

Art Therapy in Australian Prisons: A Research Agenda

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Abstract

Art therapy in prisons remains widely under-researched in Australia and beyond and represents a major gap in the literature. Despite evidence that art therapy can be a tool for social change, to date, there are no recorded studies in Australia which have investigated the therapeutic benefits of art in prison populations with measured outcomes. Literary analysis suggests that research tends to be hampered by limitations in methodological approaches that are suited to prison environments. By engaging “inside” with inmates over the course of an 8-week art therapy program, this research design addresses this knowledge gap. Building on 5 years of piloting, the research methodological design presented in this paper embodies a prototype that promises to overcome the limitations of previous research approaches. This research agenda promises to facilitate creative interventions through sensitively attuned art therapy delivery. Benefits are expected to accrue to diverse stakeholder groups, including inmates, chaplaincy and parole services, voluntary facilitators, policymakers, criminologists, and taxpayers, among others.

Keywords

art therapy, incarceration, ethical research, creative, mixed method research, methodological innovation

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Highlights

- Art therapy in prisons remains widely under-researched in Australia and beyond and represents a major gap in the academic literature.
- Literary analysis suggests that research tends to be hampered by limitations in methodological approaches that are suited to prison environments.
- By combining divergent methodologies to foster new knowledge and insights, the multidimensional design presented in this paper embodies a prototype that promises to overcome the limitations of previous research approaches.
- Building on 5 years of piloting, this research agenda is set within an experimental paradigm and facilitates creative interventions through sensitively attuned art therapy delivery.
- This cross-disciplinary research promises benefits for diverse prison stakeholder groups, including inmates, chaplaincy and parole services, voluntary facilitators, policymakers, criminologists, and taxpayers, among others.

Introduction: Research Background and Intended Contribution

The multidimensional research design on contemporary art therapy in Australian prisons propositioned in this article arises from the first author's unique experiences and perspectives as an artist and former inmate. As such, the research agenda is uniquely shaped and informed by her perspectives; its inception and conceptualization arise from her lived experiences. This opening section, therefore, prefaces the Introduction with selected brief autobiographical information, which contextually frames the remainder of this paper and the research design presented herein.

As a prison art therapy facilitator working in conjunction with Queensland Correctional Services (QCS), the principal researcher seeks to promote rehabilitation, healing, reconciliation, and recidivism prevention for both offenders and society. To this end, she draws on her own personal experiences of incarceration for background and inspiration. After more than two decades outside of prison and then stepping back in as an art tutor and First Peoples Chaplain, she is well acquainted with both prison culture and the myriad systemic issues facing institutional incarceration today. Having developed and implemented the "Change the Design of Your Life" (CDL) art therapy program in two Queensland prisons (2018–2019), she has witnessed a high proportion of participants complete the 8-week program and then continue with their art, assimilating it as an intervention and relapse prevention tool. After 5 years of piloting, notable results have been achieved: (1) inmates have grown in self-confidence through self-awareness and accountability; (2) engagement with art has reduced involvement in violence and prison drug culture; (3) some inmates have discovered art as a tool they can share with their own family members and children, thus assisting them with re-connection; (4) art therapy has resulted in changing habitual behaviors and has strengthened cognition, especially for inmates with lower levels of education. Given these positive preliminary results, prisoner artwork might

be progressively acknowledged and leveraged by Parole and Probation as a vital, albeit underappreciated, tool for interaction and communication. More recently, the principal investigator has turned her experiences into an empirical research project at a higher education institution (HEI) where she is systematically analyzing the effectiveness of art therapy for prisoner rehabilitation. Having grown up in poverty and then completing high school while living in the streets, the first author is accustomed with having to overcome acute struggles, social exclusion and cultural hurdles for herself and others. Uniquely, it is her extensive life in the arts and as a tattoo artist for 25 years that gives her such broad insight and perspective toward societies forgotten and underground, leading her into unconventional and unexplored research territories and topics. Furthermore, with an Indigenous Australian background, she is uniquely positioned to identify and empathize with aboriginal inmates that comprise a significant proportion of prisoner populations today (more on this in Sections 2–3). It is this unique background that gives rise to the current research agenda.

Australia has a rich art history that has been influenced by both Indigenous and migrant peoples for generations and therefore offers manifold opportunities for meaningful engagement (Bonython, 1976; Stanhope et al., 2020; Whitelaw, 1991). Even so, art therapy in prisons remains widely under-researched in Australia and beyond and represents a major gap in the literature (Cohen-Liebman & Gussak, 2001; Cohen-Liebman, 2016; Giles et al., 2016; Hass-Cohen & Carr, 2008; King, 2016; Vito et al., 2007). Although Gussak did some empirical studies in the early to mid-2000s that are noted below in Section 4, art therapy has never been implemented widely for rehabilitative purposes to the extent that this would be desirable (e.g., Bolwerk et al., 2014; Cohen-Liebman & Gussak, 2001; D. Gussak, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2009a, 2009b). This limited uptake is regrettable. Given the diverse benefits that art therapy can have on inmate well-being and prisoner rehabilitation, mainstreaming prison art therapy is highly propitious (Schwartz et al., 2020; Tucker & Luetz, 2021). Despite the fact that “art therapy, and the art therapist, can be a tool for social change” (Green, 2019, p. 17), to date, there are no recorded studies in Australia which have investigated the therapeutic benefits of art in prison populations with measured outcomes (Djurichkovic, 2011). Literary analysis suggests that research tends to be hampered by limitations in methodological approaches that are suited to prison environments (Day, 2020; Richards & Ross, 2001; Wener, 2012). By engaging “inside” with inmates over the course of an 8-week art therapy program, this research agenda addresses this knowledge gap.

