

## **Impact of expressive textile arts on the needy in Hong Kong**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to investigate the impact of expressive textile arts on needy people namely, former mental patients and ex-offenders after taking a series of interactive textile arts and fashion creativity workshops from a service learning subject, “Engaging Fashion as a Communication Media for the Needy: Fashion for a Better Future Extravaganza 2016” offered by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University from May to July 2016. In this service learning subject, subject lecturers and students co-designed with the needy people to enhance their self-confidence and rebuild a satisfactory identity through practising expressive textile arts. A total of twenty textile arts prototypes were presented in a mini fashion show and an exhibition, both at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, in July 2016. A quantitative research method was adopted in this study and a questionnaire survey was conducted. The research findings suggest that positive impacts are found on the service recipients’ perceptions of “feelings and thoughts before attending the workshops”, “feelings and thoughts during the workshops”, “attitude toward the textile arts materials”, and “attitude toward the expressive textile artworks”.

### **Introduction**

In recent years, a growing body of evidence has been compiled exploring the potential of the arts to impact on health and wellbeing in a variety of social contexts, to counter inequalities and increase engagement. Participation in the arts and access to a range of arts opportunities can dramatically improve health outcomes and increase wellbeing. By integrating the expressive textile arts processes and allowing one to flow into another, recipients gain access to their inner resources for healing, self-awareness and creativity. Thus, the service component of this service-learning subject was able to improve the health of people who experience mental or physical health problems. Besides, the static exhibition and fashion show effectively disseminated the expressive textile artworks created by the service recipients and are able to highlight draw the social issue of the needy to the attention of the general public.

### **What are Expressive Arts, Textile Arts and Expressive Textile Arts**

Expressive arts are the practice of using imagery, storytelling, dance, music, drama, poetry, writing, movement, dream work and visual arts in an integrated way to foster human growth, development and healing [1]. This suggests that each human being is inherently creative and infused with the gift of imagination. It is in this creative capacity that everyone can express and shape their experience into creative expression. In this study, service recipients practised textile arts as a form of expressive arts for self-expression and reflection. Textile arts can give people a sense of place in benefits and enhance a sense of self with collective identity [2, 3]. It can also link people to previous traditions and rituals and let them feel that they have escaped from previous lives and relationships [4, 5]. The textile arts making process is a kind of multi-dimensional experience and can be used as a healing process for people suffering from mental and/or physical discomforts [4, 5, 6]. Reynolds first demonstrated findings based on a study of 35 women involved in illness management by using textile arts [7]. They were asked to

process needlework to distract their attention away from worries or pain, and the results showed that participants agreed the textile arts making process helped them to block out the symptoms by focusing the attention on the textile working process. Apart from the psychological benefits, textile arts improved their physical functions, in that solving some participants' problems associated with manual dexterity. Reynolds and Prior found textile arts making could satisfy people's lifestyles and enable them to find new interests, skills or identities [8]. This kind of experience fostered their personal growth, led to a re-interpretation of their illness, and hence carried out positive changes in their lives and reduced their stress. In recent years, since a consumer culture has encouraged the handcrafters form as a community, the meaning of textile arts making has been transformed from craft revolution to a new generation of 'do it yourselves' [9]. Textile arts can calm people themselves and feel centred when they become immersed in the sheer pleasure of the creative process.

### **Service Learning Subject**

The service learning subject was taught using a combination of lectures and workshops from 9 to 30 May 2016. The local community partner was invited to deliver a seminar about its background and the skills required in communicating and working with the service recipients. Students were teamed up with service recipients to discuss and co-design expressive textile artworks under subject lecturers' supervision. Emphasis was placed on using colour, textures and patterns for the textile artworks so as to interpret recipients' memories and personal narratives on the path to self-discovery and healing. 20 expressive textile arts prototypes were jointly created by 77 students, 20 service recipients including 10 former mental patients and 10 ex-offenders, and 2 subject lecturers. The prototypes were showcased in a fashion show in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University on 7 July 2016. A professional hair and makeup sponsor was sourced and a professional show production house was appointed for the fashion show. During the mini fashion show, the service recipients presented their own expressive textile artworks as show models by themselves and their personal expressions and inner confidences were further encouraged. The fashion show served as a social platform where the results of the service learning project were disseminated to a wide public audience effectively. In addition, the 20 expressive textile arts prototypes were presented in a static exhibition in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University from 8 to 22 July 2016 in order to further to raise the academic and public awareness about the expressive textile arts created by the needy people in Hong Kong.

### **Method**

A quantitative research method was adopted in this study and a questionnaire survey was conducted before and during the expressive textile arts making workshops. The design of the questionnaire was based on the 'Art-based Intervention (ABI) Questionnaire' [10]. Variables regarding 'feelings and thoughts before attending the workshops', 'feelings and thoughts during the workshops', 'attitude toward the textile arts materials', and 'attitude toward the expressive textile artworks' were obtained through a self-administered questionnaire survey, subjects being 20 needy people including 10 former mental patients and 10 ex-offenders from a community partner. A 7-point Likert scaling was adopted for various items of the survey and the ranking scales are: the scale of 1 for 'entirely disagree', 4 for 'neither agree or disagree' and 7 for 'entirely agree'. Respondents took an average of 45 minutes to complete a questionnaire. All of the questions in the questionnaire were translated into Chinese and respondents were interviewed by the investigators of the project in person. The software package SPSS 22.0 was employed to facilitate the quantitative data analysis.

