of my hypotheses focused on the second dependent measure, the ERS-ACA, another 18-item measure.

Gender. To test the effect of gender on the ER strategies measured by the ERS-ACA, an independent samples t-tests was conducted. There was a significant difference between the scores of males (M = 72.50, SD = 14.08) and females (M = 83.00, SD = 6.63) on the ERS-ACA

measure, $t(23) = -2.10$, $p = .047$. Contrary to my hypothesis, females (M=83.0, SD=6.6) showed stronger ER abilities when participating in artistic and creative activities than males (M=72.5, SD=14.1).

To further explore where the significant difference was found in terms of the different subscales of the ERS-ACA, three independent samples t-tests were conducted for the approach, avoidance, and self-development strategies subscales. There was no significant difference found between males (M=3.88, SD=0.86) and females (M=4.48, SD=0.45) and their scores on avoidance strategies, $t(23) = -1.92$, $p = .067$. There was however a significant difference found between the scores of males (M=4.10, SD=0.88) and females (M=4.73, SD=0.37) on the self-development strategies, $t(25) = -2.22$, $p = .019$. There was also a significant difference between the scores of males (M=4.14, SD=0.86) and females (M=4.73, SD=0.37) on Approach strategies, $t(24) = -2.08$, $p = .049$.

Specific Arts Programs. I also tested the effect of specific arts programs on ERS-ACA scores. An independent samples t-test showed no significant difference between participation in dance and movement programs (M = 80.86, SD = 6.41) compared to other arts programs (M = 74.42, SD = 13.97) and higher scores on the ERS-ACA measure, $t(24) = 1.16$, $p = .128$.

Time Spent in Prison and Prison Arts Programs. To measure the effect of the time spent in prison and scores on the ERS-ACA measure, a correlational analysis was conducted that found no significant difference, $r(26) = .047$, $p = .411$. A correlational analysis was also conducted to measure the effect of time spent in prison arts programs and higher scores on the ERS-ACA and no significant difference was discovered, $r(22) = -.018$, $p = .469$.

Self-expression and Emotion Regulation in Art Therapy Scale (SERATS)

The third set of hypotheses were concentrated on the SERATS, a 9-item measure.

Gender. To test the effect of gender on overall SERATS scores, an independent samples t-test was conducted. Contrary to my hypotheses that males and females would not differ on the SERATS measure, females (M=41.09, SD=3.30) reported a greater tendency of engaging in self-expression and ER in response to doing art than males (M=37.88, SD=4.56), $t(25) = -2.002$, $p = .056$.

Time Spent in Prison Arts Programs. To test my hypotheses that the more years spent in prison arts programs would lead to higher scores on the SERATS measure, a correlation was conducted. Contrary to the hypotheses, there was no correlation revealed between the more years spent in prison arts programs and higher scores on the SERATS measure, $r(23) = .084$, $p = .351$.

Relationship Between Among Regulation Measures

The final subset of my hypotheses analyzed the relationships between scores on the CERQ-short, ERS-ACA, and SERATS measures.

Adaptive Emotion Regulation Strategies. A correlational analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between scores on the positive subscales of the CERQ-short and scores on the self-development strategy subscale of the ERS-ACA. In support of my hypothesis, there was a positive correlation between higher scores on the CERQ-short positive subscale scores and scores on the ERS-ACA subscale of self-development, $r(25) = .75$, $p < .001$.

Maladaptive Emotion Regulation Strategies. Similar to the previous hypothesis, to determine the relationship between overall scores on the negative subscales of the CERQ-short and scores on the self-development subscale of the ERS-ACA, a correlational analysis was conducted. A negative correlation was found between higher scores on the CERQ-short negative subscale scores and lower scores on the ERS-ACA subscale of self-development, $r(28) = -.38$, $p = .022$. To test the relationship between higher scores on the CERQ-short's subscales of

rumination, catastrophizing, self-blame, and other-blame and lower scores on the SERATS measure, correlations were used. The correlational analyses found no significant differences between scores of rumination $r(28) = -.040$, $p = .420$, catastrophizing $r(28) = -.297$, $p = .062$, and self-blame $r(28) = -262$, $p = 0.89$, and overall scores on the SERATS measure. However a negative correlation was found between higher scores of other-blame on the CERQ-short and lower scores on the SERATS measure, $r(28) = -.483$, $p = .005$.

