

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES**



**The Live Model-Drawing Experience and Mental
Wellbeing: A Phenomenological Study**

Anna Marie Newkirková

Thesis Supervisor: PhDr. Marek Urban, Ph.D.

Bachelor Thesis

Prague, 2024

Declaration of Authorship

I declare that I have conducted the research in this thesis independently. I declare that I have written the contents of this thesis independently. All sources and literature used have been cited. The work was not used to obtain another or the same title.

Prague, 5th of January, 2024.

Anna Marie Newkirková

.....

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank first, my supervisor PhDr. Marek Urban Ph.D. for the guidance and support throughout this project. I would also like to thank my participants for volunteering their time and entrusting me to tell their stories. I would like to thank my family and my friends for giving me the strength to continue throughout my academic career. None of this would be possible without each and every single one of you, thank you.

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Brief Introduction	1
1.2 What is Art	3
1.3 Mental Health Benefits of Art	6
1.4 Present Study	12
2. METHODOLOGY	17
2.1 Research Design	17
2.2 Sample	18
2.3 Analytical Procedure	20
2.4 Ethical Considerations	21
3. RESULTS: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS	21
3.1 Eve’s Narrative	21
3.2 Charlie’s Narrative	31
3.3 Lily’s Narrative	42
4. RESULTS: THEMATIC ANALYSIS	51
4.1 Perceptions of Themselves, Art and Creativity	51
4.2 Interacting with the Real World Leading to Challenges	52
4.3 Coping Strategies Addressing the Challenges	54
4.4 Formation of a New Future-Forward Identity	57
5. DISCUSSION	58
5.1 Summary of Key Findings	58
5.2 Interpretation and Explanation of Results	58
5.3 Theoretical and Practical Implications	60
5.4 Limitations	61
5.5 Unanswered Questions and Future Research	61
5.6 Conclusion	62
6. BIBLIOGRAPHY	63

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Brief Introduction

The main goal of this thesis is to offer an in-depth understanding of what people experience when attending live model drawing sessions. To do this, I will begin by laying the groundwork covering how people experience art, how art can be beneficial, and finally how figure drawing fits into the previous body of research on this subject. I will begin by defining art, drawing on Dickie's institutional definition, which will allow me to understand the artist as a social role. This in turn will allow me to analyze the experience of the artist. Then I will turn to the current body of research on art and well-being, and I will be careful to disentangle art from art therapy, focusing on the impacts found in engaging in the arts themselves. I will analyze the two primary impacts: the creative community and its support as well as the process of creation (both the focus required and mastery of skills). Finally, I will suggest the premises of the present study, describing live model drawing or figure drawing¹ and the reasons why it may provide a new angle for art research. This leads to my research questions: What is the experience of participants in figure drawing sessions? What is the perceived impact of figure drawing on their lives and wellbeing?

To gain an understanding of the experience, I conducted phenomenological in-depth interviews following the three-interview format described by Seidman (2006), which allowed the participants to fully expand on their own experience. I chose to conduct a case study in order to analyze the phenomenon in as much depth as possible. As standard for case studies, I analyzed a small number of participants in order to analyze them fully and dedicate my research to the details of the experience (Hanchett Hanson & Glăveanu, 2020). I chose three different cases, subjects with three different positions in the art world: art hobbyist, art teacher, and professional artist. I held 3 interviews with each subject, allotting a time of 90 minutes per interview, unless the interview subject felt, and said, that everything of note had been discussed (Seidman, 2006). That is, I have conducted nine interviews and recorded approximately 12 hours of speech. The interviews followed a before, during, and after structure, following their experience with art before figure drawing, during, and plans for the future. In the before interview, I asked participants about their experience with art throughout their lives: guiding them from early childhood to the present day, in order to create a context

¹ "Live model drawing" and "figure drawing" are to be understood as interchangeable

of their experience with art. For the “during” interview, I asked participants about their experience with figure drawing directly. In the final “after” interview, I asked the subjects for reflections about the meaning of art and figure drawing in their lives as well as their plans for art in the future (Seidman, 2006).

I also conducted an autoethnographic inquiry into my own experience with figure drawing throughout this process (Pensoneau-Conway, 2017). I wrote a reflexive diary, with entries outlining “before,” “during,” and “after” each session. Autoethnographic research allows for the researcher to examine the emotional depth of the experience. It is particularly helpful for triangulation with interviews because it allows me as the researcher to have a greater connection to the content. In modeling my reflexive diary questions after those I posed to my subjects, I effectively put myself in the interviewee’s seat. This allows me to understand the research subjects better, to relate to their experience as a participant in figure drawing, but also as a participant in research. The autoethnographic examination of my own experience also allows the reader to understand the lenses through which I approach the experience of others, and as such, it may be useful to disentangle any potential biases I may have. It permits a gentle, nuanced, and deep understanding of the subject matter that emphasizes the unique individual experience (Pensoneau-Conway, 2017).

In order to best understand and represent the model-drawing experience, I chose to perform two methods of analysis: thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and narrative analysis (Riessman, 2020). My thematic analysis consisted of coding the interview transcripts as well as my reflexive diary entries— looking for repeating themes throughout— and then categorizing or grouping these themes. Finally, I analyzed how these themes interacted with one another, and what the relationships between them were (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I then conducted a narrative analysis; after deeply familiarizing myself with each of the interviews, I reconstructed the participants’ perspectives (Riessman, 2020). I formed a narrative for each participant, that attempted to best convey their experience. Narrative analysis offers an opportunity to focus on delivering the emotional truth, enabling the participants to speak through my research (Riessman, 2020). Narrative analysis allows for the participants’ voices to be “heard,” for their experiences to be described with the greatest level of accuracy to their own perception. Within these narratives, I included my own reflections whenever it related to the experience or of the participants. I concluded by expanding on the meaning of these

narratives and themes within the context of creative research as a whole to answer my research questions.

1.2 What is Art

The act of figure drawing is a staple of the art community. To understand how or why this came to be we have to begin with an understanding of what art is. Examining figure drawing, as such, allows us to look within society rather than at the individual. As Hagman (2010, p. 15) writes in *The Artist's Mind: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Creativity, Modern Art and Modern Artists*, “the individual creative act occurs within the present confluence of meaning and dialogue, but also arises out of the historical context of the society's vital art history.” Therefore, to understand our creative act we will begin with the historical context.

In his seminal paper, *What is Art? An Institutional Analysis*, George Dickie (1974) writes that there are two main aspects of the definition of art: the categorical description of an artifact and the conferred status of “candidate for appreciation.” The categorical description of something as “art” as in “that is a painting” or artifact may seem objective and clear, but it too relies on possessing traits that “has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld),” (Dickie, 1974, p. 431). To refer to something as art means ascribing to it the characteristics we have agreed define something as art.

To demonstrate this Dickie uses the example of a piece of driftwood that has some characteristics (beautiful, patterned, etc.) that make us say “that piece of driftwood is a work of art.” Deeming the driftwood a work of art we have to see beyond the idea that art is an artifact someone has *done something* to. It is to ascribe that *something* to have certain qualities: art looks like something and that something can be identified. Here Dickie borrows a concept from Artho Danto’s (1964) *The Artworld*: “to see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of history of art: an artworld,” (Danto qtd. by Dickie, 1974, p. 429). Dickie borrows the term “artworld” from Danto to “refer to the broad social institution in which works of art have their place,” (Dickie, 1974, p. 429). This social institution is “an established practice,” not necessarily a corporation or society etc. rather a “framework for the *presenting* of particular works,” (Dickie, 1974, p. 430).

Dickie proposes the “institutional theory of art,” the theory that what is art is determined, not by some inherent aesthetic qualities that are discovered, but in a prescribed manner: it is these art institutions—the artworld— that determine and designate art, not discover it. In determining how art can be presented, they essentially determine what qualifies as art. “Artworld, or the world of art, are all people, all institutions, all representations and all narratives creating, criticizing, exhibiting, theorizing, teaching, buying or selling art, i.e. maintaining the art’s life,” (Urban, 2021, p. 14). This leaves us with a nonessentialist concept of art, which permits cultural and historical influences over time. The understanding of art as a fluid concept means we can look at artists and art alike as socially constructed and thus malleable. As we turn to the artist’s experience, and eventually to model drawing, an institutional theory of art will allow us to look for new meanings: What is the modern experience? What ideas are we taking for granted? How can people experience art – and model drawing specifically – today?

1.2.1 What Makes an Artist

Before the institutional theory was developed, the popular conception of art was quite different. “Histories are written by human beings. Science is made by human beings. Art is made by human beings. As simple as it sounds, until the 20th century, we thought art as something extraordinary, almost divine,” (Urban, 2021, p. 12). Throughout history the definition of the artist as solitary genius has been reductive. There were concepts of an “auto-therapeutic function of art” from early psychoanalysts (Esman, 1979, p. 310). However, early psychoanalysts believed this was a process for a particular type of character: the artist; there exists a preconception in the arts that creativity and mental illness have some sort of intrinsic link – the caricature of the mad artist (Sagan, 2014). This idea is quite old, yet pervasive in analysis of mental illness and creativity in the 20th and even 21st centuries; “[this link which] goes back at least to the days of Plato and Aristotle, has enjoyed particular currency in recent years because of the rise in popular interest in so-called ‘outsider art,’” (Esman, 2006, p. 645).

However, this concept has been criticized as essentializing, abelist, and ultimately inaccurate. “For every artist [...] with a physical handicap,² one could cite six who had none,”

² Esman (1979) discusses physical and mental handicaps alike as aspects of the “mad artist” caricature.

(Esman, 1979, p. 311). Modern psychoanalysis acknowledges that this relationship is not inherent and there are “many ways to creativity;” the traumatic experiences or mental and physical conditions of the artist do not cause them to create art, but instead are reflected in their creative work because of the artist’s natural “sensitivity of perception” and ability to express their experience (Esman, 1979, p. 311). The art of the “insane” bears no inherent difference from that of the sane. It is driven by the same urge “for form-making, for emotional expression, and for communication,” (Esman, 2006, p. 647). Esman (1979) uses Beethoven as an example of a “creative genius” whose work’s quality was entirely separate from issues in his life; “what he wrote certainly reflected his past and current conflicts and concerns; that he wrote and how well he wrote, apparently did not,” (Esman, 1979, p. 311).

Hagman (2009) writes that the problem came from a mischaracterization and misunderstanding of the artist. She claimed that people were only examining the artist as an individual.

[They analyzed the artist’s] intrapsychic viewpoint, only tangentially related to other people (for example the potential audience). This is consistent with contemporary culture's myth of the artist as a solitary rebel who defies convention and critical judgment. However, some recent thinkers have argued that the artist is a far more social being than has generally been admitted to (Hagman, 2010, p. 7).

