

Exploring the use of Traditional Art Forms in Healing

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the significant role of traditional art forms such as music, dance, storytelling, and visual arts in healing practices across different cultures. By analyzing the historical and contemporary integration of these art forms in therapeutic contexts, it highlights how traditional arts foster emotional expression, spiritual connection, and psychological well-being. The paper examines case studies of their use among Indigenous populations and explores the psychological benefits of art-making as a coping mechanism in trauma recovery. Additionally, it discusses the challenges of incorporating traditional art into modern biomedical healing practices, including cultural ownership, authenticity, and the risks of commercialization. The study argues that traditional art forms, when adapted respectfully and thoughtfully, can complement modern healthcare by addressing emotional and spiritual dimensions of healing.

Keywords: Traditional art, healing, art therapy, cultural practices, Indigenous healing, storytelling.

INTRODUCTION

Today, art seems to be perceived universally as a medium of expression offered for the mental equilibrium of every person. Through time and culture, artistic expression has experienced a series of transformations. From the religious or magical role, it once held in certain cultures, through the emotional purge medium, emotional expression, or representation of values, art has become for many a way of relaxing or integrating it into a Sunday afternoon with friends. Besides having a socializing role, art can play a role in healing, as will be seen a little further. Traditional art forms do not conceptualize themselves as a separate, observant, and objectifying intervention, but as a way of getting in touch with both self and others, with a collective or community, to express or exteriorize an emotion, an internal state, or an affect of understanding, healing, communicating, sharing, or socializing. This paper explores the role of traditional art forms as a healing agency, trying to answer the following questions: how can the old ways of making art be useful in today's healing practice? What transformations have they undergone from their original functions to their contemporary forms? And what stands in their way until they become therapeutic resources? The aim of this paper is to investigate the ways in which music, storytelling, traditional dance, and rug iconography can contribute to the healing processes of individuals, providing better insight through a personalized approach into theories and concepts belonging to fields such as psychology, art therapy, and cultural studies [1, 2].

Historical Context of Traditional Art Forms in Healing

Ancient Greeks and Egyptians already incorporated dance, music, and storytelling in their healing practices. In the societies of Asia, healing rituals often included calligraphy and image drawing, as well as immersing patients in a multi-sensory environment composed of fine scents, art objects, music, and the sound of water. The Kokoro, or heart study, is an old Japanese science associated with open-air art that cultivated awareness of the nature-aided healing processes between people, and this art is a core specialty

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in some of the caregiving programs held in Aarhus. Storytelling has been accustomed to performing multiple healing functions. Some carry a strong religious awakening, a spiritual rebirth message, or a positive-thinking motivational tone meant to give people creational strength, a purpose, and a sense of hope in life. There can also be psycho-logic storytelling, by which the storyteller adapts his therapeutic approach to a case raiser, by mapping the narrator's personality, beliefs, coping strategies, resilience, and finally describing the performance syndrome archetype of a participant. In addition, there have been content analysis studies undertaken that provided detailed descriptions of healing story elements. Many of the beautiful stories from early healing rituals are still alive in mythological shape up to the present day [3, 4]. One of the prime functions of a placebo is to produce hope. That's why I believe that real and validated healing traditions can be and are an integrated part of the national social, sick care, and indwelling care system if those are dream and belief compatible with the national traits of the therapeutic culture. The traditional art forms have mainly been maintained in social care, where the bankrupt individuals needed something far more propitiating and healing on a metaphysical plane of everyday emergencies. Modern medicine has, through scientific reasoning, dropped many of the traditional healing rituals, herbs, and methodologies and has, in order to diminish the risk of confusion between terrible acts such as murder, issue-order-answering, help messaging, physical work point assuring, and others, removed 'frills,' so to speak, with artistic performances unless 'arts' have proven their usefulness in chemical balances, drug development, and gene therapies, as fun or in such places where operationally a 'blind treatment' would make sense [5, 6].