Discussion

The present study elaborated on previous efforts to identify the specific emotional benefits that emerge from arts programs in the prison and reentry settings. This study specifically aimed to explore the gender differences of ER, the ER strategies utilized by participants of different arts programs, and how the amount of time spent in prison and in prison arts programs affected ER. An online study was conducted to assess individual participant history regarding experiences being incarcerated and involved with arts programs, cognitive ER strategies, and ER strategies employed while doing art and other creative activities. There is little research on how arts programs might help reduce negative ERS and instead enhance positive ERS. Moreover, it is important to further investigate not just the positive emotional outcomes that stem from arts participation, but which arts programs are more likely to teach and enhance more adaptive and long-term ER strategies to aid the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated in the reentry process. This study also provided an opportunity for formerly incarcerated people to share their experiences with the arts with those who may not otherwise be in touch with their unique voices and stories. Participants of this study were given the chance to elaborate on their experiences with prison and reentry arts programs which validated the impact of organizations that worked to improve their lives and livelihood.

In total, seventeen hypotheses were analyzed to see the various effects of arts programs on different aspects of ER. Regarding gender, it was hypothesized that females would score higher on the positive ER strategies measured by the CERQ-short and, more specifically, the subscale of positive reappraisal. However, it was assumed that there would be no significant difference between males and female scores on the SERATS and ERS-ACA measures. Pertaining to the amount of time spent in prison and in prison arts programs, it was hypothesized that the more time spent in prison arts programs would lead participants to score higher on measures of ER considered to be adaptive, specifically positive reappraisal. Similarly, it was hypothesized that the more years spent in prison arts programs would lead to higher scores on both the SERATS and ERS-ACA. It was also predicted that there would be a negative correlation between the less time spent in prison arts programs and higher scores on the ER subscales that were considered maladaptive, which included catastrophizing, self-blame, other-blame, and rumination. Along with this, it was predicted that higher scores on those maladaptive ER strategies would lead to lower scores on the SERATS measure. In terms of specific arts programs evaluated, it was predicted that participation in writing programs would lead to higher scores on the CERQ-short subscale of positive reappraisal in comparison to other arts programs. Finally, it was predicted that the higher scores on the CERQ-short will lead to higher scores on the self-development strategies, as measured by the ERS-ACA.

The Effect of Gender on Scores of Emotion Regulation

Despite the prediction that females would score higher on the positive ER strategies (ie., positive reappraisal, refocus on planning, positive refocusing, acceptance, and putting into perspective) measured by the CERQ-short, there was no difference in scores between males and females. However, females did score higher on the ERS-ACA compared to males, despite the

prediction that there would be no significant difference between genders. While there were no specific hypotheses about gender and responses on the three subscales of the ERS-ACA, analyses uncovered several significant differences. Females scored higher on the self-development and approach subscales, both of which are considered to be adaptive ER strategies. Moreover, females also scored higher on the SERATS measure, reporting a greater likelihood of engaging in self-expression and positive ER techniques when participating in artistic and creative activities. It was assumed that both male and female arts participants would report stronger ER abilities when reflecting directly on arts and creative involvements. Previous research has suggested that not only are women more likely to engage in creative projects, but they take greater advantage of artistic activities to aid in emotion-regulation compared to men (Fancourt et al., 2020). Additionally, Gussak (2009) reported that after participating in an art therapy program in prison, females exhibited greater improvements in mood and internal locus of control than males. The implementation of healthier coping and ER strategies leads to greater well-being and life satisfaction, as well as lower levels of mental illness (Fancourt et al., 2020). It is possible that female arts participants make greater use of their arts involvement in terms of self-regulation and emotional control, which is indicated by higher scores on the more adaptive subscales measured by the ERS-ACA.