Appropriate delivery of art therapies within prisons needs to consider the cross-disciplinary fields required to evaluate art therapies appropriately to reach evidence-based conclusions (D. E. Gussak, 2016; Kapitan, 2011). Although this methodology is yet to be implemented widely, it holds promise for more robust research results and a stronger evidence base underpinning art therapy within prisons. Much prison research lacks longitudinal data due to the transient lifestyles of prisoners and relies heavily upon government-acquired statistics and data that can be devoid of human connection and interaction (Cunneen et al., 2013; Richards & Ross, 2001). This research design has been purposely created to increase response and participation rates, whilst avoiding both impact bias and self-selection bias (Martin et al., 2018; Ngauja, 2016; Olsen, 2011).

Building on 5 years of piloting, this research agenda transcends disciplinary boundaries by integrating qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis within a carefully tailored mixed-methods research design (Chen & Luetz, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By combining divergent methodologies to foster new knowledge and insights, the research methodological design presented in this paper embodies a prototype that promises to overcome the limitations of previous prison research (Banks et al., 1971; Banuazizi & Movahedi, 1975; Douglas et al., 1992; Haney et al., 1972; Richards & Ross, 2001; Tolich, 2014; Vito et al., 2007). This research agenda promises to facilitate creative interventions through sensitively attuned art therapy delivery. Benefits are expected to accrue to diverse stakeholder groups, including inmates, chaplaincy and parole services, voluntary facilitators, policymakers, criminologists, and taxpayers, among others. This methodological paper pertains to a multi-prison research project that is currently in progress; empirical results are anticipated in due course and will then be publicized separately.

This paper is structured as follows. Beginning with a brief overview of the historical evolution of the prison system in Australia, Section 2 establishes the contemporary incarceration context. It will argue that imprisonment in Australia cannot be meaningfully comprehended apart from its historical evolutionary background. Thereafter, Section 3 presents contemporary statistics and trends and discusses the levels of educational attainment of prisoner populations in Australia. This context is deemed essential to comprehend both the opportunities and limitations, and constraints inherent in art therapy program delivery in Australia. Next, Section 4 offers a review of past prisoner art therapy initiatives in Australia. Importantly, this section shows the scarcity of engagements in this area to date. Thereafter, Section 5 presents the multidimensional approaches, materials and methods propositioned by this research agenda, which constitutes the centerpiece of this paper. Discussion includes study context (Section 5.1), research design and aims (Section 5.2), data collection and outcome measures (Section 5.3), data analysis, triangulation, and synthesis (Section 5.4), and finally, proposal development, pretesting, retesting, and calibrating (Section 5.5). Finally, Section 6 recapitulates the main contribution of this multidimensional research agenda with a succinct concluding synthesis. It should be noted that this paper presents a blueprint for prison art therapy delivery that is discussed within an empirical research framework. As such, this paper presents a comprehensive research design rather than any data or findings. This focus is intended and offers opportunities for prison art therapy implementation both in Australia and internationally. After 5 years of piloting, the prototype has been refined to the point where the research design merits in-depth coverage of its constituent elements in its own right.

Australian Prison History Matters: Selected Evolutionary Perspectives

Australia's contemporary prison system cannot be meaningfully understood apart from the country's history, which saw a significant proportion of early Australian settlers transported from Britain as convicts. Between 1787 and 1868, many tens of thousands of convicts were shipped from Britain and Ireland to Australia (Plowright,

2020). It is estimated that approximately 20% of the Australian population may be descended from convicts who originally arrived during the colonial period (Shaw, 1966). Although these historical realities are readily acknowledged, Australia's incarceration history has been far from romantic (Baldry & Cunneen, 2014; Cunneen et al., 2013). This section covers selected evolutionary perspectives on Australia's contemporary prison history.

Australian prisons are as young as their host country, which was birthed at the time of colonization (Coyle, 2009; O'Toole, 2006). Hill (2019) has documented how sweeping shifts of free thought brought on by the Age of Enlightenment in England progressively altered social morale and thereby set the conditions for rapid increases in survival crime. This situation expanded poverty and enlarged the socio-economic divide across England and London, more specifically. These socioeconomic conditions thereby laid the foundations for alternative methods of punishment, eventually leading to prisoner population increases, public executions, floggings, and ultimately, transportation to the British Empire's offshore colonies (Cunneen et al., 2013; Grant & Jewkes, 2015; Hill, 2019; Walsh, 2006). Hill (2019) covers the birthing of the Transportation Act of 1717 in his investigation into Australia's penal history through a detailed account of the political and theological motivations that underpinned the pilfering and exploration quests of that era (Harding et al., 2019). Following the American War of Independence, King George began transporting convicts to Terra Nullius¹ (Hill, 2019). Upon arrival of the prison hulk ships, hostilities promptly ignited toward the traditional owners and inhabitants. Indigenous Australians were viewed by the Anglophones as "the least enlightened and ignorant on earth" (Hill, 2019, p. 116). Up until 1868, approximately 168,000 convicts were transported to Australia (Harding et al., 2019). A condescending perception persists to this day within streams of Anglophone Australian collective culture (Baldry & Cunneen, 2014; Kendall et al., 2020). Even though public executions were soon discontinued for colonizers and Anglophones, these punitive methods continued against Indigenous Australians as a means of pacification for the ensuing colonialization until the mid-1800s (Anderson, 2015; Cunneen et al., 2013; O'Toole, 2006). This double standard of prisoner (mis) treatment has persisted over time and still influences the Australian prison culture and management today (Gage, 2009; Russell & Baldry, 2020).