The understanding of art as socially defined changes this “solitary rebel” narrative fundamentally. If we have established that art is socially constructed, writers like Hagman suggest that the artist is as well. She suggests an understanding of art as communal, citing that art is historically anything but individual: “communities create artistic culture as a means of coordinating individuals and thereby contributing to individual and group survival [...] individuals as artists seek to create works that possess special power, authority and beauty so that the importance of the work in the experience of the community is made manifest,” (Hagman, 2010, p. 10). Regardless of how big a role the community serves in the creation of art directly, the institutional theory suggests there is at least an indirect role. In determining what constitutes as art, the art world also determines who is and isn’t an artist: making the concept a social role or identity rather than divine gift.

An artist is then someone recognized as a person producing candidates of appreciation. Over time, that role gains its own expectations and associations (Dickie, 1974). There can be many reasons for someone to identify with the social role of “artist”: “the creative arts also

bring additional meaning, purpose, identity, role and occupation that is unique for each individual participant, irrespective of whether they are a dancer, performer, singer, painter, observer, teacher,” (Lo, 2021, p. 31). This identity can also be a political one; art can also be a part of other ways of alleviating personal and even collective suffering. Images created as social action and protest against injustice “can concurrently heal personal-collective wounds while demanding a response to injustice,” (Hocoy, 2005, p. 7).

In conclusion, the understanding of art as institutional and of the artist as a social role allows us to understand the potential benefits of art, without succumbing to the caricature of the “mad artist.” Mental illness can be a part of that social role for some, as art can be something that helps them communicate or express their experience. “Madness” and engaging in the arts are, however, not intrinsically linked, and benefits of artistic engagement could extend outside of this. Not only could art be beneficial for a “healthy” person, or detrimental to an “ill” person, but one’s identity and experience with art could exist entirely separately from that with mental wellbeing. As such it will be critical to understand that being an artist is an identity which exists separately, even though it may influence or be influenced by other factors.

1.3 Mental Health Benefits of Art

Modern non-essentializing concepts of art suggest it can help people process their experiences— including mental illness. However, it provides this benefit in adjacency with many identities (Sagan, 2014). In order to disentangle the essentialist connection between art and madness and suggest nonclinical benefits, I must clearly define how art is different from artistic therapy. Keeping in mind a constructivist approach to defining art, this may seem challenging: if art is anything that is accepted as art by the artworld, what makes therapeutic art different? The difference lies not in the finished product, but the purpose and the context of the work.

The primary purpose of art therapy is to heal. Creating art is merely a tool meant to further a broader journey of mental wellbeing. Additionally, art and art therapy have fundamentally different contexts (Ruiz, 2022). When analyzing figure drawing I will have to keep in mind the participants’ goals for their work: if their goal is practicing art or producing artwork, rather than healing, it has a fundamentally different effect on them than art therapy.

When conducting a review of the literature discussing mental wellbeing and art, I have focused on what can be beneficial in creating art on its own, not in what can be achieved through art linked with a therapeutic process. I have identified two main concepts that are separate from the therapeutic process, while beneficial to mental wellbeing: art as facilitating support from an artistic community, and art as a chance to exercise focus or a mastery experience (Ruiz, 2022).

1.3.1 Support from Community

Pursuing artistic activities has the capacity to “improve social abilities, connect communities, and promote well-being,” (Nitzan, 2021, p. 2). The World Health Organization defines health as more than just an absence of disease, but an all-encompassing state of physical, mental, and social wellbeing; the arts can be a key part of achieving equilibrium with the “physical, biological and social environment” of the patient in order to address all three aspects of health (Staricoff, 2006, p. 24). Engaging in the arts can often lead to people brought together under a common interest. When facilitating an environment that helps participants with self expression and empowerment, artistic spaces formed a creative support community in a safe environment where participants “felt safe to take risks and to be vulnerable in their journey of discovery,” (Lloyd, 2007, p. 213). The support from the community supports the basic psychological need of relatedness, the desire for closeness from people you in turn care for (Ryan & Deci, 2020). “The main emotional implication of the belongingness hypothesis is that real, potential, or imagined changes in one's belongingness status will produce emotional responses, with positive affect linked to increases in belongingness and negative affect linked to decreases in it,” (Baumeister, 1995, p. 505). Below is an example of what participants deemed meaningful in arts based recovery programs:

Participants spoke about feeling good, enjoying themselves, experiencing and expressing emotions, having a sense of worth, developing a sense of collaboration and camaraderie, working towards an end result, developing concentration and focusing skills, realising they had skills they never thought they had, feeling respected and heard by both artists and mental health staff, and connecting with their communities. While only a handful of participants mentioned the word “recovery,” the majority spoke about arts facilitating the creation of an environment that is conducive to recovery (Sapouna, 2016, p. 5).

Noteworthy is that even as these programs relied on a recovery framework, participants felt that this was not the most important aspect of their experience. The informal network, the “environment,” formed by engaging and participating in art projects with a community itself improved well-being (Sapouna, 2016). Engaging in a community of people with diverse lives but a common interest can provide a “natural base for expression of life’s diversity, which provides creative ways enabling individuals to find meaning in their lives that promote the development of beliefs, values and goals for them to function effectively,” (Leckey, 2011, p. 506). The structure of group activities can also “help build resilience” necessary for positive mental wellbeing (Zarobe, 2017, p. 337). A study on refugees working through the trauma of displacement found that “participating in a group making artworks of places associated with safety may contribute to processes of transition and social connectedness. This combination, we suggest, indicates that this model of participatory art has the potential to contribute toward feelings of well-being and a trajectory of recovery for refugees who experience trauma,” (Bingley, 2018, p. 11). The experience was helpful regardless of whether the participants found working together pleasant or enjoyed it. As one participant put it, “sometimes it’s hard, frustrating...trying to co-operate I am not enjoying it,” (Sapouna, 2016, p. 6). However, even these seemingly negative experiences allowed participants to experience the “benefits, limitations and challenges of ‘being with others’ and to connect with ‘real-life’ situations, an essential process in mental health recovery,” (Sapouna, 2016, p. 6).

While art may seem individual, there are many community-based elements. Whether or not people have direct interaction with other participants, the engagement in the sort of parallel play of community art can assist in the intrinsic factors of mental health, such as a sense of belonging and identity formation: “Arts may play a role in identity development as the activities give people an opportunity to explore and learn about themselves. The participants in the Youth Arts Programme linked identity with a sense of belonging, through the exposure to different people and experiences and the opportunity to meet like-minded people,” (Zarobe, 2017, p. 341). The increase in participants self-esteem was often paired with an improvement in social skills (Zarobe, 2017).

These communal environments actually support participants’ sense of individuality as well. “Research findings suggest that the arts can contribute to environments where people

experience a sense of freedom, acceptance and respect. Almost all the participants said that in the art workshops they felt no pressure to perform, to ‘be’ or to express themselves in a particular way,” (Sapouna, 2016, p. 8). The creative communities allowed participants to contribute to something bigger than themselves, without losing a sense of self expression.

Research suggests that communal intervention is a key for individuals’ recovery. On the small-scale this pertains to families. Child and parent mental-health has demonstrated a link, and arts practices which included children creating with their parents demonstrated positive effects, leading researchers to suggest “holistic approach to mental health interventions, taking into consideration not only the child but the family and their support network,” (Kearney, 2021, p. 158). Arts practices with people with similar life-circumstances or cultures is also helpful for the creation of community, particularly when concerning refugees, immigrants, or people of the non-dominant culture (Gaspar da Silva, 2023).

There are some frameworks of measuring health that suggest something other than “recovery.” The “contributing life framework” suggests that mental health is crafted through a variety of factors in someone’s life, each “contributing” in a positive or negative way. These factors can be access to healthcare or financial means, but also things like social support or community engagement (Gwinner, 2015). One way of facilitating engagement with (and for) the community has been through arts practices. “Art making was a significant process with which to create new meanings, to diffuse other meanings and to make sense of their experiences as ‘an artist’, and ‘an artist with a mental illness’, importantly grounded in their own experiences. Wider aspirations, development of social contacts and new activities were identified as important benefits of contributing as an artist,” (Gwinner, 2015, p. 307).

Creating artworks can also make way for self expression, reinforcing the connections within a creative community. “Art can express our thoughts, feelings, and concerns, instantly communicating what may have been impossible to articulate with words,” and when these concepts are shared among a group it creates a concept of “shared humanity” allowing the members to relate to one another (Toll, 2019). The physical space the community meets in can have added benefits to their wellbeing. An “artistically designed multisensory environment” can work to decrease participants’ stress (Cavanagh, 2021).

In conclusion, the benefits of engaging in the arts go beyond the individual. Finding some communal way of artistic participation fosters a sense of belonging and self-esteem

essential for recovery. Engaging in a community that is supportive and safe can build the necessary tools to foster a contributing life.

1.3.2 Focus and the Mastery Experience

Psychologist and researcher Csikszentmihalyi (2008) developed a theory of mastery which he named “flow;” it described an intense concentration in an activity that is engaging as well as rewarding due to a balance between the challenge presented in the activity and the person’s skill level. Csikszentmihalyi’s flow is a state of concentration and pure enjoyment of an activity, however not just any activity. He differentiates between a simply pleasurable activity, and one that is mentally engaging, challenging, and ultimately rewarding. In his book *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*, Csikszentmihalyi (2008) describes happiness as something he terms the optimal experience: “It is what a painter feels when the colors on the canvas begin to set up a magnetic tension with each other, and a new thing, a living form, takes shape in front of the astonished creator,” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008, p. 3). This occurs when “a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile,” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008, p. 3). It is not a freedom from stress and anxiety that creates enjoyment, but a balance of stress with skill.

As the artist works the tension between anxiety and aesthetic experience acts as a form of signal affect, guiding her towards increased refinement, balance and perfection. She might even seek to increase her anxiety towards some unknown or uncertain expressiveness or new formal order. Anxiety may even suddenly convert to joy and expansiveness, as a new aesthetic form is discovered and elaborated (Hagman, 2010, p. 15).

Artists and art researchers alike, have noticed this tension, focus, and anxiety involved in a practice so many refer to as “relaxing.” How is it that art can be relaxing when it relies on walking this tightrope? The answer lies in the other characteristic of the flow state, the out-of-body experience: “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter,” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008, p. 4). Without naming it as such, William Berry (1977) described the phenomenon when he writes that people have gained great satisfaction and sense of accomplishment from drawing:

I believe that there is an even deeper satisfaction in drawing from life, which is felt before the drawing is completed. During the intense period of concentration required by drawing, thoughts unrelated to the activity of drawing temporarily disappear. I have noticed, for

instance, that as I become more aware of the model and of my drawing, I become less aware of myself (Berry, 1977, p. 4).

This particular state of intense focus and concentration is a characteristic of the “optimal experience” of the state of flow: one where the amount of challenge a task provides is balanced with the skill level necessary to perform it.