It is also important to consider the unique concerns and burdens that disproportionately affect women in prison. Women are more likely to be the primary caregiver, and a prison sentence means a greater responsibility to arrange alternative child-care arrangements and child welfare support (Gibbons, 2010). This ongoing struggle to maintain family bonds even while being physically separated from loved ones may predispose incarcerated females to higher levels of anxiety and depression than are observed in males (Gussak, 2006). While every individual

arrives in prison with unique experiences, there are commonalities that incarcerated females may be more likely to form bonds over. Much of the incarcerated population is affected by low self-esteem and a poor self-image, but incarcerated females in particular are more likely to suffer from lower levels of self-confidence as a result of traumas, domestic violence, and sexual abuse (Gibbons, 2010). One study found that, of 102 women surveyed, 82% reported a history with trauma and abuse (Merriam, 2008). These shared experiences, while distressing, could lead female arts participants to seek out a community that shares their anxieties about motherhood and histories of abuse. It is possible that female arts participants experience greater catharsis from their artistic activities, as art allows for self-expression and emotional release that can be shared with a greater community (Gibbons, 2010).

David Gussak (2006, 2009), a prison psychologist and art therapist, found that women are typically more responsive to the group-setting that prison and reentry arts programs are often centered around (Gussak, 2006, 2009; Djurichkovic, 2011). Whereas men are more likely to concentrate on the final production or product of their artistic efforts, perhaps due to their more aggressive and competitive compulsions, women are more engaged with the group dynamics and processes that emphasize community, collaboration, and relationship building (Gussak, 2006, 2009; Djurichkovic, 2011). Community and relationship building are crucial components of arts work, especially for incarcerated and reentered populations. Female arts participants in prison have been observed to establish more meaningful relationships with peers than their male counterparts, and these relationships could serve as a protective factor against the dehumanizing prison experience (Gussak, 2009). These differences in engagement levels could support the findings that women are more likely to utilize and strengthen positive emotion-regulation strategies when engaging in artistic activities than males. Group behaviors and relationship-

building tendencies for both males and females should be studied to better understand how to organize arts-based and therapeutic groups in order to best support the different needs of prison arts participants.

Time Spent in Prison and in Prison Arts Programs and Scores on Emotion Regulation

In accordance with my hypothesis, no relationship was found between the amount of time spent in prison and scores on the ERS-ACA measure. Because the ERS-ACA asks participants to think specifically about their engagement with artistic and creative activities, it was believed that any participation in the arts would lead participants to experience greater ER abilities regardless of the amount of time they'd spent in prison. Prison is an inherently dehumanizing and deteriorating experience, and the longer time spent in the prison system could serve to reinforce and teach maladaptive coping and cognitive thought patterns. However, if someone is immersed in the safe and secure arts environment, the negative experiences of prison life could be outweighed by the positive impacts of arts programs in or outside of prison.

A longer time spent in prison arts programs did not predict higher scores on the positive reappraisal strategy measured by the CERQ-short, which was contrary to my hypotheses. There was no difference found between participants who'd spent less time in prison arts programs and higher scores on the CERQ-short subscales of rumination, catastrophizing, other-blame, and self-blame, which are considered maladaptive. It is likely that any participation in arts programs leads to stronger and healthier emotion-regulation strategies, whereas not participating in arts programs may lead individuals to ruminate, catastrophize, blame others, and blame themselves. A study that had included a control group of participants who had never engaged with arts programs in prison might have shown a greater reliance on more unproductive ERS, whereas

experience with arts programs for any duration appears to serve as a protective factor against poor ER.

