SESSION 7625 (SYMPOSIUM)

ARTS-BASED PROGRAMS FOR OLDER ADULTS FOR THEIR COGNITION, IDENTITY, COMMUNICATION, DIGNITY, AND MORE

Chair: Kyong Hee Chee
Discussant: Seoyoun Kim

This symposium takes an interdisciplinary perspective in order to address psychological and behavioral benefits of various arts-based programs for older adults including persons living with dementia. Presenters in this symposium specialize in diverse disciplines including psychology, social work, cognitive neuroscience, education, and sociology. Using novel approaches and various research methods, the presenters will speak to the specific outcomes of arts-based interventions. The positive outcomes include: 1) improved cognitive health rediscovered identities among cognitively normal older adults; and 2) better communication and reduced agitation for persons with dementia. The first two presentations concern cognitively intact participants. Brown will present a mixed-methods study that examined cognitive benefits and differential experiences of 11 older adults who participated in a 12-week, arts-based intervention. Chow will identify the themes in the "Tree of Life" drawings of 144 Hong Kong Chinese older adults, who re-authored their sense of self transcending life challenges. Next, Mohan will discuss results from an analysis of communication exchanges among 6 older participants in a 6-week, creative group storytelling program (TimeSlips) offered in a memory care community. Halpin-Healy will explain the research-based practices used in museum programming (Arts & Minds) for persons with dementia and their care partners. She will summarize the assessments of the programs that have served approximately 500 participants over a decade. As a discussant, Kim will summarize common threads that lead to effective arts-based interventions for older adults regardless of their cognitive status. She will also highlight implications regarding the benefits of arts-based interventions in late life development.

I'M NOT CREATIVE IN THAT WAY: OLDER ADULTS' DIFFERENTIAL EXPERIENCES OF AN ARTS-BASED INTERVENTION

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A recent 12-week intervention study revealed that making conceptual art is linked to improved cognitive health among community-dwelling older adults (Brown et al., 2020). Unknown, however, is whether the intervention experience differed for participants who exhibited more versus less improvement. This pilot study examined 163 excerpts from semi-structured interviews with cognitively normal, older adult participants (N = 11, Mean age = 72.82). Using thematic analysis and data displays on Dedoose, key themes were distilled regarding intervention acceptability. Participants exhibiting less cognitive improvement more often mentioned personally connecting to topics of dementia and aging through art, but more often mentioned scheduling conflicts. Conversely, participants exhibiting greater cognitive improvement more often mentioned experiencing intellectual enrichment, but feeling insecure about their art capabilities. Novel art activities may be personally meaningful and cognitively stimulating for some participants, but emotionally frustrating for others. Future work should explore ways to optimize arts-based interventions for older participants.

REDISCOVERY OF OLDER ADULTS' LIFE WISDOM: APPLICATION OF NARRATIVE THERAPY USING A TREE-OF-LIFE METAPHOR

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Using narrative therapy with a “Tree of Life” metaphor, practitioners facilitated 144 Hong Kong Chinese older adults through 24 4-session groups to rediscover their preferred identity and celebrate their lives. Thematic analysis of their 'Tree of Life' drawings revealed five themes: 1) Insights about their abilities, intentions and problem-solving capabilities; 2) A sense of purpose and commitment to their preferred identities; 3) Realization of personal values and beliefs; 4) Reconnecting sense of agency and hope; and 5) Cherishing life as a journey to celebrate their wealth of wisdom for common good. Despite confronting life challenges, participants re-author their sense of self consistent to their preferred identity, and renew purpose of life through drawing and dialectic narrative conversations. These findings depict a deeper understanding of older adults’ lives, and have significant theoretical and practical implications for health and social care professions to advance a constructive perspective to late life development.

IMPROVING SOCIAL COMMUNICATION WITH TIMESLIPS AMONG PERSONS LIVING WITH DEMENTIA: RESULTS FROM A PILOT STUDY

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Persons living with dementia (PLWD) often display declining communication and conversational skills, leading to reduced quality of life and social isolation. Given limited evidence for interventions targeting conversation skills in PLWD, we examined the transcripts of a creative group storytelling program, TimeSlips, offered in a memory care community in Central Texas. We analyzed communicative exchanges using modified rules of the ‘Conversational Act Profile’ (Fey, 1986). Utterances were coded for each participant’s interaction 1) with the facilitator and 2) with other participants. Preliminary evidence for six participants across six sessions is reported here. While the number and type of participant-to-facilitator utterances did not show a specific pattern, five of the six participants showed increased participant-to-participant communication across sessions. These findings suggest that a creative storytelling program such as TimeSlips may promote greater communication among PLWD, thereby improving social connectedness amongst them and possibly, their quality of life.