## Results

In response to service recipients' perceptions of "feelings and thoughts before the workshops", 90% and 70% of the former mental patients claimed that they felt "much excited" to participate and "much confident" in their ability to perform well in the expressive textile arts workshops, respectively. Only 10% of the respondents were "much reluctant" to get involved in the workshops and all respondents felt "much peaceful and pleased" to participate the workshops. In the case of ex-offenders, 90% and 80% of the respondents claimed that they felt "much excited" to participate and "much confident" in their ability to perform well in the expressive textile arts workshops, respectively. None of the respondents were "much reluctant" to get involved in the workshops and all respondents felt "much peaceful and pleased" to participate the workshops. Regarding respondents' perceptions of "feelings and thoughts during the workshops", similar results were obtained from both groups of service recipients. All respondents felt "much pleased" to create the textile artwork. 80% of the respondents felt "much relaxed, and concentrated" during the creating process. 90% of the respondents "enjoyed" working on the expressive textile artworks and 80% of them claimed that they could "overcome the failure" of their creative process. Positive "attitude toward the expressive textile artworks and the textile arts materials" are presented from both groups of service recipients. All respondents felt "much satisfied" with their created textile artworks and 90% of respondents were "much interested" in creating textile arts materials. But, 40% of former mental patients were "much scared" to handle textile materials comparing to 20% of the ex-offenders having the same perception of handling textile materials.

Items		N	Mean	SD	Percentage distribution (%)		
					1-3	4	5-7
					Little	A fair amount	Much
Feelings and thoughts before attending the workshops							
1	I am excited to participate in the expressive textile arts workshops	10	5.7	.949	0%	10%	90%
2	I feel confident in my ability to perform well in the expressive textile arts workshops	10	5.2	1.033	0%	30%	70%
3	I am reluctant to get involved in the expressive textile arts workshops	10	2.6	1.506	60%	30%	10%
4	I feel peaceful and pleased to participate in the expressive textile arts workshops	10	6.0	.816	0%	0%	100%
Feelings and thoughts during the workshops							
5	I feel pleased to create a textile artwork	10	6.2	.919	0%	0%	100%
6	I feel relaxed in my creative process	10	5.8	1.229	0%	20%	80%
7	I can concentrate on creating textile artwork	10	5.8	1.229	0%	20%	80%
8	I enjoy working on my textile artwork	10	5.9	1.101	0%	10%	90%
9	I feel frustrated to execute my creative ideas	10	3.7	2.163	40%	20%	40%
10	I feel limited in my creative process	10	3.9	1.729	40%	10%	50%
11	I encountered technical difficulties in creating textile artwork	10	3.6	1.955	50%	10%	40%
12	I can overcome the failure of my creative process	10	5.6	1.955	10%	10%	80%
Attitude toward the expressive textile artworks							
13	I am worried about the appearance of my textile artwork	10	4.0	2.261	30%	20%	50%
14	I feel satisfied with my textile artwork	10	5.9	.994	0%	0%	100%
Attitude toward the textile arts materials							
15	I feel scared to handle textile materials	10	3.5	2.415	50%	10%	40%
16	I am interested in creating textile arts materials	10	5.7	1.059	10%	0%	90%

Table 1: Findings of Art-based Intervention (ABI) Questionnaire of Former Mental Patients

Items		N	Mean	SD	Percentage distribution (%)		
					1-3	4	5-7
					Little	A fair amount	Much
Feelings and thoughts before attending the workshops							
1	I am excited to participate in the expressive textile arts workshops	10	5.70	.949	0%	10%	90%
2	I feel confident in my ability to perform well in the expressive textile arts workshops	10	5.20	1.033	0%	20%	80%
3	I am reluctant to get involved in the expressive textile arts workshops	10	2.60	1.506	100%	0%	0%

4	I feel peaceful and pleased to participate in the expressive textile arts workshops	10	6.00	.816	0%	0%	100%
<b>Feelings and thoughts during the workshops</b>							
5	I feel pleased to create a textile artwork	10	6.20	.919	0%	0%	100%
6	I feel relaxed in my creative process	10	5.80	1.229	0%	20%	80%
7	I can concentrate on creating textile artwork	10	5.80	1.229	0%	20%	80%
8	I enjoy working on my textile artwork	10	5.90	1.101	0%	10%	90%
9	I feel frustrated to execute my creative ideas	10	3.70	2.163	50%	20%	30%
10	I feel limited in my creative process	10	3.90	1.729	50%	20%	30%
11	I encountered technical difficulties in creating textile artwork	10	3.60	1.955	40%	10%	50%
12	I can overcome the failure of my creative process	10	5.60	1.955	0%	10%	90%
<b>Attitude toward the expressive textile artworks</b>							
13	I am worried about the appearance of my textile artwork	10	4.00	2.261	40%	20%	40%
14	I feel satisfied with my textile artwork	10	5.90	.994	0%	0%	100%
<b>Attitude toward the textile arts materials</b>							
15	I feel scared to handle textile materials	10	3.50	2.415	70%	10%	20%
16	I am interested in creating textile arts materials	10	5.70	1.059	0%	10%	90%

Table 2: Findings of Art-based Intervention (ABI) Questionnaire of Ex-Offenders

## Conclusion

In this study, positive impacts were found on the needy people's perceptions of "feelings and thoughts before attending, and during the workshops", "attitude toward the textile arts materials, and the expressive textile artworks". The needy people can regain positive well-being through creative design interaction during the practise of expressive textile arts. They were able to build confidence through their participation in both the exhibition and catwalk performance. By expressing their feelings through their unleashed talents in expressive textiles arts and fashion styling, the needy people were also able to rebuild their individual capital, expand their social networks and enhance mutual trust and cohesion. Finally, it is believed the most important impact is to raise the public awareness of needy people such as, former mental patients, and ex-offenders to the general public by various publications, fashion show and static exhibition and eliminate the misunderstanding of general public about the needy people in order to facilitate social cohesion and acceptance.

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