INFLUENCE OF FOLK-ART APPRECIATION ON MENTAL HEALTH OF COLLEGE STUDENTS: AN ANALYSIS BASED ON COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Chengquan Kuang*

Abstract
Appreciation of art works is a popular optional course in Chinese colleges. From the perspective of pedagogy and cognitive psychology, this paper aims to disclose the influence of the folk-art appreciation on the mental health of college students. First, an activity model and a plan were developed for the folk-art appreciation. Then, 600 students in a college of Henan Province, China, were surveyed. Their mental health levels were evaluated by Self-Rating Depression Scale (SDS). On this basis, 70 college students were selected for contrastive experiment, using the designed plan for folk-art appreciation. The results show that folk-art appreciation activities can effectively alleviate the depressive symptoms of college students, especially the mild depressive symptoms, thus enhancing their mental health. The research findings enrich the knowledge on mental health education of college students.

Key words: Cognitive Psychology, Folk-Art Appreciation, Mental Health, College Students.

INTRODUCTION
As early as in ancient times, humans began to express their emotions and desires through painting, while individuals can feel the process of painting creation and aesthetics by painting appreciation, thus alleviating emotional conflicts and gaining physical and mental relaxation (Ketch, Rubin, Baker et al., 2015). With the accelerating pace of life and the increasingly fierce competition of society, contemporary college students have had more or less psychological problems of different degrees. At present, in order to cultivate talents with comprehensive qualities, colleges and universities offer art appreciation courses. It requires constant exploration and verification in college art education on how to solve the existing psychological problems of college students and improve their psychological quality through the courses of folk-art appreciations.

Studies have shown that (Koh & Shrimpton, 2014) compared with other groups of the same age, college students are a high-risk group of psychological problems, where more than 60% have moderate or above mental health problems, mainly dominated by interpersonal sensitivity, somatization, anxiety and depression, and depression is the most prominent. Foreign studies on the aesthetic appreciation of paintings have achieved rich results, involving the preference of paintings under different occupations and educational backgrounds (Lim, 2017), and the relationship between painting and physiological changes through use of the skin conductance to measure the physiological data of the experimental subjects (Lloyd, 1999). Chinese scholar, Li’ou introduced the two forms of art therapy of American painting and music in detail (Jakesch & Leder, 2009). Tang Wanjie combined group counselling and painting appreciation, finding...
that painting appreciation can improve college students' mental health and depressive symptoms (Bozikas, Kosmidis, Giannakou et al., 2011). Li Hong pointed out that field-dependent variables are closely related to painting appreciation (Spence & Gwinner, 2014). Qi Junzi found that painting art appreciation can improve college students’ self-evaluation and self-awareness (Yorgason, Linville, & Zitzman, 2008).

Throughout the field of painting therapy and education psychology at home and abroad, it can be found that the current empirical research on the influence of folk-art works appreciation on the mental health of college students needs to be further strengthened (Goodwin & Deady, 2013).

Based on the above analysis, this paper constructs an activity model and a plan for the folk-art appreciation. Through the form of group counselling, the Symptom Check List-90 (SCL-90) scores and Self-rating Depression Scale (SDS) scores of 70 selected college before and after the experiment were obtained. Then, the comparative analysis was conducted to reveal how the folk-art appreciation influences the mental health of college students.

MODEL CONSTRUCTION AND PLAN DESIGN FOR FOLK- ART APPRECIATION ACTIVITY

Model construction of folk-art appreciate on activity

In this study, the folk-art appreciation activity consists of the horizontal system and vertical system. The horizontal system is the expression of the objective aesthetic elements, and the vertical system is the subjective psychological process. The specific contents are as follows:

(1) Horizontal system-the expression of the objective aesthetic elements

The folk-art appreciation activities can be expressed in three aspects: painting creation, painting analysis and painting appreciation (Williams, 1996), and the selection of painting works is the core of folk-art appreciation. In the process of painting creation, the painter is guided to show the affirmation of self-worth with their own efforts, and express their emotions in daily life; the process of painting analysis is focused on the spiritual beauty, behavioural beauty and physical beauty of the paintings, and appreciation of art harmony in painting (Warne & Mcandrew, 2008); for the painting appreciation, a warm and beautiful visual and auditory environment should be first offered, and then the participants can feel and experience the paintings based on the principles of interactivity, pleasure, visualization, experience and affectivity, so as to better give play to the mental regulation role of folk-art appreciation through the communication and interaction between the appreciators and between the appreciators and their instructors.