Regrettably, prison ruins are far too often misrepresented as a kind of progressive colonial history of Australia, sometimes even being revered as tourist attractions (Russell & Baldry, 2020). Relatedly, Finnane (1991) and Grant and Jewkes (2015) mention the 18th-century radial architectural design of many Australian prisons, which has been characterized as psychologically oppressive, specifically for Indigenous Australians (Grant & Jewkes, 2015). Furthermore, Grant and Jewkes (2015) also reflect upon the punitive models of prisoner re-education, which was aimed at exacting maximum punishment to break the human spirit of free will.

More recently, the World Wars exerted a strong social influence toward a prolific military presence within government-employed agencies, which have introduced conditions that permit officers to follow through with a dominant military-styled regime of control over the inmates (Kennedy, 1988; Nagle, 1978). This has nurtured and

sustained a culture of punishment over rehabilitation that remains within the bloodlines of prison culture today (Schwartz et al., 2020; Stephenson, 1982).

Australian Prison Populations Today: Statistics and Trends

Against the background presented in Section 2, the decade 1994 to 2004 saw Australian prison populations increase by 43%, with the upsurge considerably exceeding the 15% background increase in the Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2004). Since then, the prisoner population has increased further, from 24,171 in 2004 (ABS, 2004) to 40,591 in 2022 (ABS, 2022; Australian Law Review [ALR], 2018). Indigenous Australians have been particularly afflicted. In the words of the Australian Human Rights Commission, “First Nations Australians are the most incarcerated people in the world, making up just three percent of our population, but 29 percent of the prison population” (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2021, para. 8). Sadly, despite COVID-19 leading initially to a reduction in the prisoner population overall, Indigenous incarceration has since increased further. According to the latest figures available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), from 30 June 2020 to 30 June 2021, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners made up 30% of all prisoners,² and in Queensland alone, their incarceration increased by 8%.³ More recently, at 30 June 2022, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners accounted for 32% of all prisoners (ABS, 2022).

Statistics on Inmate Education and Cognitive Disparity

One of the most prominent issues restricting inmate rehabilitation is cognitive learning ability. Statistics published in 2019 show that 33% of inmates had not completed year 10, 17% had completed year 8 or under, 2% reported no schooling or access to schooling specifically in remote regions, whilst less than 19% had completed the equivalent of year 12 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2019). Statistics further reflect that tertiary education is uncommon; diploma 4.4%, bachelor degree 1.5%, and postgraduate study 0.5% (Baldry et al., 2018). Additionally, many prisoners experience social exclusion and are therefore more likely to have experienced abuse, neglect, and childhood trauma, in addition to mental health problems with insecure housing and unstable relationships (Guthrie et al., 2013; Morgan, 2018; Simpson et al., 2021; Social Exclusion Unit, 1997). It has been noted for decades that such cyclic disadvantages are a major characteristic of prison populations (Centre for Policy Development, 2020; Gage, 2009; United Nations Office on Crime and Drugs, 2010).

Additional Issues and Challenges

Geographical issues compound the problem. Queensland has inadequate support for remote Indigenous communities, in addition to complex legal systems, leaving Indigenous inmates poorly supported through the prison systems (Baldry et al., 2012,

2013; Black, 1987; French & Keyzer, 2012). Although census information has supported better statistical understandings by highlighting the myriad of cognitive and social difficulties for prisoners, this is an area still vastly misconceived by external academics and researchers. According to Hayman (2012), “Australian policymakers rely heavily on international research, including research in the United States demonstrating a compelling link between education and training and reductions in recidivism” (p. 41). In 2012, Hayman reported that Australian inmate populations were ahead of US vocational training engagements by nearly 20%. Notwithstanding, overall incarceration rates in that era were significantly lower than today (27,000 in 2012 compared to 40,591 in 2022) (ABS, 2022). This suggests that less overcrowding in prisons during this earlier era permitted more ease and better access to education (Harmes et al., 2019; Hayman, 2012). Less overcrowding is generally beneficial for prisoner well-being for a range of reasons (Schlosser, 1998).

In summary, there are clear suggestions from research that the delivery of education, while positively correlated with reductions in recidivism, is enduringly low in Australian prisons (Newton et al., 2018). This means that alternative methods of educational engagement with prisoners are needed to address current gaps. This is explored next.

Prison Art Therapy: Overview of Previous Studies and Initiatives

A review of the literature shows that art therapy programs are very sparse across the Australian prison landscape (Russell & Baldry, 2020; Sarre, 2010). While there has been “little systematic evaluation” (Djurichkovic, 2011, p. 1) of prison art programs worldwide, D. E. Gussak’s (2016) work in American forensic environments has been a cornerstone (D. E. Gussak & Rosal, 2016) for the development and implementation of art therapy programs across the U.S. (Prison Arts Collective, 2020; Prison Fellowship, 2018; Sydes et al., 2017), and this work has been a relevant platform for the Australian prison art therapy context. Although American trends in correctional settings have been closely replicated, art as a therapy has been left behind. In 2003, at the International Forum on Education in Correctional Settings Australia (IFECSA), McMillan (2003) argued for the necessity of creative arts programs in Australian Prisons (Djurichkovic, 2011). Despite repeated calls for rehabilitation-focused art in prisons, there has been very little uptake. Currently, in Queensland there are very basic art certifications offered through government-funded Technical and Further Education (TAFE). According to Hayman (2012), this government-funded TAFE education is not specifically geared toward the unique needs of prisoners. This point has been noted by Craig et al. (2013):

The vast majority of mentally disordered offenders come from very poor material, emotional and social conditions, and expecting an over intellectualized model of any kind to help them shows a massive ignorance and disrespect for the difficult lives our clients have. . . (p. 153)

External Providers of Prison Art Initiatives

TAFE certifications do not focus on self-expression or rehabilitation but are aimed primarily at maintaining enrollment numbers (Cale et al., 2019; Hayman, 2012; Newton et al., 2018). Importantly, these TAFE certificates do not function within a personal accountability paradigm, and their success has been questioned (Eileen Baldry, pers. comm. 15 March 2021; Cale et al., 2019).