Some research has been done on art therapy as connecting to that flow process “[a]rt therapists and others may discover that flow states—in all their phenomenological, psychological, neurological, and biological complexities—are foundational for important therapeutic aspects of the creative art experience,” (Chilton, 2013, p. 68). The creation of art involves a “great deal of mental activity” and yet at the same time can feel effortless and let people feel outside of themselves. Previous research with MRI scans suggested that the “more effort one puts into learning or performance the better the result. However, Dietrich (2004) observed that in the flow state, performance in various domains of human activity actually improves while seeming effortless,” (Chilton, 2013, p. 65). This allows the creation of art to be engaging while also being relaxing and meditative.

The act of “creative engagement” on its own “can decrease anxiety, stress, and mood disturbance,” (Stuckey, 2010, p. 261). Engaging in the arts has a variety of positive impacts on mental well-being, including psychological and physiological benefits alike. Previous studies have found that taking part in creative activities both heals and protects mental well-being because it promotes relaxation and self-expression, and even leads to reduced blood pressure and a stronger immune system (Leckey, 2011). Immersing yourself fully into an activity, particularly a creative activity, can serve as a form of stress-relief, either through an outlet of frustration or the chance to relax. On a medical level, a study on the effects of art making on on participants’ level of cortisol (a hormone associated with stress), found that there was in fact, a significant reduction in the cortisol levels of participants post-art making, indicating a beneficial effect on stress (Kaimal, 2016).

In conclusion, art has a myriad of potential benefits to anyone engaging with it. The presupposition of art as the work of the “mad” only works to limit the potential it has for benefits across the board. People engaging with art can experience benefits to anything from their social skills to their stress levels. This makes the art field ripe for further and more specific investigation of effects on wellbeing.

1.4 Present Study

1.4.1 History of Figure Drawing

Figure drawing, also known as life drawing or live model drawing, refers to the practice of drawing the human figure (typically nude) from the observation of a live model. It is generally viewed as a standard in the art world, a “rule” that should be learned before it is broken (Berry, 1977). The goal of figure drawing is not necessarily a finished art piece (although it can often serve as a study that forms the background for the creation of a finished piece), it is considered the standard traditional way to hone artistic skills in general: “Drawing and painting the figure is not merely an exercise in copying photographically, it is rather a re-creation of the form seen; a selection, made by the artist, of some features of the original” (Oliver, 2004, p. 8). Figure drawing draws on combining multiple different skills (shapes, perspectives, anatomy, proportions) so it remains useful for students advancing their skills to this day.

However, figure drawing in Western art history was more than simply an effective practice method, it was understood as essentially the gold standard. “With the formation of the Academies in Europe, figure drawing became the most important part of the course,” (Oliver, 2004, p. 8). Its popularity in schooling was emphasized by the likes of Leonardo da Vinci, Michaelangelo, Rembrandt etc., (Berry, 1977). This history suggests that engaging in figure drawing was indicative of being an artist, of participating in the artworld (Dickie, 1974). “So central is the human form to the history of Western art that it inevitably became an accepted standard against which draftsmen tested and sharpened essential drawing skills,” (Berry, 1977, p. 7). The artworld’s understanding of the artistic process is far more diverse now, in the last century the importance of figure drawing has somewhat faded. However, “drawing from the nude figure is still a stimulating exercise calling for keenness of observation and depth of perception,” (Oliver, 2004, p. 8).

1.4.2 Implications of Figure Drawing

In John Berger’s (2012) *Ways of Seeing*, Berger brings to light a concept often referred to as “the male gaze.” In his analysis of classical art, he finds that women in art have been subject to objectification and subordination in the form of the nude. A live-model drawing

class is even featured in the episode. The nudity and the artist's gaze of the model can be characterized as voyeuristic. Berger analyzes Western European oil paintings during the Renaissance period and their depictions of women, analyzing the male gaze on female nudity in art. He reveals, in these paintings, the social hierarchies, gender roles, and cultural values implicitly or explicitly shown through a variety of signs to explore the way Western art has constructed gender roles.

Berger finds that the women are not simply naked, they are nude – or even clothed in nudity by the male painters. Berger believed that true nakedness is somehow more free and liberated, and felt that the issue was the *way* the women's nakedness was presented (towards the audience and "owned"). He believed there were some paintings where there is a pure relationship between the art and the artist, even though the figure was naked. "The way the painter has painted her includes her will and her intentions in the very structure of the image, in the very expressions of her body and her face," (Berger, 2012, p. 58). Lynda Nead in the book: *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* counters this idea. She claims Berger makes the mistake of suggesting that oppression is only in public expression, and that love is necessarily private; Nead suggests that oppression can very much exist in the "private" realm (Nead, 1992).

Keeping in mind our constructivist definition of art means that the figure drawing was created and influenced by the expectations and class, gender, and power dynamics of the time. What is and isn't fine arts was debated in the same breath as whether or not women could participate in it. This has been something that has carried over to the modern day. "Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?" Ask the female activist group the Guerilla Girls, noting the majority of nudes as female, while less than 5% of the artists with work displayed were women (Sayej, 2020). Nead and Berger suggest that the role of the woman as the nude not the artist is another method of trapping, controlling, or framing women. Nead emphasizes that the women are transformed into "seductive but not obscene" artwork; the female nude is the border between art and obscenity, it remains passive because the erotic is "too strong a flavour added to a dish," (Nead, 1992, p. 27).

Nead and Berger's analysis is based on the role of women in these paintings: women are the models, not the artists. On top of that the women are depicted nude even when their male counterparts are clothed, to the extent that a "nude" almost implies a female subject. "It

is in the process of dropping the gendered prefix – the moment when the female nude becomes simply ‘the nude’ that the male identity of artist and connoisseur, creator and consumer of the female body, is fully installed,” (Nead, 1992, p. 13).

However, the nude in modern model-drawing is not necessarily assumed to be a female body or a “beautiful body” depicted for pleasure. Modern figure drawing is composed of mixed-gender artists and mixed-gender models. It is an area of interest to me, whether modern figure drawing could be a source of empowerment: model being non-female, creator being non-male. Nead suggests that there is space for this concept.

If one challenges the boundaries of this category, it is at least possible to propose not a single aesthetic register but a range of possibilities and differences– distinctions of race, size, health, age and physical ability which create a range of possibilities and differences – distinctions of race, size, health, age, and physical ability which create a variety of female identities and standpoints (Nead, 1992, p. 33).

Modern figure drawing can also have a positive effect different from the traditional view of the medium as dehumanizing. The modern model drawing space will have a variety of models with different body types: all real people not photoshopped or moved into traditionally “flattering” poses. Exposure to these realistic naked bodies can create more realistic expectations for the human figure and body image issues (Swami, 2017). Swami’s study determined it was in particular live model drawing that benefited participants: “positive effects on body image are accrued when participants are exposed to live, human model” irrespective of the gender of either party. Ultimately, it demonstrated that “longer-term participation in life drawing sessions has a positive impact on trait body image (Study 3); specifically, life drawing appeared to moderately elevate positive body image and feelings of embodiment and reduce social physique anxiety, though it had no appreciable effect on indices of negative body image,” (Swami, 2017, p. 71).

In conclusion, despite the history of figure drawing centered on a display of attractive female bodies, modern figure drawing can have beneficial effects on self-perception and a relationship with nudity. This is still a field with a lot of questions in terms of its effects, particularly due to the history involved, however it is a field ripe with change and opportunity for improvement, based on the interpretations and definitions the attendees create.

1.4.3 My Positionality and Research Goals

I began the practice of figure drawing in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when small gatherings of people were permitted only recently. At the time, I had recently moved back to Prague after living abroad for 8 years, alone in a period marked by widespread isolation. The idea to take part in figure drawing was rather random; a Facebook Event Listing was enough to pique curiosity. On my first-ever engagement with a Live Model Drawing session in Prague, it was also my first time experiencing art creation as something public involving complete strangers. The term public art generally refers to any type of artwork in publicly accessible locations: “that is, outside conventional settings such as museums and galleries. Public art is peculiar in that it integrates the site as part of the content, which makes the ontological nature of public art complex and contested,” (Zebracki, 2013, p. 303). The experience of model drawing has some of the conventions of public art, inherently different from drawing at home, because of its space in a community, and interaction with a public space.

In the case of model drawing, the community and the space, together form an environment that could potentially be conducive to—not just recovery, but the creation of a contributing community. And when one takes into account the model, model drawing becomes a way of engaging in participatory and receptive art at the same time. Engaging in receptive arts, such as listening to music or going to a museum has, along with the participatory arts, demonstrated positive effects on mental well-being (Kiernan, 2021; Totterdell, 2021). Model drawing is a space that allows for participation and observation alike, meaning it allows participants to gain benefits from, potentially both practices.

Public spaces are never neutral, “they have varied meanings, values, barriers, and benefits for different social classes, age groups, genders, races, and other personal or professional identities,” (Lecours, 2019, p. 17). There are some aspects of the sessions I chose to attend that suggest the presence of these meanings and values. In the center of the room sits a collection box and the artists are trusted to pay in order for the organizers to pay the model and the rent from the space. This serves an interesting dichotomy with the anarchist collective cafe where the sessions are held. The cafe takes part in a Food Not Bombs collectivist-anarchist organization that provides food to people at their own price, however the

cafe also hosts these types of paid events. Over the years the price of admission to figure drawing has gone from 50 to 100 to 150 Czech crowns, potentially limiting low-income attendees from participating (although still much cheaper than other drawing classes in the city). The “on-trust” payment model, however, suggests a space both accepting of those unable to do so, as well as a general respect by the attendees for the model as a professional. The model drawing sessions I attended also contained a unique community. There are professional artists and school teachers and students alike. The audience is part international and part local. There is the occasional translation of instructions to English, though mostly as an afterthought.

When speaking with the diverse community members over my years of attending, I came across similar stories. Lonely people with a solitary hobby or profession finding something worthwhile. They often spoke with great reverence for the organizer, and confided in how helpful the experience has been for them personally. I could not help but identify deeply with these stories. I too had forged friendships and found a way to motivate myself to improve my artwork. I understood what they meant, when they told me they had found a space they felt just as comfortable returning to every week or after months of absence. Model drawing workshops are not at face-value meant to improve mental wellbeing. Any benefit is drawn purely from the communal and arts-practices and not from traditional therapy approaches. This inspired my interest in the effects these sessions were having on me and others in the community.

1.4.3.1 Research Goals

My research goal was to understand the experience of people of different backgrounds who are attending the live drawing sessions. In particular, to understand the experience of people with different roles in the artworld. I also wished to ascertain if there was a potential benefit to attending these sessions, particularly in terms of mental wellbeing. Additionally, I wanted to understand if there is any other benefit participants wished to emphasize. Essentially, I wished to gain an in-depth understanding of participating in figure drawing as perceived by participants.