No significant difference was found between the more time spent in prison arts programs and higher scores on the ERS-ACA. It is possible that the amount of time spent in arts programs is not as significant as participating in an actual program alone. Any amount of time spent with an arts group may provide participants with a foundation for building adaptive ERS that serve them outside of the arts-based activity. Similar to the way that therapy is not intended to only serve the client in the therapy session, any exposure to arts and creative activities appears to extend its influence into other areas of participants' lives.

In their interview, Participant EJ01 shared that because of their involvement with art in prison, they became able to recognize and define emotions that previously they could not “put a name to”; prior to their participation in prison arts Participant EJ01 stated that they would often numb their emotions with self-harm or substance abuse, whereas now they can “pick up on threatening emotions when they come up and use the right tools to deal with them”. For participant EJ01, art in prison served as a tool for healing, as they were able to utilize the skills learned in the prison arts program to self-soothe when they were upset, and express feelings without the need for words (EJ01, 2022). They stated that “Instead of cutting, [they] could paint with expressive colors”, a safer and more positive way to deal with the emotions that were associated with their trauma experienced before imprisonment, and the trauma associated with the incident that led to imprisonment (EJ01, 2022). Furthermore, participant EJ01 shared that “in prison you become known for your crime, not who you are. But in the arts-class you were seen as just another person” (EJ01, 2022). The insights shared by EJO1 show that any involvement with the arts in prison or upon reentry can equip participants with the tools needed to utilize

healthier ER strategies in everyday life, regardless of the amount of time spent with the arts group.

There was no correlation found between the more years spent in prison arts programs and the higher scores on the SERATS measure, which was not in accordance with my hypothesis. The SERATS measure asks questions explicit to the self-expression and ER that occurs during art making, and it appears that there is no difference between less and more experienced arts participants and their tendencies to attribute their well-being and self-regulation to their arts involvement.

Specific Arts Programs and Emotion Regulation Strategies

For participants who were involved in writing programs while in prison, their responses did indicate a higher reliance on positive reappraisal than on positive refocusing. However, contrary to my hypothesis, when comparing the scores of participants of prison writing programs and participants who did not partake in prison writing programs, there was no significant difference for positive reappraisal versus positive refocusing. One explanation for this result may be that participants were able to indicate their involvement with more than one arts program, so many respondents participated in both writing programs and at least one other arts program. Because of this, it is unclear whether involvement in writing programs alone was responsible for higher scores on the CERQ-short subscale of positive reappraisal, or whether involvement with many arts programs led to more adaptive ER overall. Research supports the tendency of participants of writing programs to more often deploy positive reappraisal than positive refocusing, likely due to the fact that people use writing to express and vent their emotions, rather than to avoid them (Drake et al., 2011; Drake & Hodge, 2015). Writing can serve to improve mood repair in the long-term, whereas distraction may serve as a more adaptable and

short-term emotion-regulation strategy in prison when there are fewer avenues available to concentrate on and work through difficult emotions and past experiences. Future studies should explicitly study the ER strategies associated with writing-based prison and reentry programs.

A similar hypothesis assumed that participation in dance and movement programs, as compared to other programs, would lead participants to score higher on the ERS-ACA measure. However no significant difference was found. There are some possible explanations for why dance and movement participants did not score higher on the ERS-ACA measure, as this is not in accordance with previous research on movement-oriented programs. First, there was a methodological problem with the questionnaire where individuals were able to indicate their involvement with more than one arts program, which made it impossible to isolate the effects of dance and movement programs on specific ER strategies. Second, only 24.1% of the sample participated in a dance and movement program while in prison, so it is plausible that the sample size was not large enough to capture the effects of dance and movement on positive ERS. Movement is an important part of emotional and cognitive well-being. Movement through dance engages with more implicit processing, which is achieved through body-based interventions that allow participants to engage with their unconscious by engaging in moment-to-moment mind and body awareness (Homann, 2010). As participants gradually become attuned to their own internal states, they also begin to attend to the relationships with other group members. Action-oriented interventions, such as dance and movement programs, support participants in handling feelings of anger and rage by increasing body awareness, social competence, and control over anger and aggression (Koch et al., 2015). Dance and movement programs, which typically operate in a group setting, foster empathy, perspective building, and relationship building through a safe and collaborative environment (Koch et al., 2015). Participant SR12, whose arts involvement while