(2) Vertical system-the subjective psychological process of appreciation subjects

The subjective psychological process of folk-art appreciation can be roughly divided into the preparatory stage, the prosperous stage and the continuous stage (Long, Gren, Mihalopoulos et al., 2013). The preparatory stage can be summarized as two mental activities: subjective attention and expectation for art works appreciation, and the former is the beginning of the psychological process of painting appreciation, which is related to the psychological state of the appreciator itself on one hand, and affected by the style and colour etc. of the painting on the other hand. The prosperous stage of painting aesthetics is the most active and important stage of the appreciator's psychological activities, in which the emotion of the appreciator is the main driving force to stimulate the subject's motivational imagination and strengthen the perception, so as to sublimate the psychological activities. At the continuous stage, the appreciation subjects relive, reflect and precipitate the psychological changes and feelings in the appreciation process of the paintings, thus deepening the cognition and understanding of the art works appreciation (Lengen, 2015).

Plan design of the folk-art appreciation activity

In order to create a safe and harmonious psychological environment, this paper analyses the influence of folk-art appreciation on college students' mental health by means of group participation. The entire activity was divided into three phases, nine weeks in total, once a week for a duration of 90 minutes.

(1) Introduction phase

In this phase of one week, the main purpose is to enable the participating students to eliminate concerns, understand the content and purpose of the activities, improve their cognitive ability, and promote communication between the instructors and students and between the
INFLUENCE OF FOLK ART APPRECIATION ON COLLEGE STUDENTS’ MENTAL HEALTH

Research methods

600 students of Grade 1-4 in a college of Henan Province were selected as the research objects. Their overall mental health level and depressive symptoms were measured and evaluated through the Symptom Checklist 90 (SCL-90) and the Self-rating Depression Scale (SDS). Using the principle of voluntary registration, 70 students with both the SCL-90 score above 2.18 and SDS score above 40 were selected as experimental subjects, who were divided into experimental group (35) and control group (35) with the pre-measured data of both groups balanced as much as possible. According to the designed plan of folk-art appreciation activity, the experiment was conducted. After the experiment, the SCL-90 and SDS scores were measured again for the two groups of students. Then, a comparative analysis was conducted for the data of the two groups before and after the experiment, to draw the conclusions ultimately.

Analysis of research results

Descriptive statistics on the mental health level of college students

Figure 1 shows the proportion of mild, moderate, and moderate depression levels before the experiment; Table 1 lists the t and p values of SDS and SCL-90 at different levels of depression, which indicates that most of the college students before the experiment were in mild and moderate depression.

Table 1 t and p values of SDS and SCL-90 at different levels of depression

| Level   | t value SDS | t value SCL-90 | p value SDS | p value SCL-90 |
|---------|-------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|
| Mild    | -0.308      | .442           | .749        | .651           |
| Moderate| .836        | .703           | .402        | .501           |
| Severe  | -.239       | 1.513          | .808        | .212           |
| Overall | -.202       | 1.000          | .828        | .272           |

Influence of folk-art appreciation on college students’ mental health

(1) Significant difference test of pre- and post-test depressive symptoms between the experimental group and the control group

Figure 2 shows the pre- and post-test M values of depressive symptoms between the experimental group and the control group. It can
be seen from the figure that the M value of the control group didn’t change obviously before and after the experiment, and there is no significant difference (t=1.068, p>0.05); the M value of the experimental group was significantly changed, and the t value test showed a significant difference (t=4.102***, p<0.001). The post-test results of the two groups did not show significant difference (t=1.319, p>0.05), indicating that the folk-art appreciation can improve the mental health of college students to a certain extent.

(2) Influence of folk-art appreciation on the overall mental health of mild, moderate and severe depression subjects

Figure 3, 4 and 5 show the statistical analysis results of the pre- and post-test differences in the overall mental health of the mild, moderate and severe depression subjects in the experimental group and the control group. It can be seen from the figures that after the experiment, the mental health level of the subjects in all the mild, moderate, and severe depression level was improved; the subjects at the mild depression level was significantly different before and after the experiment (t=3.288, p<0.01), while the difference between moderate and severe subjects was not significant (p>0.05). It indicates that the appreciation of folk-art has a more significant effect on improving the mental health of subjects with mild depression.