1.4.3.2 Research Questions

What is the experience of participants in figure drawing sessions? What is the perceived impact of figure drawing on their lives and wellbeing?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

I conducted a case study analysis to explore the experience of participants of figure drawing. As Hanchett Hanson & Glăveanu wrote in *The importance of case studies and the evolving systems* (2020), case studies are valuable to research into creative fields because they are a way to examine how or why something occurs when there are multiple potentially overlapping variables. Case studies allow the researcher to make a case for the relationship between these variables together. Thus I conducted a qualitative study of select individuals looking for an in depth phenomenological understanding of the practice.

I chose to conduct a total of nine interviews, three with each participant. I conducted a qualitative study using a combination of autoethnography (Pensoneau-Conway, 2017; Wiesner, 2021) and unstructured phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2006). Interviews were held about the experience of participants, combined with an autoethnographic analysis of my experience in reflective writing after sessions (Wiesner, 2021). Interviewing entailed three separate interviews with each participants as suggested by Seidman (2006): the first interview is contextualizing the person's experience with art throughout their lives leading up to the model drawing, the second interview is focusing on the actual experience of model drawing, and the third interview is about their insights on the meaning as well as their thoughts about the impact that live drawing sessions have on their future life. The interviews were unstructured.

I modeled my interview process after Sagan in her book *Narratives of Art Practice and Mental Wellbeing: Reparation and Connection* (2014), to ensure the interviews remained unstructured while relevant to the subject. I took as an example her asking participants for "thoughts and reflections regarding their art practice and their wellbeing" and spent the majority of the interview asking follow-up questions and prompting the interviewee to elaborate on subjects of their own choice (Sagan, 2014, p. 10). For each interview, I allotted

90 minutes, however, the subject was free to end the interview earlier if they felt they had shared everything they had to say.

The experience was cross-analyzed with an autoethnographic look at my experience with the sessions. I took as a model on how to conduct autoethnographic writing Pensoneau-Conway's *Doing Autoethnography* (2017). I gathered data for this The Reflexive Diary contains 10 stream-of-consciousness diary entries written on the day of the session. I formatted them with the same before, during, and after format, but for each session I chose to speak on. Aside from that I did not limit my stream of consciousness and allowed it to wander so far as it was concerning the session (Wiesner, 2021). This was to ensure my entries were written in a comparable manner to the interviews, so that I could have the same "freedom" of expression as other participants. Using autoethnography allowed me to analyze the experience in the moment, without the selective remembering that interviews rely on, allowing a different perspective on the sessions.

2.2 Sample

I conducted a case study on three distinct cases. As such I made use of maximum variation sampling, intended to demonstrate the diversity of experiences and show "how creative work is done," not to encapsulate the entire range of possible experiences (Hanchett Hanson & Glăveanu, 2020, p. 208). I interviewed people with a variety of experiences with art: a professional artist (creation of art directly involved in her career) to an art teacher (creation of art indirectly involved in her career) to someone who does not consider herself an artist (creation of art understood as a hobby). What participants have in common is investing their time and money in the making of visual art in the public space of model drawing sessions and also a willingness to take part in the research and interviews. I did not do any screening on their opinion on the importance of art: instead, I chose from those whom I met attending the sessions. I chose to interview people I did not have a strong personal relationship with. As Seidman (2006) writes in his *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, the risk of interviewing those with close personal relationships is incomplete data: when you believe you know the person in question, you are less likely to ask follow-up questions, because unconsciously you feel that you already have an understanding of their meaning. I chose people I had spoken with as little as possible, so I would not be confident in their views and opinions: with every person

I had no expectations of what their views on the importance of art and the role of art in their wellbeing, or much about their life aside from their profession and their interest in my project.

2.2.1 Biographies

I spoke to each of the participants about their relationship with art, as background for their relationship with figure drawing. The following is a brief description of each person as they described themselves in my interviews.

Eve is a 27-year-old artist who works in video game marketing—she works for a company that creates promotional artwork for mobile and PC video games. She describes her work as creative and fulfilling but also isolating and exhausting. She struggles with maintaining a healthy relationship with art re-creatively due to the high demands of her profession. She is also considering whether her profession is letting her reach her potential.

Charlie is a 32-year-old art teacher from England working in Prague. She considers art important to her, but she is not a professional artist – nor does she want that necessarily. She finds that being an art teacher allows her the joys of creating and learning, without the isolation of many arts-based jobs. However, she is open to potentially changing her mind and pursuing other artistic careers in the future. Art was a private thing to her once, but now she is enticed by public or community-based ways to engage with it.

Lily is a 23-year-old university student from the Netherlands who attended the sessions while on Erasmus in Prague. She is a full-time student and self-identifies as not an “artist”, but a person that draws sometimes – among other things. She does not struggle with stress, but she does find that art is a good indicator of her mental wellbeing. Drawing, like reading a book, is something that allows her to clear her mind and relax.

In the case of integrating autoethnography it is important for me to include my own positionality and perspective from which I am writing, as the narrator, researcher and artist. I am a Liberal Arts and Humanities Student in Prague, and an artist, attending figure drawing sessions on and off for the past three years. I do not have aspirations of working as a professional artist, but I find making art a crucial form of self-expression. I have formed connections with people at the sessions, but more than anything I look at them as a way to fully engage with art, in a capacity I wish I could commit to more often.

2.3 Analytical Procedure

After conducting the interviews, I used the audio recordings to transcribe the interviews verbatim. I used the transcription service Descript, which allowed me to listen to the audio file and see (and correct) the transcript one word at a time. I then anonymized the transcripts and began analysis. I made myself familiar with each interview. I modeled my familiarization after Sagan's (2014) work which included reading through the transcripts multiple times, creating a list of "emerging themes" and frequently returning to the audio files for a proper comprehensive impression (Sagan, 2014, p. 11).

I began with thematic analysis, a "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). I coded each interview transcript, finding which themes were significant and recurring. I used the following understanding of "theme": "A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). I did the same to my reflexive diary to see where my own experience was applicable. I determined what were the major themes at play in the experience of figure drawing, and potential relationship between them (Adams et al., 2015). I then proceeded to review the themes, "[c]hecking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts [...] generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis," and finally naming them and categorizing them into four major overarching themes generating an overall story built by the themes collectively (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

After this I conducted a narrative analysis (Riessman, 2020). The interviews I had conducted lended themselves well to narrative interpretation. Catherine Kohler Riessman (2020, p. 37) in *Narrative Methods for the Humanities* recommends interviews with questions that are "simple, more open and straightforward [because they] elicited long narratives." After analyzing the themes and patterns I began to construct the narratives for each person, reconstructing the experience from the accounts (Řiháček et al., 2013). I made sure to focus on not only the content of their speech, but also the "gestures and movement" involved (Riessman, 2020, p. 140). I summarized and interpreted each participants interviews into one cohesive story demonstrating their experience in their own voice. The goal was to create more than a summary or a transcript, but "a written representation—that conveys the dynamic process of storytelling," (Riessman, 2020, p. 34). I began a four step process of crafting this

representation. First, I determined the chronological sequence of events in the interviews (for they were often mentioned out of order), then I identified the most important parts (the milestones or key points, “klíčových mezníků v příběhu”), I identified the key turning points within the narrative, and then finally I determined how to best present them within the conventions of storytelling (Řiháček et al., 2013, p. 79). I chose to present a combination of narrative writing in the 3rd person and direct quotations for the interview, to best represent the verbal and nonverbal information presented (Riessman, 2020). I inserted my autoethnographic points of view where relevant and supplementary to an understanding of them and their story (Pensoneau-Conway, 2017; Wiesner, 2021).

2.4 Ethical Considerations

The study followed the ethical considerations of APA. Confidentiality and privacy for the participants was ensured by the anonymization of the interviews. Participants were informed of their ability to terminate participation in the study at any point of the data collection phase. The participants signed the informed consent, as the research goals and process were made known to them before the interviews. All interviews were digitally recorded with the written consent of the interviewee. All participants volunteered their time and thoughts for no reward or other method of coercion.

3. RESULTS: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Following creating the transcriptions, I spent time familiarizing myself with each of the interviews. As described in the methodology, I analyzed the themes and constructed narratives for each participant. I have chosen to present the narrative analysis first and the thematic analysis second, to provide the reader first with the unique experience of each participant before discussing the themes.

3.1 Eve’s Narrative

“Eve” is a 27-year-old professional video game marketing artist from central Asia. The interview began in Eve’s apartment. She began stilted and asked me for permission to use her electronic cigarette. I told her to make herself comfortable. Her nervous energy melted a bit and she began to speak with me.

Making art started in childhood, Eve said with a tone of voice that seemed to imply it was inevitable. One day she was drawing in coloring books and next thing she knew she was visiting a professional artist once a week. Then it just took a random day of struggling in math class to make the decision: I'll become an artist. She applied to art school soon after that, she recalled not asking, but telling her mom: "I have entrance exams in a week, if you want you can drive me." That initiative carried her all the way into her career. She entered an art academy then studied art in Prague, and became a full-time graphic designer.

As a young girl, Eve's mother recognized her talents and found a professional tutor to teach her once a week. It was this tutor that gave Eve this path to follow. The tutor showed her it was possible for art to be a career, not just a hobby. She made me fall in love with it, Eve confides in me softly. The statement out of place with the bold tones of the rest of the story. As a young girl, art gave Eve power. She recalled coming home with big canvases wet with oil paint. In that moment she had the spotlight. She tells me when she carried her wet canvases into the bus, crowds parted for her like Moses and the Red Sea. She was a star.

3.1.1 Art and Identity

In Russian, there are two different words for artists. There is the artist who knows technique, who can copy a portrait, and there is the "real" artist who creates, expresses, and changes the world. Eve tells me she had a second tutor who taught her this. She would assign Eve a "huge" canvas and let her go fully abstract, painting with whatever she would like. For me it was a huge shock, Eve laughs retelling, like how it'll be a waste of material. She taught Eve about the real artist that is loved by the world outside of her country.

It's not what I make, she tells me, I definitely don't do the real art because I work in um, uh, marketing, for ads. It's art made to sell not to express. She misses "real" art, but she feels it's outside her grasp. She does not feel strongly enough about any issues to influence anyone. She supports many movements and communities, but "real" art comes from a desire to lead not to support.

She looks pensive and I bite my American tongue before I can speak out with some platitudes like "I think you make real art," and it's a good thing I do, because she does not need them. It is obvious her work interests her. She tells me it's about performance, about

analyzing the audience. She tells me she's in love with making art. I'm in love with the visual part, she breathes out.

3.1.2 Comparison and Impostor Syndrome

Eve tells me she does not want to be a starving artist (I want to be rich and not hungry!), and that's why she merged art with marketing. She tells me she knows it is not the "great path" but she likes it anyway. When I asked her what she meant by this she sighed; she told me she is happy with making art for promotional purposes, but when she is making marketing material promoting a video game, she can't help but compare herself to the artists making the game itself. Eventually, she finds herself comparing herself to the "real" artists showing their work at exhibitions.