A review of the literature suggests that there is an overwhelming need for more and better data on prison art therapy in Australia, with indications that programs require better facilitation and need to be far more cognizant of the manifold limitations associated with prison environments (Auty & Liebling, 2020; Belton & Barclay, 2008; Cohen-Liebman & Gussak, 2001; Craig et al., 2013; Dawe, 2007; Day et al., 2004, 2011; Djurichkovic, 2011; Giles et al., 2016; D. Gussak, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2013; D. E. Gussak, 2016; Hopkins et al., 2019; Howells et al., 1997, 2004; Junge, 2006; Wright, 2005). Furthermore, according to Junge (2006), much of the available prison research is methodologically flawed and requires a more holistic systems approach. Similarly, the Arts Council of Australia (Djurichkovic, 2011) covered an exhaustive literature review of art in prisons and found repeated thematic undercurrents that call for more quantitative data on art therapy within Australian prisons and a national program focus on consistent delivery and direction.⁴ Notwithstanding these calls for change, there has been very little progress made in Australia toward holistic art program delivery during the last decade.

The J-Block art project at Darwin's Women's Correctional Centre began as a Domestic and Family Violence (DV&FV) initiative (Belton & Barclay, 2008). However, the program facilitators felt that the variable nature of prison life and the transient rotation of inmates was challenging to remain focussed on therapy assisting with DV or FV. Similar problematic themes arose in other therapy programs (Byrne et al., 2001; Dean & Field, 2003; Heseltine et al., 2011; Hopkins et al., 2019). According to the literature, data collection routinely runs into unanticipated problems regarding the maintenance of inmate participation numbers; obtaining follow-up interviews; verbal communication; cultural barriers; and environmental shifts (Day, 2020; D. E. Gussak, 2016; Hopkins et al., 2019). Furthermore, facilitators have unintentionally hindered report processes due to inconsistent methods of program delivery, and there is a need for "highly trained staff" who can engage with the prison culture without inmates "hijacking" the perceived privilege (Byrne et al., 2001; Djurichkovic, 2011; Gannon et al., 2019; Giles et al., 2016). In hindsight, informal program approaches have been questioned as potentially initiating unintentional harm by triggering traumas (Djurichkovic, 2011), thus motivating a recommendation to assess the effectiveness of appropriate interpersonal art psychotherapy in Australia (Hackett et al., 2020).

Prison Art Education: Quantitative studies

Westwood (2015) documents a similar Indigenous art initiative with the external community, supported by Indigenous Arts in Prisons and Community (IAPC) and aided

internally through Victorian prisons. The Torch externally engages Indigenous inmates toward rehabilitation while encouraging life skills. In 2018, an evaluation of The Torch program was published by IAPC (Westwood, 2015). Despite the lack of longitudinal data, this initiative highlighted reduced recidivism rates of art program participants and additionally noted a secondary benefit in that participants were able to sell their art within Victorian prisons, which created livelihood opportunities post-release (Westwood, 2015). Contrastingly, in 2010 Queensland prevented inmates from selling art from inside as it was legally viewed as “proceeds of crime” (Djurichkovic, 2011). In short, experiences in this area have been very different in the two Australian states of Victoria and Queensland.

Adding to the differences, Giles (2016) extensively cross-referenced quantitative data from Western Australian prison education databases and Government census records, highlighting the relevance of any form of art education as a step toward rehabilitation motivation. However, Giles et al. (2016) argue that the measurable outcomes used to report the successful or unsuccessful facilitation of art education within prisons are truncated due to the security protocols of the authorizing bodies, impeded by the lifestyle factors of prison populations (nomadic, socially excluded, etc.). Relatedly, they call for “better measures of all impacts of art studies in prisons . . . including qualitative and humanitarian aspects” (p. 690).

Prison Art Education: Qualitative Studies

Arts Council Australia funded \$23,000 for a Risdon prison “Create” program, which employed external professional artists to work with eight prisoners over 6 months. Dean and Field (2003) found that such arts-based programs can target and redress offending behaviors while promoting self-discipline and healing. However, despite funding, facilitation became problematic as the external artists employed to work with inmates quickly found the prison population extraordinarily unique and challenging in that they were unlike any population the artists had previously worked with:

They had very few emotional or social skills and almost without exception see the world through a narrow and fatalistic vision. Many had never started and completed anything in their lives. . . (Djurichkovic, 2011, p. 20)

In summary, this literary overview highlights the dire need for art programs to be facilitated by professionals who understand the prison inmate culture and the prison environment and who can engage with the prison culture without inmates “hijacking” the art therapy process (Djurichkovic, 2011). Despite some hopeful attempts to implement art programs in Queensland prisons, there is no longevity with any programs, and their success has been questioned (Sarre, 2010).

Materials and Methods

Study Overview, Context, and Prospects

Incarceration rates in Queensland are second in the country behind New South Wales (ABS, 2022). Current models of rehabilitation, prison culture and prison programs are not fulfilling the demand for breaking the cycle of recidivism (Baldry, 2010; Baldry & Cunneen, 2014; Schwartz et al., 2020). Due to the continued increase in prison populations coinciding with budget cuts, programs such as art have been cut back in most Queensland prisons, and program access is being restricted due to increasing violence resulting in lockdowns of centers, thus increasing the need for contemporary interventions of a more targeted and holistic nature. Art is proven as a successful communication tool and therapeutic practice in prison environments while decreasing the risk of vicarious trauma for empathetic workers (Cohen-Liebman & Gussak, 2001).