in prison emphasized the importance of community and teamwork, reported in their interview that if they were to advocate for any arts program in prison, it would be one centered around performance, as the performance piece requires participants to interact with one another to develop prosocial skills. With arts programs like dance and theatre groups or musical ensembles, participants can return time and time again to the arts community even when the involvement is stressful, because the feeling of responsibility towards the arts group teaches skills that participants need to rehearse in preparation for release (SR12, 2022). An effective arts program, SR12 argues, is one that is centered around building community, as "everyone has a role to play, a part in the greater machine that is the final arts piece".

The Relationship Among the Measures of Emotion Regulation

In support of my hypothesis, the results showed that higher scores on the positive ER subscales of the CERQ-short also led to higher scores on the self-development subscale of the ERS-ACA, another adaptive ER strategy. This would suggest that participants who reported the ability to engage in healthier ER strategies (ie. positive refocusing, positive reappraisal, acceptance, refocus on planning, and putting into perspective) after experiencing a negative or distressing event, were also able to utilize healthier ER strategies when participating in artistic and creative activities. It can be assumed that the emotional and cognitive benefits experienced in response to arts participation carry over into other aspects of daily life that are separate from arts involvement.

In addition to the positive correlation found between higher scores on the positive ER strategies measured by the CERQ-short and the self-development subscale measured by the ERS-ACA, a negative correlation was also found that revealed the opposite. Higher scores on the negative ER strategies measured by the CERQ-short (ie. rumination, catastrophizing, other-

blame, and self-blame), led to lower scores on the self-development subscale measured by the ERS-ACA. This would suggest that participants who demonstrate the reliance on maladaptive ER strategies after experiencing a negative event are less likely to report the utilization of self-development strategies when engaging in artistic and creative activities. This is not to say that some participants simply do not reap the emotional benefits of arts participation, but it is possible that those whose self-development strategies are not as developed in relation to arts engagement also have weaker cognitive and ER abilities in response to stressful and negative life events. Whether the strengthening of self-development strategies in response to arts participation leads to the reliance on healthier ER strategies outside of the artistic setting cannot be determined from this study. Future research should investigate the ways in which ER can be enhanced by arts involvement that then yields positive effects on the individual's mental and emotional state separate from the arts program.

In terms of additional maladaptive ER strategies that were measured, while there was no correlation between the total scores on the maladaptive ERS measured by the CERQ-short, there was one ER subscale that was negatively correlated. A negative correlation existed between higher scores on the CERQ-short subscale of other-blame, a negative ER strategy, and lower scores on the SERATS. It is possible that some formerly incarcerated individuals struggle to take responsibility for their involvement with the incident that led them be incarcerated, or some people believe that they were wrongly convicted or involved with their crime. Regardless, this finding suggests that the tendency to blame others for negative events or unfortunate situations is also related to weaker self-expression and ER when participating in an arts group.

Limitations of the Current Study

While the study demonstrated several significant findings that provide insight to potential important gender differences of ER, as well as, the impact of more and less time spent in prison arts programs, further studies are needed to enhance the preliminary findings from this study. Participants were asked to self-report their experiences with arts programs and their ability to regulate emotions. There is a risk with any self-report measure, especially one focused on emotions for formerly incarcerated people, that participants will not be transparent with their responses. A limitation of this study is that by only using scaled responses important aspects of ER for formerly incarcerated people were not discovered. While researchers have used these measures of ER in previous research, given the population of this study, these measures may be less than adequate. Individuals who have been incarcerated might be somewhat suspicious of participating in studies relating to prison experiences. While this study worked to ensure anonymity, it is possible that not all participants felt comfortable being forthcoming in their responses. Even if individuals were trying to be open to the different ER scales used, it may be difficult for the individuals of this study to fully express their feelings about the regulation of emotions because of the fact that the prison experience in and of itself revolved around the suppression of emotions.