She assures me that making art for marketing companies is not meaningless. To make art in marketing, you need to understand your audience, she tells me again. And by doing that you learn a lot about people and the state of the world, what people care about, what affects them, what their politics are. To Eve, her art is about the people.

Eve is hyper-critical of her work and tells me that on some level that is by design. She tells me you have to be constantly searching for mistakes to improve, to keep up. She thinks the ability someone has to handle critique is key to their success. One has to be capable not only of realizing their own vision but adjusting it to match the expectations of the customer. To be employable you have to be quick on your feet, the industry is hyper-competitive. She is already learning about AI art in case she will be requested to implement it in some manner professionally.

When I finish a piece I am so happy [...] it's like you are high because, uh, it took you, for example, a month to finish it. And you are happy that you finally finished it and then you're getting likes and you're like, yeah, people saw it. But then you keep coming to that page and you're like staring and then keep staring and it takes you like-- I need a week-- A week to find mistakes. And you work hard for the next month again to hate it in the end [...] It's like a magical circle you keep running in.

Eve grew up in a Muslim country; "It's a world of man," she tells me. When she was studying at an art academy some professors refused to teach women. They said there's no reason to teach a girl because she will get married and pregnant and then she will forget about art. She will just be a wife, teaching her is a waste of time. Eve laughed, she reassures me that

this did not stop her. She always found a way to keep going. This time she went to the dean and told him the professor's personal preferences were against the rules. I have the right to enter the class. *Privately I admire her confidence, but she is smiling.*

Eve spent a lot of time struggling with being labeled the "impostor" by herself or by her peers. As a woman in a male-oriented space, as a foreigner, and as a beginner, Eve felt it was her passion that kept her moving forward despite these pitfalls.

3.1.3 Re: Art and Identity

Those stupid professors probably became a reason I'm a career oriented woman. They keep trying to show me that my place is in the kitchen with kids, I'm this close to deciding to be child-free.

She tells me that art is easy to love. It is not hard to be a career woman when you have a loveable career; you can dedicate yourself so completely that it's difficult to love somebody else. She places her relationship to art at the top of a hierarchy: If you're an artist you love art, then yourself, and then somebody else. She tells me The couples Eve knows in marketing, they are always together, they need this effort. As artists we're not that attached to our partner as a person. We're not bored by being alone. People who have less art or creativity in their mind, they need to constantly be doing something. But art you're very often doing alone, what art can you do with somebody?

Art is a relationship with yourself, she tells me. And it's often not a healthy one. That's why it's difficult for an artist to be confident. It's why they can have imposter syndrome. As she gets closer to 30, she's trying to think of her art relationship in a more "global" way. I cannot find the final destination, she confides, It frustrates me, there is too much I want to do. (Story board artist, splash arts, children's book illustration, 3D modeling and printing...). She tells me she has the formula for success. You have to pick a direction and head towards it full speed. But you can't do that without this destination. She laments this: I cannot seem to pick, I don't have time for everything, and without a final destination I can't make a plan. Then she surprises me.

And that is why recently I stopped drawing.

3.1.4 Artist Burnout: Balance and Wellbeing

We take a beat after this sentence. Maybe to give it the respect it deserves. Then she tells me the story of her burnout. She says she has not been drawing in her free time for the past month and a half. She started to dance and play tennis. And, she laughs like she's giving away a secret.

I actually was super shocked to find out your life is easier when you don't draw! When you work nine-to-six and then come home and draw to become a better artist. I was working non-stop, obviously I burned out! But when you don't draw, you can live. I had so much free time. For hobbies, for chatting. I realized I started to feel better and look better. I became more open to people and I even noticed they started to see me as more attractive.

She tells me she knows it's not the art that's to blame, of course, she just needed to pause. Basically, she needed to learn how to have a proper relationship with art. Where it helped her instead of burning her. "I had it as a child," she tells me, "so I know it must be possible."

Eve spoke about negative effects of an art lifestyle. Drawing for long periods of time is bad for: posture, neck, back, spine: "say goodbye to your eyes and your health." While she feels that, as an artist, she does not generally mind isolation, when it is combined with professional pressure, she feels adverse effects to the extent of depressive episodes: "And because of that, I also have depressions. Uh, it's difficult to, to find a time just to go to breathe."

As someone working in an art career that also enjoys creating art recreationally, the line between work and fun is blurry. She recounts that she has been working nine to six on art for work, and then coming home and drawing, not only for fun, but *specifically* to become a better artist for her work. This meant that with art as her primary hobby, Eve was effectively always on the clock. Eve then tells me about the burnout which followed: a period of time when she was unable to create and felt a lack of inspiration creatively and otherwise.

When I burned out I was not leaving the house unless I had to, once every two weeks at most. What really killed me was having to make choices, I couldn't do it. I stopped caring about eating. It started to be too difficult to choose something to eat and then go downstairs to get it, so I lost my appetite. But I was still hungry, it was torture. I stopped caring how I look. If I'm sitting at home and no one sees me, why do I have to wash my hair? You just stop caring for

life, You live on autopilot. I had my working tasks and I did them and then I just played video games for a cheap energy boost.

Burnout meant that she stopped leaving the house. She had a hard time making any choices. She didn't want to eat anything, but didn't want to be hungry. She stopped caring how she looked. She felt frustrated, and the only thing that seemed to help was reducing her contact with art and looking for other hobbies and outlets for the time being. This did have a positive effect. After she effectively quit for some time and searched for other hobbies, her life became easier and she became happier.

Eve was not satisfied with this, however. She felt it was not the fault of art that her burnout had happened, but her relationship with it, and she hoped for some way of helping this relationship without a need to compromise. "A few days ago I bought myself a red eyeliner," she tells me. It sounds like she is saying something much more important about self care and rebuilding. She's wearing the eyeliner to the interview.

3.1.5 The Value of Art and Identity

Eve tells me her burnout was caused by more than simply feeling overwhelmed by her work. She tells me she burned out because she "didn't agree" with herself, she did not feel secure in her direction in art. She told me she had originally wanted to be an artist in development and did not succeed. It was difficult to accept that she wasn't good enough for that industry. Suddenly, when she started to work in marketing, she started excelling. She was praised for her work in marketing even when she was barely trying. It created a dissonance to be accepted so easily after the previous rejection.

My boyfriend said I should stop knocking on the closed door when I have so many open paths, she tells me. It's difficult to just float in your life instead of actually having a plan and knowing your final destination. People tell her the final destination should be being an art director. Her mind is scattered on the subject. She used to think it was the "worst job ever" to see a cool commission and have to pass it to another artist. But now she realizes being an art director is about people, being the "chewing gum" between the client and the team. You become a manager, but a manager with your vision. It is a creative process, a decision making process, an ideas making process.

But it is intense. As an illustrator of an image you get to render, which is like meditation. You can listen to music, drink tea, vibe, chill, feel good about that art. But now, Eve notes, I don't have this. Now I have to make the ideas, decisions, and I come home with a headache more often than not. Not having this chance to relax is another reason she burned out. Coming up with ideas, that's the part that eats energy. Creativity needs some kind of borders. To think outside the box, you first need a box. At work, she creates the box for people.

When I draw in my free time, I created my own box because I usually draw female characters. And I have in my mind what characters I like, usually colorful small female characters.

Why do you pick those topics, I ask her.

Oh. That's an interesting question. This is the only topic that kinda actually triggers me a lot. I just realized I probably could be able to speak loudly for women's rights because that is something I had to fight for. Actually, yeah, I never realized that until you asked. Because I forgot about this story. I forgot about this stupid professor who didn't want me.

Usually, she creates because of inspiration. She sees some amazing artist, a story she likes, a game character she loves, and then in her head she combines them into something new. Talent exists because you become talented, she tells me. You probably liked drawing a little bit more than others as a child. You were inspired by something. So you did it more. Suddenly, you can draw better than others.

That inspiration can also come from life. She tells me that if you like somebody, you want to draw a portrait on that person. And it gives you the feeling that you own the person in a way, you have some artifact of them to keep.

Because with artwork you're trying to recreate the world. The world as we would like to see it. Even if it starts in that silly way, our art starts to reflect what we're missing. And... maybe that's why I like to draw strong female characters. I just hope I will become stronger and more confident and that's it. In this life I just need to become a good artist and a confident person.

3.1.6 Enter the Figure Drawing Sessions

When Eve finished art school and started her first job as a graphic designer she found herself alone. She lost her school friends and never really formed an art community, or any kind of community. She went to some event on Facebook and the organizer invited her to Figure Drawing every Wednesday. She had never understood networking before, but then and

there she learned how to make connections. The lines between friendship and networking seemed blurry.

What she found was a supportive community with people holding a variety of perspectives and life experiences. And also she “just clicked” with some people. After being alone she made friends quickly. And these friends were also a support network: personally, but also skill-wise and career-wise. She claimed this was a unique staple of the art community, that her experience in other communities has been negative – full of competitive, toxic, or unrelatable people.

I know that kinda when you are going to a bars, there's a very small chance that you will meet a normal person there. And when you are going to, uh, drawing sessions, it's like 99% people are super amazing there. So you kind of want not to miss the opportunity and [...] a chance to meet somebody there.

There's a million questions to ask someone at a drawing session. It starts with can please take a look at your drawings? And then you follow up with technique or anatomy or oh you brought oil paints, how is that working out for you time-wise? She tells me these days, it does not even matter so much what they're drawing. If the model came or not. She's coming to see her friends. And to get a beer with everyone after.

She tells me at some point it was a “family close” community. But it has gained popularity and grown, and people are practicing their skills instead of networking. They don't even go to the pub after anymore. Now she carries these expectations, which makes it hard to go and risk being disappointed. But she tells me she aims to have a more positive attitude. A room of strangers is an opportunity to meet new people. Although she does not have the same desperate need for it anymore. She has friends, a boyfriend, hobbies, meeting new people is a nice bonus, not a requirement.

She's outgrown the need for the community. It taught her soft skills personally and professionally. And she has implemented those skills. Now she knows how to speak to her colleagues and friends. Now she has her own community.

At the time, it was crucial.

When Eve first started attending live drawing sessions, she had depression. She was unhappy with her first job as a graphic designer. She longed for a more “drawing related” job,

but those were hyper competitive, almost impossible to get into. So she was stuck, no idea what path to follow.

3.1.7 Finding a Community

The figure drawing community gave her examples. One girl also wanted to work as an artist in mobile games. But when she didn't get in she became a tattoo master, and is very happy with her work. She watched people become content creators, art directors, or even fortune tellers in Astrology!

I saw people who gave up an art and I saw people who just found a different way or went into animation, for example. And, uh, this is was also important for me because I stopped feeling as a failure.

Through seeing examples and talking with people, she learned to not punish herself. This did not come at the cost of improvement as she once feared. Instead of self-loathing, Eve turned to constructive critique from her community.