Art is prevalent throughout history as a meaningful visual communication tool in holistic practices. Visual input can re-enforce learning. Using art in a meaningful manner can support self-actualization (Gardner, 2014). The “Change the Design of your Life” (CDL) program has been offered successfully at Borallon Correctional Training Centre and Brisbane Women’s Prison (2018–2019). This pilot program has run four full-length iterations and has seen a high proportion of participants successfully complete the program and continue with their art. Preliminary evidence suggests that this cross-disciplinary program assists in regulating emotional reactions in highly stressful conditions (Tucker & Luetz, 2021). Based on this early apparent success, there is a case to explore how art therapy can be most helpfully utilized to support Queensland inmates in rehabilitation (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Robinson, 2013).

The CDL program fits the requirements of the Women’s Custodial Estate Review (WCER) and therefore represents a fitting context for this research (Robinson, 2013). Art therapy within this program requires low to moderate emotional input, which limits stress and ensures that program participation is comfortable. As emphasized by Howells et al. (2004), keeping program participation within a certain hourly range is considered to be an essential requisite for successful cognitive interventions. The CDL program has the support and backing of the Queensland Correctional Services (QCS) psychological team. As described by Seiter (2017), pertinent processes, debriefings and inmate assessments can significantly contribute to best practice for evidence-based programs.

Research Rationale, Study Aims and Methodological Design Features

Art therapy in the prison context remains under-researched in Australia and represents a major knowledge gap even beyond its borders (Cohen-Liebman & Gussak, 2001; Cohen-Liebman, 2016; Djurichkovic, 2011; Giles et al., 2016; Hass-Cohen & Carr, 2008; King, 2016). By engaging with selected inmates over the course of an eight-session art therapy program, this research agenda addresses this knowledge gap. According to Green (2019), “art therapy, and the art therapist, can be a tool for social change” (p. 17). This notion is forcefully underpinned by Kaplan (2007) and Hocoy (2006). A

better understanding of the efficacy of art therapy in prisons is thus conjectured to support the welfare of prisoner populations and may benefit diverse stakeholder groups, including inmates, prison ministries, sentence management, parole services, voluntary facilitators, policymakers, criminologists, and taxpayers, among others.

Research Question. This research explores how art therapy can contribute to prisoner welfare, including inmate emotional well-being. For the purposes of this research, the concept of “art” will be comprehended in a broad and inclusive manner. As such, the art produced may comprise paintings, drawings, experimental/abstract, craft, coloring-in, collages, card-making, script-writing, architectural drawings, illustrations, shadings, and sketches, among others. (According to each prison’s security ratings, the availability of resources can be subject to change and may be altered to suit each inmate’s skills and interests.)

Study Design and Methodological Features. This research follows a mixed methods exploratory design of social inquiry, which is weighted in favor of qualitative data collection and analysis (Punch, 2014, pp. 308–326). Having arisen from 5 years of piloting and extensive prison volunteering experience, the study design is appropriate for answering the research question and addressing the knowledge gap (Spencer, 2011). The study also builds on prior prison art therapy experience in Queensland prisons (Tucker & Luetz, 2021).

As noted, this research follows a mixed methods approach set within an exploratory design paradigm that is weighted in favor of qualitative research and analysis rather than quantitative study (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Punch, 2014). Even so, the study does take into account the comparatively lower levels of educational attainment among prisoner populations (AIHW, 2018), as well as mental health disorders and cognitive disability and impairment, which tend to characterize contemporary prisoner communities (Baldry, 2011; Baldry et al., 2012, 2013; MacGillivray & Baldry, 2013). Hence the research design intentionally integrates selected Likert scale questions and qualitative (“visual”) questions, which can be easily comprehended and completed by inmates from a range of educational backgrounds.

The multi-week art therapy program schedule makes the design broadly reminiscent of Action Research, which Bryman (2016) describes as follows: “action researcher . . . work(s) on the diagnosis . . . and solution of a problem . . . the investigator becomes a part of the study” (p. 397). Furthermore, the study also involves active listening and reflexive practice (Creswell, 2014; Gardner, 2014).

Importantly, the methodological approach rests on a pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design, which can be “[u]seful in demonstrating certain relationships between variables and effects of treatments” (Kapitan, 2011, p. 60). This means that the same questionnaire is used both before and after the CDL program. It is acknowledged that due to the small size of the study, it may be difficult to conclusively establish cause-and-effect relationships (Punch, 2014). Nevertheless, despite this limitation, including multiple methods of data collection, analysis, and synthesis (next sections) reduces the possibility of bias and avoids blurring the lines between the art activity of the CDL program and the evaluation being conducted. This process is known as “methodological

triangulation” (Kapitan, 2011, p. 111) and exempts data analysis from being affected by the personal bias of the CDL art program facilitator. For this reason, the study design incorporates assistance with data analysis from external researchers. Finally, the study will also involve behavioral observation (as prisoners do artwork), which is immersive and unobtrusive (Kapitan, 2011; Liamputtong, 2010).