This study was also limited in that it was difficult to determine which arts programs were most effective in encouraging positive ERS for reentered people. Because many of the individuals in this study participated in more than one arts program, it was difficult to discriminate the effects of specific arts programs on different ERS. A further limitation is that we did not ask participants to report the amount of time spent in each program, nor which program they believed to be most impactful in terms of teaching positive ERS. To avoid this limitation,

future studies can conduct extensive interviews dedicated to finding out the inherent benefits of arts programs experienced by each individual.

Had there been more participants in the study, more experiences with arts programs could have been studied, which would expand the findings. There exists a range of experiences with different arts programs; a writing class with one organization may look very different from a writing class with another organization. Unless participants were interviewed or more in-depth questions are were, there was no opportunity for participants to elaborate on or explain the organization of the arts programs they were involved with.

A final limitation was that there was no control group of participants who had been incarcerated but had never participated in an arts program in prison or upon reentry. A comparison group would have allowed for more explicit conclusions to be drawn about the benefits of arts participation, versus no participation, for reentered people.

Future Research

To the best of my knowledge, this was the first study of its kind to analyze three separate ER measures in relationship to one another, as well as the first study to utilize the three measures with a group of reentered citizens. This study supported the convergent validity between measures of ER that pertain explicitly to art and creative activities. Capturing the ER abilities of reentered citizens can inform arts programs of the best and most effective ways to strengthen positive ERS for a vulnerable population.

This research supported previous studies that suggested that there are gender differences in ER abilities. Given that females in this study appeared to more often utilize adaptive emotion regulation strategies in general and when engaged in an arts program, it is important to address

these gender differences and make programs available that best-fit different individuals, whether gender or culturally based.

Studies should also investigate which positive emotion regulation strategies are associated with specific arts programs in order to advocate for the implementation of programs that most successfully strengthen positive emotion regulation strategies for the incarcerated and reentered people. The programs that are identified to be most effective can then be reengineered to fit the demands and constraints of the prison environment.

While this study only focused on reentered people, further longitudinal research can follow individuals from their prison arts program and through the reentry experience, making it possible to study whether people are still utilizing the positive ERS learned in the prison arts environment. It is possible that prison arts programs are sufficient in teaching positive ERS in preparation for release, but a further study could investigate whether the continuation of an arts program upon release contributes to stronger ERS than those who did not continue with the arts after prison.

Finally, it is important for future research to allow for the voices of arts participants to be highlighted. Interviews are one way to ensure the personal testimonies of those who have been incarcerated are at the forefront of arts work. By allowing people to more expressively share their experience with the arts, these humanizing stories can convince others of their far-reaching impact and effectiveness. Studies on prison and reentry arts programs should focus on validating the mission and impact of organizations who work to make such rehabilitative programs more accessible and mainstream. Research addressing the efficacy of arts-based interventions with prison and reentered populations could encourage funding of, and support for, programs that are not always considered a necessary part of the rehabilitation process.