I noticed that you're not working properly with the color ... this filter works different way ... you have like, um, a wrong perspective here and there or in on that there. Yeah. As they constantly providing feedback on my works and they, because of that, I, I grew way faster than when I was trying to do that alone.

She tells me they are better artists than her, and that she has no trouble admitting it. "They're gods," she says. However, she believes this comparison is not the same as "bad" jealousy. She tells me it's easy to tell the difference. If something good happens with that person, If you feel happy for him and you want to be like him, this is good. If you are feeling jealous and you won't become better by working on yourself, but downgrading that person, this is bad jealousy.

Constructive comparison comes when you recognize the work that person puts in. She tells me she watches how hard they work at the sessions, how much they practice. It inspires her.

Because there are people who are like way better than you. So there is a space still to grow, and it's important to actually, like without, pink sunglasses or without black sunglasses to actually realize the situation.

3.1.8 The Future: Finding Your Path

She tells me she sometimes compares herself to artists that make “real” art, but it does not affect her much. At the end of the day, she does not really *want* to make “real” art. Aside from supporting women’s independence, she does not have the drive necessary to make that kind of art. I want to understand the world, she tells me, I’m not trying to change it. It’s through her success as an artist that she pushes back on the patriarchs who did not believe in her.

Eve has found herself at a crossroads in life. Her skills in the art world have landed her a solid job that she excels at. But there are so many directions she could go into that it is overwhelming. Sometimes the identity of artist swallows her so completely that she needs a break in the relationship. A break to find out who exactly she is and what she wants (“becoming a regular person”).

She tells me the constructive community is the most valuable part of attending live model drawing sessions. It’s constructive value is much bigger than the soft and hard skills she learned or the network she gained. She says herself it is so important to hear “actual like real” stories and to see how much those people work hard for the skills, and you realizing that it’ll come. During a burnout that environment is invaluable.

Eve warns that it is a cycle of falling in love with art, losing herself in it, burning out, taking a break, falling in love with art... She does not sound so concerned. She tells me she will break out of it. Reforge her relationship with art until it is healthy.

I hope that once I will go there and, uh, I will recharge myself and they will give me like a motivation to love art again, and I will start drawing again.

I am remembering about live drawing session only when I'm getting into that burnout point when everything is good, I'm like, I'm good at drawing on my own at home. Maybe that's when you, when you need the extra push is when you're burned out.

As for the crossroads, she tells me there is no rush. If she is reforming her relationship, the right answer will come to her with time. She has rediscovered a tranquility with art. She feels that after some deep thought about her experience, she understand her position, and it makes her less scared for the future. She will do what she can, and trust she ends up on the right path.

3.2 Charlie's Narrative

“Charlie” is a 32 year old art teacher from a European country, working in Prague. We meet in a cafe of her choosing. It is a popular spot for foreigners in Prague. We talk briefly about our winter break. She asks me if we can get started, seeming eager.

3.2.1 Art as An Urge to Learn

For Charlie, as a child, art was just something accessible. Almost a natural part of childhood, picking up a pencil and trying to make something. It eventually matured into a relaxing hobby, an opportunity to experiment with imagination and creativity. After a while, she started to pay attention to the finished product, and things took a turn. Charlie tells me that at some point the stack of printer paper and colored pencils in kindergarten or the afternoons spent copying manga books as a preteen were not enough to satiate her. She grew a hunger for learning.

Maybe it started the first time she “practiced” instead of drawing. When she looked back to the paper and could point to the shading, the proportions, the coloring, and know how to fix it. Or maybe it was whenever the art teachers in high school called her “quite gifted.” She admits to me shyly that it motivated her to keep trying. As her interest grew, so grew a hunger for experimentation, more materials, and understanding the history and the techniques. She flourished in college, and then went to an art university to pursue this passion.

3.2.2 Encountering Burnout

I dunno, university kind of put me off it a little bit and I needed to take a step away from art for a few years and then I, uh, I decided to train to be an art teacher after having some time away in a new approach to actually teach it rather than actively do it.

The story was progressing in a positive direction until this point. I was curious, what did “put me off it” mean. How did her experience with art change? We rewound back to the beginning and tried to trace her story slowly this time, trying to pinpoint the change between high school and University.

High school was amazing! Art in school was so creative, a chance to participate in big projects! Charlie was excited to participate in the community and to build her skills. She felt driven, had a strong motivation to get better. The motivation to make the best drawing, get the

best grades. The idea of “practice” carried a positive connotation. It was exciting to reach the point where you understand how your drawing functions and why, and to have the ability to manipulate it. She excelled in this space.

University was completely different, she tells me: I went from being driven in an environment where technical ability was really important and achieving high grades to being out of my depth. University required research, justifying your art, conceptual ideas, and offered harsh critiques but no support or guidance, no community. It seemed that all of the skills she had built were not enough to support her. No matter how hard she practiced, how much time she put into her artwork, it was never good enough for her school. She was spending time sitting in the library alone, doing research and ended up just feeling lost.

Charlie was unable to make artwork the university approved of, and eventually found herself unable to create at all.

It was more complex than a simple skill gap that she could close with enough patience and practice. Art in university felt like it went against her values. Against what she saw as important. The drive to create anything at all dissolved.

I think it disheartened me quite a lot. And at university it felt quite turbulent and my relationship with art changed and the passion that I had for creating just it kind of diminished because the actual making of the work and that experimentation and that growth as an artist kind of disappeared, and instead, I was expected to be in the library researching and coming up with ideas and reasons for why I was doing what I was doing.

She tells me that in becoming academic, art had lost all the passion and meaning that got her there in the first place, leaving her with no motivation to create. It felt like something she loved and felt confident in had suddenly diminished. So much of her life had gone into this that the lack of motivation injured her confidence. The passion had dwindled and left her lost in the dark. The rest of university was a struggle to feel inspired again and motivated and want to actually create art for herself.

When she graduated, Charlie moved back in with her parents. She felt a complete burnout. She had succeeded in getting her degree, but the passion did not return. It weighed on her. She tells me how disappointed she felt, knowing how much her parents did for her and how much work she had put in, and she just could not find it in herself to take up creative work. She did not make artwork outside of a commission here or there for someone she knew; she was relegated to making art work that was “easy but not creative.” The dedication

since childhood, the years of practice, the art degree on her shelf, and she could not *make* art. She tells me it felt as though she could not reach the creative parts of her brain. She tells me her dad made her an art studio in the house, and she wished she could have taken advantage of it. There was a weight on her chest. A constant pressure to create that paralyzed rather than inspired her.

3.2.3 Finding Purpose and Identity in a Community

One day, almost on a whim, she volunteered at her local afterschool leisure center. It was like a breath of fresh air. She tells me they had a great art department, she had a lot of respect for her colleagues. They were not “just” artists. They were great, creative and inventive people that had passion for art, and art existing just to satisfy the need to create. They saw the importance of it for young children and in motivating young children and helping them express themselves. She found she really enjoyed working with the children.

[Working there] changed my relationship to art. I started to think of it in more of a positive way. And I decided from that moment to pursue teaching.

From that moment Charlie had a bit of a change of heart. University had taught her that the lonely starving artist role was not for her. She needed people, not just to get the most out of art, but to hold the ability to create at all. The community was a pivotal aspect of her experience.

While working at the leisure center she was exposed to different techniques and different people and different ways of working and teaching art. Those people inspired her to move forward in her own creative process, and actually enjoy it.

It was really good for me and I, I got inspired again, and I started to create art for myself and art that I was happy with and satisfied with. And, and I started to go to exhibitions again more and, and just kinda observe things around me and think, oh yeah, that would be cool to draw. That would be interesting to paint. And yeah, and buy art materials again, yeah, just really embracing. So I felt so much better when I did that.

Instead of being closed off and alone, Charlie felt integrated in her environment. The research and art history she dreaded in university came to her almost naturally from the excitement and eagerness to learn from her peers. Engaging with art inspired her to create, which in turn encouraged her to engage with art.

And it was, it was, I had work to do for the course and for planning, lessons and do an assignment, but, uh, because I, I had that passion. I still made time to create for myself.

Suddenly the weight of the “academic” aspect of art paled in comparison to the passion to create. She had regained her confidence. Charlie then ended up involved with a local art group in her hometown. They would arrange exhibitions that she started attending, and she even began exhibiting her own work. She put a lot of weight on this choice with only a few words.

Beginning to teach art as a profession was, of course, hard work. Charlie tells me, the job was challenging, the students were challenging, but unlike her time during burnout dreading making art every day, she spent most days excited to go home and draw. To go home and have a chance to actually experiment with the techniques she was teaching.

I had this way, this kind of escapism where I went from home and work on a piece for a few hours and it would really calm me down. It just changed my mindset.

Drawing after work helped Charlie because it was hers, it was for her, she could draw whatever she wanted with whatever medium. She tells me this gave her ownership over it, and by extension herself. It felt much more personal than making art professionally.

I used a lot of colored pencils at that time. And I think I just really loved working with colored pencils and I had a really good set. And even now I still use colored pencils all the time. And I think maybe just sitting there and coloring and shading something had this really calming effect on my mood as well.

It is a byproduct of speaking with artists, where they take a pause to discuss their medium. I wonder if there is anything important about returning to colored pencils at this time. We spoke about colored pencils at the beginning of the interview. About their accessibility. The childhood imagination and urge to make something for no other reason than you simply can. I also remember that when I met Charlie at the sessions, before she agreed to participate in the study, she was drawing with them. My own paper was smudged and torn from my attempts to erase and restart, and I felt frustrated that the pace of the session did not give me the time. The first thing we spoke about was colored pencils. The way they force you to confront your mistakes and move on, simply because you can't erase them. I bring them to sessions now.

It is interesting that the next thing she spoke about was teaching her students it was okay to make mistakes. She tells me how much joy she took in teaching them to learn and

grow, to not be hard on themselves, and to fully immerse themselves into their projects. She tells me that teaching these skills helped her learn them herself. (In our conversation was she attempting to teach me those same ideas?)

It was more important to, to, to let all things and all, um, attitudes and experiences go and just *make* without the pressure of anyone assessing it or having to be a certain specific purpose

However, either this changed or somehow the aspect of someone assessing it was, to Charlie, a different concept than someone seeing it. Because in the next breath, she told me about how excited she was to participate in exhibitions.

I think the prospect of the work being shown in an exhibition excited me as well and, and it kinda gave me the motivation of, okay, well I've gotta get this finished cause it's gonna be featured in this exhibition and I wanna show it off and I don't wanna miss the opportunity

As she gained confidence in her work again and started to believe in the type of artwork she was created, she began to be motivated by the idea that people will see her work. She became motivated by the idea of having something finished she could display. This was only possible after she had mastered the ability to create for herself and without pressure.

She tells me that in university she had the burnout because she didn't have a community.

I think for me it's important that you have a network of people who also enjoy art and wanna create and the tutors are invested in the students. They, they really see the students as individuals and see kind of people's potential and can be more pleasant.