Psychological and Emotional Benefits of Traditional Art Forms

The instinct to create and engage in traditional art forms such as beading, embroidery, weaving, and basketry brings a rush of fulfilling emotions that have benefits on mental and emotional health. It may serve as a coping mechanism and a way of expressing emotions that are otherwise difficult to express. Creative and artistic expression as a result of trauma yields beautiful works of art, showing creativity and strength of character. Additionally, traditional art forms, methods, and practices are gaining more attention as a result of tribal members and health professionals seeking out alternative forms of healing. This interest, coupled with advances in science, has advanced research on the positive connection between practicing creativity and health while connecting our emotional life with our physical existence. The wearing of traditional art forms and adornments could also lead to improvements in well-being and vitality. In reawakening traditional practices, traditional crafts are another way of revitalizing interest in using creativity as a healing force. As a result of physical experience, the making and use of these art forms bypass intellectual conclusions and result in profound internal experiences [2, 7]. Furthermore, arts and social sciences studies reported that the indigenous community preferred traditional ceremonies, funeral songs, and healing rituals to cope with day-to-day stresses. The arts can evoke community and family association, reconnecting members and pulling together those who have become isolated and without protective social factors. The older generations have acknowledged that the strength gained through such cultural activities will be there for the emotional support of generations to come. While the effectiveness of traditional art practices is considered to heal gently through "storying" and is incrementally supportive and potentially endearing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, additions may not always be integrated into programs of contemporary therapeutic support in Australian mainstream culture. If embraced and incorporated at other levels of social community, their accessibility to participants and the relationship to cultural custodians can still be transformed [8, 9].

Case Studies and Examples of Traditional Art Forms in Healing

Case Study 1: Using the performance of make and storytelling in the villages of Vanuaso, Tavewa, and Yaro to respond to the trauma of World War II in their village in Fiji.

Case Study 2: Healing of Indigenous "stolen generations." This includes well-publicized individual and collective initiatives such as programs working through dance and story.

Another project that has been gathering essays and personal accounts from those who have had a cultural arts experience with their own care and healing elaborates on the following themes:

- The person practicing or experiencing a traditional art form (the artist) knowingly or unknowingly links with others or a worldview greater than the self. The artists often acknowledge feeling part of something larger than themselves.
- Traditional or cultural art forms are typically based on group or community involvement. The creation of a traditional art form often necessitates the involvement of many individuals and is created within ongoing group or community ceremonies and customs.

- In a neoliberal, Western medical system, programs or projects that successfully integrate traditional or cultural art forms into care or healing usually adapt the care to individual needs [10, 11].

Some of the positive outcomes people listed after their experience with a cultural art have included:

- a return to or increase of sense of spiritual connectedness
- increased feelings of self-worth
- recovery from a physical illness, shortening the duration or increasing the ease of their journey
- decreased levels of psychological distress
- increased immunity from physical and psychological feelings of insecurity
- improved mental health and quality of life
- reduced feelings of distress from chronic ongoing health conditions [12, 13].

Challenges and Considerations in Integrating Traditional Art Forms into Healing Practices

There are numerous challenges and culturally specific concerns that need to be addressed when considering how traditional art forms practiced by Indigenous peoples might be integrated or re-contextualized into contemporary healing practices. Although traditional art forms offer numerous benefits, there are compelling reasons why they may not be entirely congruent with how healing is currently conceptualized within biomedicine. For instance, some health care providers might be uncomfortable using clay or song to address health issues, whereas others who are more closely aligned with art therapy and other psychotherapeutic practices might find these traditional-based arts practices too unstructured. This might well be the case even though they might have no problem incorporating some sort of traditional symbolic framework into their biomedically grounded practice. It would be unwise for non-practicing individuals, who are guided purely by a wish to make use of traditional-based arts practices, to ignore this issue of cultural ownership [14, 15]. Another key challenge involves determining the authenticity of a given individual's claims to being a traditional practitioner of a given art, song, or dance. Presuming this challenge can be met, other critical issues remain, not the least of which is the potential threat of commercializing such traditional art forms. How these art forms are taught and by whom must also be included in the conversation. There is no point in providing basic-level employment training in the traditional arts forms of a given Indigenous people if this contributes to diminishing the level of cultural and practical knowledge possessed by a given community. Heavy consideration should also be given to the necessary depth of training required for an artist-healer to be competent when working with individuals or communities on complex health issues, as well as the potential toll that doing such work may have on them. Each Indigenous community should also be given the chance to consider the specific impacts, including the possible benefits and potential liabilities, of having these art forms deployed in new ways. Commentary from Elders can be quite variable, depending on their traditional worldview and the specific cultural and spiritual paradigms that guide them; some Elders are eager for their ceremonial practices, songs, and dances to be offered more broadly, while others are deeply private and cautious. Contemplation of the implications of sharing and who might actually benefit should also be a part of any conversation [16, 17].

CONCLUSION

Traditional art forms hold profound potential as healing modalities by providing emotional, spiritual, and psychological support. Their integration into modern healthcare practices offers a holistic approach to healing that respects the emotional and cultural dimensions of well-being. While challenges such as cultural ownership and commercialization must be carefully managed, the benefits of incorporating traditional art into therapy are manifold. By acknowledging and respecting the cultural origins of these practices, traditional art forms can serve as effective tools for promoting healing, fostering community connection, and addressing the complex interplay between emotional and physical health.

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