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Table 1. Characteristics of Participants

	Male (N=17)	Female/Non-Binary (N=12)	Total Sample (N=29)
Prison Time Spent			
Short (0-3)	29.4%	41.7%	34.5%
Medium (4-15)	29.4%	41.7%	34.5%
Long (16+)	41.2%	16.7%	31.0%
Prison Arts Participation			
Any Program	82.4%	83.3%	82.8%
Dance and Movement	5.9%	50.0%	24.1%
Music	23.5%	16.7%	20.7%
Theatre	35.3%	8.3%	24.1%
Visual Art	25.5%	41.7%	31.0%
Writing	23.5%	58.3%	37.9%
Participation Time in Prison Arts			
Short (0-2)	35.3%	25.0%	31.0%
Medium (3-6)	35.3%	33.3%	34.5%
Long (7+)	29.4%	41.7%	34.5%
Years as Reentered Citizen			
Mean/SD	2.2 (2.9)	5.8 (5.6)	3.7 (4.5)
Reentry Arts Participation			
Any Program	64.7%	41.7%	38.0%
Dance and Movement	0.0%	8.3%	3.5%
Music	11.8%	25.0%	17.2%
Theatre	41.2%	8.3%	27.6%
Visual Art	17.7%	25.0%	20.7%
Writing	17.7%	41.7%	27.6%

Appendix A

Informed Consent

Request to Participate in Study

I am inviting you to participate in this study about your experience with prison or reentry arts programs, and the effect of those on your overall emotional well-being. This project has been approved by Trinity College's institutional Review Board.

Purpose of this Research

The goal of this project is to learn about how arts programming has impacted your lives. I hope that my project will provide support for arts programs and also inform the public of how arts programs can create change in individuals.

Procedure

To understand more about arts programs, I am distributing a questionnaire over email and also doing follow-up interviews. Interviews are optional for all participants who fill out the questionnaire. The questionnaire has a series of questions that ask about you and your participation in arts programs. The remaining questions ask you to reflect upon how arts programs have helped you deal with different life experiences. We anticipate that the questionnaire will take you about 20-25 minutes to complete.

Risks or Discomfort

Because you can't be personally identified by the information you will give in the questionnaire, the risks involved in completing it are minimal. If you feel uncomfortable answering any question on the questionnaire, you may choose not to answer that question.

If you participate in an interview, we recognize that there may be potential discomfort or difficulty sharing personal experiences. You are free to ask me to move onto the next question or stop the interview or at any time.

Confidentiality

All information obtained in this questionnaire will be treated confidentially. The questionnaire is completely anonymous, meaning no identifiable information will be attached to your questionnaire or your interview responses. In order to keep everything anonymous, we will ask you to create a "unique identifier" so that if you agree to participate in the interview, we will be able to connect your questionnaire answers to your interview answers. Your unique identifier will be a 4 letter code, which will be made up of your mother's first initial, your father's first initial, and your birth month (January = 01).

Here is an example: My mother's first name is Linda. My father's first name is Joe. I was born in September. My 4 letter code is: LJ09.

Information from the survey will be kept on password-protected computers and only the research team will have access to these records to preserve confidentiality. Records will be kept in our laboratory for a minimum of 3 years.

Compensation

You will receive a $10 Amazon gift card after completing the questionnaire.

Voluntary Participation

The decision to complete this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question asked in the survey. Even once you begin the online survey, you may stop at any time by closing your web browser. But if your survey is not almost entirely complete, you will not be compensated.

Questions/Concerns

Thank you in advance for your time and willingness to share, it is so appreciated! If you have any questions about your participation or would like to discuss the project before completing the questionnaire, please contact: Dana Parker: dana.parker@trincoll.edu, Trinity College or Professor Dina Anselmi: dina.anselmi@trincoll.edu, Trinity College.

Do you want to take this questionnaire?

- I want to participate
- I do not want to participate

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. What art program are/were you involved with and what creative activities did you do?

2. Did/do you find art to be a healing activity? If so, is art ever an easier way to release or express emotion than verbally discussing your past or personal struggles?

3. Did art programs, either while in prison or once released, provide you with a sense of community? If so, how did that impact you?

4. Did/does arts participation help you better understand the feelings or experiences of others in the group? Of others more generally?

5. How did your involvement in art programs help while in prison and / or with your reentry process?

6. Do you feel that your involvement in arts programs empowered you to take back control of your life in prison and / or upon reentry?