As noted, exploring the nexus between art therapy and prisoner welfare, the research leans on a qualitative research paradigm of inquiry and is focused on inductive approaches and theory generation (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Kapitan, 2011; Spencer, 2011). “If the research is conducted rigorously enough . . . and a significant correlation does exist, the researcher may add credence to the theory of projection in art therapy” (Deaver, 2002, p. 24). A rigorous scientific methodology thus supports the art therapist in interpreting the imagery that subconsciously emerges from the participants. The study duration is up to 18 months. Data collection was envisaged to commence in 2020 and has been delayed due to government-imposed restrictions arising from the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Participant Recruitment and Enrolment. The study will recruit research participants from Southern Queensland Correctional Centre (women’s prison), Borallon Correctional and Training Centre, and Woodford Correctional Centre (both men’s prisons). All participants will be screened and selected by Queensland Correctional Services (QCS), pending meeting all security and sentence management criteria. Prisoners will be made aware of the program through posters displayed within the prisons advertising the CDL program. The ultimate participant selection will be made by psychology teams and intelligence within correctional facilities. For the avoidance of doubt, it is emphasized here that the principal investigator has no influence over which participants will ultimately be selected for the study.

Based on prior piloting experience (Tucker & Luetz, 2021), the target for each program group begins with approximately 15 art therapy participants and thereafter typically reduces to an average of 8 to 12 remaining participants per prison. Furthermore, to ensure that the study yields valid and reliable findings, the questionnaire will be additionally completed by a matched sample/control group comprising the same number of inmates who are not completing the CDL program. Accordingly, this study will recruit a total of 16 to 24 research participants from each prison. With the CDL program being offered in multiple Queensland prisons,⁵ it is anticipated that this research will ultimately recruit between 48 and 72 participants. Assistance with supplies will be provided by Uniting Care Prison Ministry.

Data Collection and Outcome Measures

Data collection will involve three steps.

First, in agreement with the research question, the questionnaire will ask inmates to reflect on areas where art may affect—or may have affected—their emotional well-being. The following sample questions give an idea of the kinds of questions that are to be asked:

- How do you feel when you do art?
- What have you learned about yourself/life/others through art?

Questions were peer-reviewed by an unnamed ex-inmate for appropriateness and comprehension (cf. Section 5.5). The principal researcher will collect the completed questionnaires from the inmate participants prior to the start of the art sessions in Week 1 and at the end of the CDL program in Week 8. Session 8 marks the conclusion of the CDL program, which will recognize and celebrate the inmate artwork, which covers self-exploratory themes such as self-portraits, future goal maps, soundtrack to life/album covers, and any other artworks arising from the CDL program that the inmates wish to share. Participants who complete the CDL program will receive a certificate of completion signed by the Manager of Offender Development (MOD) and by the principal facilitator of the CDL program. Participants who drop out will be invited to complete an exit interview. Exit interviews are envisaged to take place after the CDL program concludes in Week 8. In addition to seeking to understand why some participants did not complete the program, exit interviews are also intended to limit and manage “self-selection bias” (Olsen, 2011).

The questionnaire tool will ask questions in the following six areas. Section 1 will ask demographic and background questions. Section 2 will investigate areas of inmate self-awareness, Section 3 will ask questions about the prison environment, and Section 4 will ask questions about the past 8 weeks. Sections 2, 3, and 4 will collect quantitative data. Thereafter, Sections 5 and 6 will collect qualitative data. Section 5 will ask visual questions, which inmates will be requested to answer as “visual responses” in their own artistic expression, and Section 6 will comprise open-ended questions. The research instrument is available (Supplemental Appendix A).

In order to ensure the validity of the data collection tool, several questions were used with adaptation from the 2010 Health and Wellbeing Survey (Annex C)⁶ Mental Health Prevalence and Wellbeing Study conducted by the Australian Government (AG). The findings from this data collection process are considered to be both valid and reliable (Australian Defence Forces [ADF], 2010). All the questions included in Section 4 of the Questionnaire were adapted from this AG survey (Questions 2.8, 2.10, 2.11, 2.15, 2.16, 4.21, 4.31, 4.34), however minor adjustments were accommodated to suit the prison environment more aptly. Relatedly, questions were loosely based upon the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI) process used for prisoner assessment (Heffernan et al., 2012).

Furthermore, in keeping with the 8-session duration of the CDL program, the time-frame for these questions was altered from 4 to 8 weeks. Finally, it should be noted that while this study is interested in the overall emotional welfare and well-being of CDL research participants, it does NOT intend to scrutinize or even diagnose inmates in areas of mental health, which is the responsibility and prerogative of Queensland Corrective Services (QCS). Given that prisoner rehabilitation is best assessed longitudinally over time, it is conceivable that the study may be extended beyond the time-frame currently envisaged.

Second, the principal researcher will take note of group dynamics and behaviors through personal note taking, journaling and prison staff input.

Third, an art exhibition (2–3-week duration anticipated), supported by Uniting Care Prison Ministry, will be held at a public venue or at a higher education institution campus, featuring inmate artwork generated by prisoners during the course of the 8-week CDL program. To avoid blurring the lines between the art activity of the CDL program and the evaluation being conducted, displayed artwork will be evaluated separately and independently of the art program by members of the public using the Anonymous Art Research Tool (AART), which was specifically developed for this purpose by the lead investigator. The development and use of art therapy assessment tools is important for advancing the field of art therapy. This has been highlighted by Betts (2006), “creative investigation can be fruitful” (p. 77). Furthermore, Oster and Crone (2004) state,

Art therapy assessments can be directed and/or non-directed, and can include drawings, paintings, and/or sculptures (Arrington, 1992). Referred to by some as projective techniques (Brooke, 1996), art therapy instruments are ‘. . . alluring with their ability to illustrate concrete markers of the inner psyche’ (p. 1).