A community, to Charlie, is more than a group of people in the same area or with shared interests. A community is formed by how "invested" in each other. It is a space where you feel supported in your individuality.

[University] was quite a lonely time. And I think, yeah, to create art you need space and you need time to yourself, I think [for] there to be that balance of communication and people that care about you that can help and be honest and not be too harsh

Charlie tells me that Artistic creation hangs in a balance of individuality and community. Where going too far to either end stunts her ability to create. A community too focused on one another is simply a friend group, more likely to spend their time chatting than creating. However, in isolation, Charlie finds herself in a lack of inspiration and motivation. To create she wants to see art and for her art to be seen.

She believes art affects her self-perception so strongly because of how integral it is to her identity. Being in the right environment and fostering the right attitude towards art is important not just for the sake of creating but for the sake of her own identity. She tells me that making art had always been a big part of her life as one of her “strengths,” so losing confidence in her artistic ability meant losing confidence in herself. Learning art has many benefits: “it's about that balance and, and also having empathy and being able to understand and kind of access their own emotions and process things and express how they're feeling or engage creatively with something to help with problem solving in a different, more practical way.”

This individuality is something she felt in the exhibitions she participated in, but what about the day-to-day? The excitement of reintegrating art into her life could only last so long. Eventually, she would find herself lacking motivation, struggling to “find the time” to make art for herself in a busy schedule of teaching. At the end of the work day she often finds herself so exhausted that she daydreams about/pushes everything onto summer break. But then when there's time off work there's also more pressure when you do have time, which can make it harder rather than easier.

When she goes on to describe experiencing a lack of motivation, it seems that the actual act of drawing is not the difficult part. “It's more kinda finding the energy to set it up, and then tidy it away that's harder.” The commitment of “getting started,” the blank canvas staring up at you, the empty room with the unwashed dishes you should get back to. It creates an intense pressure on herself that makes it too difficult to accomplish anything. The times she is more likely to create is when her pencils are already on the table, there's a drawing she can add a few more things to, there is something to continue rather than to begin or finish.

The blank page freeze. The fear of beginning. There was a lot I identified with in her descriptions. Personally, I always skipped the first page in my sketchbook to take the edge out of “beginning.” I think every artist creates some sort of trick like this to allow their mind to “continue” rather than begin. I remembered something from a model drawing session of mine.

We take our seats as the session begins, I immediately jump in, trying to put shapes to paper but when I glance up I see my friend sitting completely still. Staring forward, pencil to paper, not moving a muscle. I realize she is calling to me for help. I whisper to her, “just move! Look at some part of the body and move your pencil with your eyes” and she protests and blinks back at me, missing the first pose. But the next pose I see her pencil moving on paper. And we

both are in the zone. As scared as she looks she doesn't stop moving. And I let myself be guided into returning to the focus.

3.2.3 Enter the Figure Drawing Sessions

Charlie started going to drawing activities with a friend. One day she was invited to the figure drawing sessions I attended. She has attended many such events and had positive things to say about each of them: sessions with hour long poses (“if something went wrong, maybe a few um, minutes in, then it was kind of easy to start again and go back and reflect”) and with 5-10 minute poses (“whatever you draw, that is the final pose”) alike.

I think it really challenges how, how I draw. And I know that sometimes I panic and sometimes I'm really slow and I make mistakes. It's, it really kind of makes you feel nervous. So Prostor is good because you don't really have time to be self critical or doubtful. You just have to go straight in. Work with the time that you have

These sessions were not, however, Charlie's first experience with live figure drawing. In college, she started attending her very first figure drawing session. At first she was nervous. But then she enjoyed it. Comfy chairs. Relaxing music. It was at a fun creative time when she felt very confident in her ability. In university she had burnout:

I didn't actually do any life drawing at university. I didn't seek it out. I didn't do any in my free time I wasn't, wasn't really in the right space for it

Before she started Model drawing, Charlie was nervous that there would be criticism, being told what to do, and she was scared of “Feeling inadequate compared to other artists.” This was completely contrary to the experience she actually had. Instead it was a space which encouraged “having freedom, feeling comfortable, and just learning by yourself.”

I was just really glad that I did it and I found lots of benefits for doing it and I found that I really enjoyed it and it gave me that time to be completely focused on a drawing, on a study. Um, whereas like I said, like sometimes it's so hard when you don't have that switch. It's so hard to find time in daily life to do it.

3.2.4 Building Skills Together

The model drawing community provided a quality of solitude necessary for Charlie to create. Live figure drawing does much more to improve skills. The sessions also give you “the experience of working with other artists or students or being in a room with other people.

Drawing exactly the same thing and actively looking at how each other approaches it and learning from each other.”

And that's why I think for me, I really like going to the drawing classes when I can cause it's about getting to know different people's approaches and you feel that even though you are working independently. You feel part of a larger collective of people and, and for me I think that's really important [...]

I think it's very easy to become isolated, so, so I really liked working with other people and talking to other people about art [...]

And I think that if people are allowed to collaborate, and make art as a community and together, it can have wonderful effects on people ... the ideas that you have can grow more from the support and kind of the inclusion of others [...]

Even just being able to share challenges that we had and have somebody that understand so was so beneficial to me.

3.2.5 Gaining Motivation

Despite this there are of course, still days when she loses motivation; Good days and bad days (when “it won’t click”) depend on the mindset.

If it's been a long day and I've been teaching and nonstop, then I go to drawing after, I find that my head, it's really bad at focusing and I kind of lose momentum a little bit. I lose that focus that I would rather, I would usually have, As a result, my drawings aren't as good.

Charlie tells me that it takes an incredible amount of focus to get “in the zone” for model drawing. Observing is not necessarily hard to do but it requires a painstaking attention to detail: the way the light falls on the figure, the way that the joints and the muscles fit together, etc. At times this felt overwhelming and she felt like she could not do it. If it had been a while since her last session, she might even wonder if she lost the skill and simply does not know how to draw anymore.

However, this does not phase her as much as it used to. Or perhaps it is the environment, the opportunity to draw the model, that shakes her out of it. When you find it’s difficult don’t be stressed, she tells me: “sometimes change media, change color, change approach, try something new. Different coloured paper.” Whatever it is, Charlie has learned to keep going until it feels right.

And I think it depends a lot on the figure as well, and which media is corresponds best to, to how they are, and I don't think there's a way that you can determine that. It's just kind of in the moment, like, okay, what do I feel? What media do I feel like is gonna be the best to, to depict this person?

3.2.6 The Model

This brought us to the elephant in the room. The previously undiscussed but integral aspect of model drawing: the model. Charlie expressed concern about how to best depict them. She tells me she is always wary about showing the model what she makes, because people have “Different opinions about how they want to be depicted” and she does not want to subject them to a representation they don't feel suits them. Model drawing is in Charlie's eyes a private and vulnerable experience from the perspective of artist and model.

If it's my own drawing and I've chosen the subject matter, then it's very, it's very much my work and I have kinda ownership of it, so I don't mind showing people because it's something that I've done and I've worked with, whereas in life drawing I am presented with somebody. And then you have to kinda interpret them, and draw them, however you choose. So I think in terms of ownership, it's, it doesn't feel like it's, it's completely mine. It feels like it's slightly theirs as well.

It's very, it's very sort of private. It's very sort of them kind of opening themselves and, and putting themselves, I, I dunno how to describe it. They're, they're in a position where they are revealing their whole selves.

Charlie tells me she holds the models in high regard. She even describes them as “brave” for being able to “bare themselves” for the sake of other people's education. She tells me it must be in some way empowering to them, but she comes from a very private culture. Maybe the model does not feel this intensely about her choice, but to Charlie it would be a “big thing” to do. She tells me she does not feel comfortable showing other people drawings from the sessions or even post them on social media. It feels on some level as though she is violating the privacy and intimacy of what the model shared with her.

She asked me if I thought her perspective was strange. It is not the dominant culture at the sessions. The sessions have an Instagram and Facebook page which posts pictures and drawings from the sessions. I did however share a similar sentiment at times. I remembered a excerpt from my own journal:

While my journey home was tranquil (once I made it out of the cold), my evening was otherwise disappointing. While the model was in a sense empowering to me, my male friends accidentally snatched that power away right in front of me. Looking through my sketchbook, as I always allowed people to do, they made jokes about boobs and about wishing they could attend the session as well. I felt like I had disrespected the model in her vulnerable moment, by placing her in front of a group of young men. Men with good natured intentions and no harm behind their jokes and comments– ironic and all of that– but still, very much outside of the vulnerable and private experience I felt I had shared with the model.

There is so much to gain from drawing a model, particularly an experienced model. You can tell if the model is comfortable. Sometimes you'll have a first-time model that doesn't know "what to do with their body" and has to be guided by the instructor, but when the model is comfortable and experienced they "take ownership of it a lot more" and know how to coordinate themselves for the best perspective from the artist's point of view. Charlie tells me, "You can tell the ones that have got experience. 'Cause they'll be completely comfortable with being completely nude. Then sometimes I find it really hard to draw underwear."

She described model drawing as a form of body positivity. That within regular life there is so much pressure to look a specific way and, and have to have a specific kind of body. That pressure can build up and become toxic. In her opinion, life drawing helps people to appreciate the human body and natural form.

It doesn't matter what kind of body type anybody has. They can still be beautiful and it can still be something that is, is worthy to create art.

She tells me that model drawing sessions have exposed her to a variety of body types and helped her see the beauty inherent in each of them. It was also her first personal exposure to a trans model. She describes positively her relationship with a trans model: being able to depict them the way that they wanted to be depicted, and the importance that seemed to hold to them. The community in figure drawing having progressed outside of the boundaries of becoming a better "artist" to improving yourself as a person.

3.2.7 Forming a Likeminded Community

After enough time spent at drawing sessions, Charlie tells me, you start to recognize the people who attend. Even on days when the faces are unfamiliar, someone will notice you sitting alone and start a conversation with you. They will ask how it is going for you today,

and whether they can take a look at your drawings. Or maybe they offer to show theirs. Or maybe you have not seen someone for weeks, months, or even years, “you can not go to live drawing in a while and then go back and then you see someone again and, and it's just, you kind of just pick off where you left off the last time and it doesn't feel like you don't see them in so long.”

While the people attending the sessions are diverse and their approaches are wildly different, they all share a respect for the craft. Charlie tells me how much she appreciates the “not too serious” and “friendly” banter on the breaks “but when the model is posing, then it's focused. It's about drawing.”

3.2.8 The Future and Accomplishment

I think I'm at a good place with my attitude towards art now.

Charlie tells me this during our last interview. She tells me it is a shame this is our last interview, she liked the chance to reflect on her life and her experience in art. I ask her what she thinks she has discovered, and she says it is very simple. She believes model drawing has had a positive effect on her mental well-being, mostly because it provides her a designated time and space to focus.