7. Emotion regulation strategies include distraction, reflection/reappraisal, problem solving and discharge (see definitions below). Did your involvement in art programs help you learn how to take control of your emotions in any of these ways?
    a. Distraction = focus attention away from distressing situations
    b. Reflection / reappraisal = change or soften the meaning of a situation to alter its emotional impact
    c. Problem solving = help you to problem solve a situation
    d. Discharge = attempt to release or get rid of negative emotions

8. Are there other aspects of arts programs that we haven't discussed, that have helped you and that you would like to share?

Appendix C

Context Questions

1. Unique identifier (in place of name)
2. Gender
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Non-binary / Other
    d. Prefer not to say
3. What is the total amount of time you have spent in prison?
    a. Text box to specify months/years
4. How long have you been a reentered citizen?
    a. Text box to specify months/years
5. Did you participate in an arts program while in prison?
    a. If so, what type of art program were you involved with?
        i. Dance and movement
        ii. Theater
        iii. Visual art (drawing, painting, sculpture, collage)
        iv. Singing and songwriting (Music)
        v. Writing (poetry, fiction, nonfiction, personal narrative, letter)
6. If you answered yes to question 6, How long were you involved with a prison arts program?
    a. Text box to specify months/years

7. Now that you are back in the community, are you still involved with an arts program?
    a. If so, what type of arts program are you involved with?
        i. Dance and movement
        ii. Theater
        iii. Visual art (drawing, painting, sculpture, collage)
        iv. Singing and songwriting (music)
        v. Writing (poetry, fiction, nonfiction, personal narrative, letter)

Appendix D

Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire - Short Form

1. I feel that I am the one who is responsible for what has happened [after a negative event]
2. I think that basically the cause must lie within myself
3. I think that I have to accept that this has happened
4. I think that I have to accept the situation
5. I often think about how I feel about what I have experienced
6. I am preoccupied with what I think and feel about what I have experienced
7. I think of pleasant things that have nothing to do with it
8. I think of something nice instead of what has happened
9. I think about how to change the situation
10. I think about a plan of what I can do best
11. I think I can learn something from the situation
12. I think that I can become a stronger person as a result of what has happened
13. I think that it hasn’t been too bad compared to other things
14. I tell myself that there are worse things in life
15. I keep thinking about how terrible it is what I have experienced

16. I continually think about how horrible the situation has been
17. I feel that others are responsible for what has happened
18. I feel that basically the cause lies with others

Appendix E

Emotion Regulation Strategies for Artistic Creative Activities (ERS-ACA)

1. I get in touch with my feelings through the process of making art
2. I am able to depict my feelings when doing art
3. Through the process of making art, I am able to discover what is at play within me
4. I am able to express my feelings through the process of making art
5. I am able to make things fall into place in the art
6. Making art is a kind of outlet for me
7. A piece of art I have created can help me hold on to a particular feeling
8. I apply the new behavior that I have been experimenting with in arts class outside of the arts class
9. I gain greater insight into myself when doing art

Appendix F

Self-expression and Emotion Regulation in Art Therapy Scale (SERATS)

1. I can block out any unwanted thoughts or feelings
2. I can contemplate what is going on in my life with a clear mind
3. I can shake off any anxieties in my life
4. I feel I am in my own little bubble, away from ordinary worries

5. I feel more confident in myself
6. It boosts my self-esteem
7. It gives me a sense of purpose
8. It helps me forget about my worries
9. It helps me refocus on what matter in life
10. It helps me to come to terms with my own emotions
11. It helps me to disengage from things that are bothering me
12. It helps me to put worries or problems I have into perspective
13. It helps me to understand my own feelings on things that are on my mind
14. It makes me feel detached from negative things in my life
15. It makes me feel stronger in myself
16. It makes me reflect on my emotions
17. It reaffirms my identity
18. It redirects my attention so I forget unwanted thoughts and feelings