The AART instrument is based on existing art evaluation tools that are discussed in the literature, including the Ulman Personality Assessment Procedure (UPAP) (Agell, 1990); Diagnostic Drawing Series (DDS) (Cohen, 1986); and the Formal Elements Art Therapy Scale (FEATS)⁷ (Gantt, 1990; D. Gussak, 2007). The AART tool represents a simplified measuring instrument for inexperienced viewers from which the major structural forms of art are line, shape, color, and emotive symbolism (Billingsley, 1998). The AART assessment tool does not follow the exact methodology of either the UPAP, DDS, or FEATS, as these assessments require specific structure and art supplies, which cannot be confirmed in some prisons. Therefore, the proposed AART instrument was based on these well-researched and structured methodologies and then adapted to be suited to the Queensland prison environment (Gantt & Anderson, 2009; Gantt et al., 1997; D. Gussak, 2007).

While the FEATS scale was used as a basis for developing the AART tool, this tool is limited by its ratio intervals of 1 to 5. Furthermore, the FEATS scale is limited in that it does not incorporate baseline data in its analysis to assess cognitive progression (Latessa et al., 2002). The AART tool, on the other hand, is ratioed at intervals of 1 to 10, thus allowing for more complexity, nuance and spread to be reflected in the evaluations. While Likert scales are viewed as dimensional, they can be limiting to a level of ordinance, creating reductionist data analysis, which can rob artwork of its unique meaning (Barron et al., 1973; Betts, 2006; Carol et al., 2000). Ensuring capacity to accommodate complexity is highlighted as important by Wiersma (2000): “A rating scale presents a statement or item with a corresponding scale of categories, and respondents are asked to make judgments that most clearly approximate their perceptions” (p. 311). The AART instrument is available (Supplemental Appendix B).

During Week 1 of the CDL program, inmates will be asked to complete a sketch of a “safe place” (e.g., home, house, garden, etc.). Inmate artists will use their Integrated Offender Management System (IOMS) number to identify securely and anonymously. This artwork will form the “initial” (baseline), against which their “final” artwork will be compared. Both the “initial” and “final” artwork will be evaluated by members of the public during the 2 to 3-week art exhibition.

Data Analysis, Triangulation, and Synthesis

Analyses of the three above-named data sources will be undertaken as follows:

First, questionnaires will be analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively (Punch, 2014). More specifically, Sections 2, 3 and 4 of the questionnaires will be analyzed quantitatively, and Sections 5 and 6 will be analyzed qualitatively. As mentioned, emphasis will be given to qualitative data analysis. Notwithstanding, the quantitative data analysis is expected to support and confirm the qualitative data analysis.

Qualitative data analysis will follow the norms commonly used in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016) and will be undertaken using thematic analysis, which Bryman (2016) defines as a process “used in connection with the analysis of qualitative data to refer to the extraction of key themes” (p. 697). “Analysis in qualitative design tends toward inductive methods that move from the specifics of a situation to broader understandings plausibly revealed by the data” (Kapitan, 2011, p. 212). Furthermore, quantitative data analysis may be aided by SPSS25, and qualitative data analysis may be supported by Leximancer, NVivo and/or similar computer software.

In practical terms, it will be necessary to separate out those respondents from Week 1 who do not complete the CDL program. While the views of these participants will not be discounted entirely, their perspectives will be analyzed separately from the other participants who do complete the program and submit completed questionnaires in both Week 1 and Week 8. This process will limit response bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 157).

Second, the journaling process will involve reflective considerations on the part of the principal researcher, taking into account possible sudden alterations in behaviors, which can manifest in prison environments (Campbell, 2015; D. E. Gussak & Rosal, 2016; Seiter, 2017). In this context, reflective practice and keen observation can take note of “unconscious phenomena [which] manifest themselves in an individual’s behavior. An attentive observer can detect them without difficulty, while the observed person remains quite unaware. . .” (Jung, 1980, p. 276). This approach assists in comprehending the overall collective unconsciousness of the prison and individual, which Spencer (2011) has characterized as follows:

identities and complex cultural meanings are the object of study, understanding is always positioned and subjective. Therefore, it can be seen that the knowledge produced by research, through the visual researcher’s collection and interpretation of data is socially constructed. Hence only by pursuing a reflexive approach, in which a rigorous analysis of motives behind the interpretative path chosen, takes place, might a tentative sense of validity be achieved. (p. 141)

Furthermore, journaling will record the observations empirically, including any relevant autobiographical conversations that may take place throughout the 8-week CDL program. This ensures that analysis does not take on the researcher's personal biases or become "interpretations of interpretations or second-order stories" (Kapitan, 2011, p. 210). In this way, it will be ensured that the inmate's artwork and story will remain honest to the artist/inmate, which is the subject of data analysis conducted under step three (next).

Third, despite all collected artworks being meaningful in their own right, there is merit in a systematic process of analyzing the final exhibited artworks. This will involve a process of "winnowing" data so as to extract key themes. Intentional "winnowing" of imagery data will help the research to focus on those areas related to prisoner well-being. The benefits of "winnowing" imagery data have been described by Creswell and Creswell (2018) as follows:

Because text and image data are so dense and rich, all of the information cannot be used in a qualitative study. Thus, in the analysis of the data, researchers need to 'winnow' the data (Guest et al., 2012), a process of focusing in on some of the data and disregarding other parts of it. (p. 192)

The prominence of themes will emerge in colors, imageries, symbolisms, and semiotics. Through visual analysis (D. Gussak, 2007; D. E. Gussak & Rosal, 2016), words and images will be coded and recorded through a deconstruction process known as Tesch's Eight Steps (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) on a scale from negative to positive. Each step will lean toward the "[i]diographic, which is concerned with what is unique and variable" (Kapitan, 2011, p. 212). The principal researcher will incorporate an adaptation of a process used in piloting this research, previously called the Symbolic Repetition Scale (Tucker & Luetz, 2021). Importantly, the inmates are encouraged to write their own personal reflections and stories to complement their artworks that are exhibited in the final week. Participating in their own story-making and story-telling process has the capacity to transform and re-imagine lives (Maruna, 2001). These personal artist statements will add weight to the final analysis of inmate artwork and will thus contribute to ensuring that the interpretations are valid. This approach "implies a purposeful and constant process of steering toward validity, and negotiating the reefs of misinterpretation" (Spencer, 2011, p. 158).