Figure 3. Differences in overall mental health level before and after mild subjects

(3) Analysis for pre- and post-test results of the overall mental health in the experimental group at different levels

Figure 6 shows the pre- and post-test results of the overall mental health in the experimental group at different levels. It can be seen from the figure that the post-test results were significantly lower than the pre-test results, and the overall mental health levels of the subjects at different depression levels were significantly different (F =4.646**, p<0.01), indicating that the folk-art appreciation can significantly improve the mental health of college students.
Figure 6. Pre- and post-test results of the overall mental health level of the experimental group at different levels

(4) Influence of the folk-art appreciation on various factors of mental health in the experimental group

Figure 7 to 9 compare the difference in M value, t value and p value of each factor of SCL-90 in the experimental group respectively. It can be seen from the figures that the post-test values of the SCL-90 factors in the experimental group were smaller than the pre-test ones, where depression, paranoia, psychosis, interpersonal sensitivity and somatization factors are significantly different from pre-tests; in addition, the pre-test total scores of mental health and pre-test ones also show significant differences, indicating that folk-art works can effectively improve college students’ depression symptoms and promote the mental health.

Figure 7. Comparison of M values of various factors of SCL-90 in experimental group

Figure 8. Comparison of t-values of various factors of SCL-90 in experimental group

Figure 9. Comparison of p-values of SCL-90 factors in experimental group
CONCLUSIONS

A model of folk-art appreciation activity consisting of horizontal system and vertical system was constructed: the horizontal system is the expression of the aesthetic elements by the appreciation objects of folk-art works, and the vertical system is the subjective psychological process;

The folk-art appreciation activity was divided into three stages: introduction, implementation and end. Each stage consists of four parts: painting creation, painting analysis, painting appreciation, and exchange discussion;

In the form of group counselling, 70 subjects were divided into experimental group and control group. The pre- and post-test scores of SDS and SCL-90 were compared between the two groups, concluding that folk-art appreciation activities can effectively improve college students’ depressive symptoms, especially for mild depression, and enhance their overall mental health.

Acknowledgement

(1) Fundamental research funds for the central universities, Study on the integration of traditional family visual elements and family virtues, NO.2019CDSXYS0034.

(2) Chongqing social science planning and cultivation project, Study on alienation of productive protection of intangible cultural heritage in Chongqing, NO.2018PY89.

REFERENCES

Bozikas, V. P., Kosmidis, M. H., Giannakou, M., Adamopoulou, A., & Garyfallos, G. (2011). Humor appreciation of captionless cartoons in obsessive-compulsive disorder. Annals of General Psychiatry, 10(1), 31-36.

Goodwin, J., & Deady, R. (2013). The art of mental health practice: the role of drama in developing empathy. Perspectives in Psychiatric Care, 49(2), 126-134.

Jakesch, M., & Leder, H. (2009). Finding meaning in art: preferred levels of ambiguity in art appreciation. The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology, 62(11), 2105-2112.

Ketch, R. A., Rubin, R. T., Baker, M. R., Sones, A. C., & Ames, D. (2015). Art appreciation for veterans with severe mental illness in a va psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery center. Arts & Health, 7(2), 172-181.

Koh, E., & Shrimpton, B. (2014). Art promoting mental health literacy and a positive attitude towards people with experience of mental illness. International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 60(2), 169-174.

Lengen, C. (2015). The effects of colours, shapes and boundaries of landscapes on perception, emotion and mentalising processes promoting health and well-being. Health & Place, 35, 166-177.

Lim, Y. J. (2017). Relationship between positive mental health and appreciation in Korean individuals. International Journal of Psychology, 52(3), 220-226.

Lloyd, C. (1999). Art as therapy within occupational therapy in mental health settings: a review of the literature. British Journal of Occupational Therapy, 62(1), 31-35.

Long, K. N. G., Gren, L. H., Mihalopoulos, N., & Long, P. M. (2013). 121. Painting a picture of mental health among urban indian secondary students. Journal of Adolescent Health, 52(2), S79-S80.

Spence, R., & Gwinner, K. (2014). Insider comes out: an artist’s inquiry and narrative about the relationship of art and mental health. Arts & Health, 6(3), 254-265.

Warne, T., & Mcandrew, S. (2008). Painting the landscape of emotionality: colouring in the emotional gaps between the theory and practice of mental health nursing. International journal of mental health nursing, 17(2), 108-115.

Williams, G. (1996). Irving kenneth zola, (1935–1994): An appreciation. Sociology of Health & Illness, 18(1), 107-125.

Yorgason, J. B., Linville, D., & Zitzman, B. (2008). Mental health among college students: do those who need services know about and use them? Journal of American College Health, 57(2), 173-182.