Proposal Development: Pretesting, Retesting and Calibrating

This multidimensional research proposal was developed through an iterative process that involved input and feedback from an interdisciplinary team of stakeholders. Proposal development incorporated several review, revision, and pretesting cycles. Development took approximately 5 years to complete and benefited from multiple rounds of input. Feedback was provided by former inmates, academics, three Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) boards, the Queensland Correctional Services (QCS) Research Ethics Committee, a Senior Project Manager and voting member of

the BioDesk Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC), the State Coordinator State Chaplaincy Board (SCB) for prisons, a Uniting Care Community Engagement Officer, a Professor of Criminology at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), the former Coordinator of the Uniting Care First Peoples Prison Ministry, and an artist and academic with expertise and experience in the interpretation and analysis of visual art. Peer review and pretesting led to several improvements and ultimately confirmed the adequacy of the data collection instruments (Bryman, 2016, pp. 260–261).

Concluding Synthesis

This paper has intentionally presented a comprehensive research design rather than any data or findings. Set within an empirical mixed methods research framework and experimental practice paradigm, this paper has sought to showcase a conceptual blueprint for prison art therapy delivery that may be implemented in prisons both within and beyond the borders of Australia. Five years of piloting have refined the multidimensional prison art therapy prototype to the point where it merits coverage of its constituent elements. Supported by creative and experience-informed practice, the multidimensional methodological design propositions to interlace scientific and empirical discovery in support of a more humane criminological theory generation. By combining divergent methodologies to foster new knowledge and insights, the research agenda presented in this paper embodies a prototype that promises to overcome the limitations of previous research approaches (Richards & Ross, 2001). Importantly, by facilitating creative interventions through sensitively attuned art therapy delivery, this cross-disciplinary research promises benefits for diverse prison stakeholder groups, including inmates, chaplaincy and parole services, sentence management, voluntary facilitators, policymakers, criminologists, and taxpayers, among others. In an age of AI, prison privatization, and algorithm-driven data mining and analysis, human-centric prison art therapy may play a far more prominent role in facilitating community, rehabilitation, healing, and reconciliation while at the same time breaking the cycle of recidivism to benefit both offenders and society (Baldry, 2010; Baldry et al., 2018; Baldry & Cunneen, 2014; Bolwerk et al., 2014; Hayman, 2012; Maruna, 2001; Peck, 1998; Schwartz et al., 2020; Westwood, 2015).

This study was approved by the CRA Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC no. EC00354) on 9 November 2020 and 19 October 2021 (Supplemental Appendix C), the Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) Research and Evaluation Committee on 15 February 2022 (Supplemental Appendix D), and the UnitingCare Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Ref.: Tucker_20221221) on 9 February 2023 (Supplemental Appendix E). The first author of this paper is the first ex-prisoner to successfully receive ethics approval from QCS to move forward with data collection in art therapy. This methodological paper pertains to a multi-prison research project that is currently in progress (Supplemental Appendix F). A forthcoming publication of the empirical results is envisaged in due course.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

This study is conceptualized according to the guidelines of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) (National Statement (2007) developed jointly by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), the Australian Research Council (ARC) and Universities Australia, and published by the Australian Government (2007) <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research-2007-updated-2018> (accessed 7 April 2023). The study was approved by the CRA Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC no. EC00354) on 9 November 2020 and 19 October 2021 (Supplemental Appendix C), the Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) Research and Evaluation Committee on 15 February 2022 (Supplemental Appendix D), and by the UnitingCare Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Ref.: Tucker_20221221) on 9 February 2023 (Supplemental Appendix E). The first author of this paper is the first ex-prisoner to successfully receive ethics approval from QCS to move forward with data collection in art therapy. This methodological paper pertains to a multi-prison research project that is currently in progress (Supplemental Appendix F). A forthcoming publication of the empirical results is envisaged in due course.


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Notes

1. The Latin expr. *Terra nullius* ('tɛrə nʌ' lɪəs/, plural terrae nullius) means “nobody’s land.” Evidently, in relation to Australia this term is a flagrant misnomer, given that the continent, Tasmania and several smaller islands have historically comprised many dozens of “language, social or nation groups of Aboriginal Australia” (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies [AIATSIS], 1996, para. 1); <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia> (last accessed on 9 April 2023).
2. www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/prisoners-australia/latest-release#aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-prisoners
3. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/prisoners-australia/latest-release#state-territory>
4. Following Djurichkovic’s (2011) case study and appeal from Arts Council Australia for more robust and quantitative data collation on art therapies in Australian prisons, no further piloting occurred since. Maragaret Burin (2014) in *The World Today* reports on an Indigenous Art program beginning in NSW prisons titled Arts Apology. Once again, despite its perceived success, there is no further information available.
5. Borallon Training and Correctional Centre (BTCC), Southern Queensland Correctional Centre (SQCC), and Woodford Correctional Centre (WCC).
6. <https://www.defence.gov.au/Health/DMH/Docs/10MHPWSreport-AnnexC.pdf>
7. The FEATS art therapy scale was developed to measure 14 different global variables, including prominence of color, problem solving, space, color fit, developmental level, implied energy, details of objects and environment, logic, realism, line quality, perseverance, and personal identity (Carol et al., 2000).

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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