Having time in a kind of more scheduled event helps me to make sure that I can put that time aside and that I can, um, I can still make art and, and by the end of the session, however long it is, I come away with something new.

Learning, improving, and developing skills is integral to her experience. In a big way or a small way, simply making progress over time. Charlie feels that right now she is building herself in a way which is pointing her life in a positive direction – with art and with everything else.

I think it's that feeling of [...] accomplishment. I think when you, you go to life drawing and I get a drawing that I'm somewhat happy with it. It does kind of have this really positive effect on me and. I feel like I've learned how to, how to do something that is quite different naturally quite challenging, like capture it, the figure in a strange angle. Or maybe it's that I was able to shade something pretty well or work on the hair and the face and things like usually are kind of the most difficult to me. And then get it right to some extent. Or not necessarily right, but to a way that I am satisfied with.”

She tells me that satisfaction and accomplishment mean more than simply “I did what I needed to do,” but also now I can use what I learned from that to move on to something else. She has been able to reflect look through the sketches from every session. They exist almost like a diary. She remembers where and when they're from because, because of the style that she used. As she pages through them she wonders about displaying them.

I kinda like that celebration of, of completing something and showing it to other people and saying, oh yeah, this is what I made. Um, this is, this piece is important to me.

If I was to show these drawings, like how would I feel about displaying somebody else's body?

These questions remain, for Charlie, unresolved. She wonders if it is the influence of her culture or her own personal moral code, but at the end of the day it is something she has yet to decide on. Would she ever be comfortable displaying this work? Regardless, she knows she will not throw any of them away, even if it means it is sitting in some cabinet collecting dust.

It's a little kind of part of myself that I'm, I dunno, it would just feel strange to me to put it in the trash or the recycling

Even if it does not involve pieces from the sessions, Charlie tells me her primary goal in art is to become further involved in community projects: exhibitions and model drawing sessions alike. Art can be isolating and creating creative communities is essential. She wants to continue to forge a healthy balanced relationship with art. Then maybe try out a few directions. She tells me she loves being an art teacher, but she has also always thought about illustrating children's books. She wants to keep her options broad while optimizing her experience, which is best done by choosing her environment and her community.

[Key to] making work and being productive is maybe having scheduled time for it. And, um, Having a space set up at home I can access rather than just working on the kitchen table. Um, making sure that there are people to communicate with and share ideas, inspiration, and show the work to.

3.3 Lily's Narrative

“Lily” is a 23 year old university student from the Netherlands on Erasmus in Prague. She is a full-time student and self-identifies as not an “artist,” but a person that draws sometimes— among other things. We meet at a little bookstore cafe in the city. We had only met once before so I was surprised she agreed to do this with me. She seemed surprised as well.

Lily tells me she does not remember when she started drawing, she must have always loved it. She describes how as a child she had a low “crafts table” in the living room. She loved drawing but had a hard time deciding what to make. So she set up shop at the table and let adults come “order” something.

3.3.1 Imposter Syndrome & Going Professional

In contrast to this little shop from her childhood, Lily feels passionately about not selling her art today. She tells me this is instrumental for her in order to maintain a positive relationship with art– at least at her current level. She believes that making art for money would encourage her to focus on quality and worth in a manner that she feels is detrimental to her own progress.

I don't have imposter syndrome now cause I'm not trying to be in a position that would require to have such feelings cause I'm just doing it for fun. But it seems like the best way to kind of feel worse about whatever you're making. And cuz then you have to objectively look at it and realize like, “what is it worth?” and other people have to do the same thing.

She tells me she is quite happy with her art because she can create what she wants. However, in terms of going professional, she tells me: “I don't think I'm at that position yet.” When she sees people at her level selling their work, she does not judge them, but she does think of them as somewhat naive. She has this opinion, not because her work lacks value, but rather the opposite: it holds far too much value to her. She explains that when you are a beginner it simply takes a “really long time” to make something that looks “half decent.” After all that effort, if someone offers 5 or 10 euros for the piece (because of your skill level) it is simply not worth your time. It is actively discouraging to observe people value your art on an aesthetic level rather than the value it brings you in terms of the practice you gained and the personal vision you managed to bring to life.

Besides the issue of technical ability, Lily is not sure she would even want an artistic career. The pressure of art as a full-time income would put stress on “the whole fun and enjoying part.” Lily suggests that there is no imposter syndrome when you have a leveled and happy understanding of your technical ability.

3.3.2 Art and Identity

To Lily, drawing comes and goes.

It really fluctuates a lot and that's why I also don't say like I'm an artist or anything cuz it's not something that's been very consistent. It's just, it's always been there, but it's never for a longer period of time really been a major point in my life at all.

She says it may be a “Dutch thing,” to not “have an identity” instantly paired with an activity. It is important to her to create artwork, but she does not feel lost without it. Other activities like hiking, field research, and reading, can easily replace the hobby. So long as there is some aspect of creativity and problem-solving.

(Laughs) I identify as something, (laughs), but uh, someone who enjoys doing it.

To be an artist, Lily qualifies, art would need greater longevity or impact, in her life. What does it mean to identify as someone who *enjoys doing* art? And why does Lily think Art is, in a sea of many other hobbies, something she does find herself returning to?

It's just that that drawing has been like a consistent, consistent ish thing throughout my life. And these [other hobbies] are more to see what I like just enjoy for now and not as focused on like improving and getting better. It's because if you try something else, you obviously wanna improve, but it's not as specific in a way.

Lily specifies that while art is not consistently in her life, it is something she finds herself returning to at a higher frequency. It is not a casual time-waster, it does hold value to her— even if in combination with other hobbies.

3.3.3 The Value of Art: Creative Vision, and Improvement

The only way Lily eventually differentiates art from her other hobbies is a “specific” desire to improve. So then what does it mean to have a specific desire to improve? What is the reason for people like Lily to enjoy art? Lily characterizes it as something simple “making something pretty.” She tells me she began to draw with a love for mostly portraits.

Mainly people and then like I never enjoy doing backgrounds and that kind of stuff cuz always had this sentiment that, I don't know, you don't need to draw, draw a pretty forest cuz the forest are already so pretty. So why do you need to make it?

But I guess that's a weird logic cuz people are also, you know, pretty on themselves. They don't need my 10 year old expertise to make 'em look better (laughs)

For a moment, she feels she is lost in her explanation, worried that she has contradicted herself. However, she stands with the sentiment. Art is to Lily fundamentally about herself as the creator and the consumer. She is happy with her art because she can create the things that she envisions, and those things are “pretty.” And when she can’t create them she is motivated to learn until she completes the vision.

I just wanted it to look pretty, make it look good. And not pretty as in “ooh, little pretty bows” but more, as in that the piece itself was pretty, like a cohesion.

‘Cuz you know, some things look better than others and I want it to be one of the things that looks better [...] but it was more about, cause it's always been the thing, like you wanna get better, there's also composition and lighting and all that kind of stuff. You don't realize that as a kid, but I think that was kind of the goal.

Lily tells me she enjoys learning new things, such as the “hard skills” or technical skills necessary in art (perspective, anatomy, etc.). However, as someone who enjoys making her art and then seeing it, she has the goal of getting a “better eye.” She wants to envision her potential, notice her mistakes, and form a greater understanding of art. Creating art inherently changes the way that she engages with it. “Practice” is more than shading and sketching She tells me: You’re more interested, more curious, “I hook onto it more [...] you look around a lot more. You see more.”

When we speak about art education, she mentions manga books and copying pictures, and eventually practice. She tells me she did not consciously do art as “practice” until an art class. The kind of practice she does today (“I really wanna improve on specific things. I wanna get better of those, so I should practice doing that”) was not present in her childhood, but the sentiment was. In Lily’s eyes the line between a piece and practice is “kind of blurred.” Every time you draw as a child, every finished piece is “practice” for your vision, and with age you only learn to be conscious of it (and more efficient: figures, forms, the basics, all a tool to speed up the natural learning process).

The natural urge to learn:

I wanna improve [...]

I like went about whatever it was and I just try to be a little bit better next time.

Preventing stress:

Your life is never consistent line of growth anyways, so that's fine [...]

It also takes the fun out of everything if you have to be better. Like wanting to improve, fun! Needing to improve is like ‘euh.’

It is this consciousness that Lily warns to be wary of, not the desire to improve. Being trapped in the “have to” and the “can’t” is an uncomfortable imbalance of skill and motivation.

Me: Is [art] ever not fun?

Lily: No. Cause then I'd just stop.

Lily emphasizes to me that the most important quality of making art is the fun. The process of making art is “more or less a peaceful, quiet, nice time.” It is a rich experience of focus and near-meditation and –because of the aforementioned drive for improvement– it is also exciting and engaging. Lily describes it as satisfying, almost like solving a puzzle.

You feel good having done it because you're not necessarily like wasting your time doing stuff that doesn't make you happy.

Drawing in particular is good for unwinding after a stressful day at work or school. However, it has a longer-lasting psychological benefit. Lily tells me that because drawing is not “wasting time,” like watching a TV show or scrolling on the internet is), it has a more profound effect than these alternatives. The activities that “waste time” are good for unwinding, but leave her feeling worse afterwards. Once she turns off the TV or closes the browser, she is met with an empty feeling of disappointment. Making art bypasses this emotion by leaving her with a sense of accomplishment, even though the purpose of the activities is the same.

And then the other version of unwinding could be drawing, but I already need to have a bit more alive in me to, you know, start doing it. But it is very relaxing. I do feel better afterwards, which you don't really get as much from, for example, spending time online [...] I dunno if drawing means that I'm happier or if I'm happier and that means I will be drawing.

Lily tells me she is unsure about linking her experience with art to her emotional or mental well-being. She tells me she has noticed a pattern: she does tend to create more when she is happier. However, she is inclined to think it is that she already needs to “have a bit more alive in me” to begin.

3.3.4 Gaining the Motivation to Draw

Artists at times experience troubles with motivation, art block, or burnout. They will discuss periods of time when they were unable to create. Lily reframes this concept. She tells

me that in order to create at all you have to have some level of mental energy (an energy not necessary for time-wasting hobbies). She compares this experience to a shower: a shower does not fix your mental health, but in order to take a shower, you have to have a certain level of autonomy and energy– indicative of mental wellbeing.

I need to like be able to reach this threshold of getting into it and then it's really nice and calming. But if you're not, you can't reach that

She tells me it is easier to draw out of the house:

But it's a very different threshold. If you're out and about, like then you're already way above it. But at home it's you. At least I'm more likely to kind of be able to be below it” when you have a “blah” day. Cause you already reached the getting out of the house and going there and now you are functioning and that kind of stays that way.

In order to draw she needs to have the energy. If she stays at home she is more likely to stay in and “waste time,” so to combat this Lily tells me she started carrying her sketchbook with her. She started drawing more outside. This was when she found herself on erasmus in Prague surveying WhatsApp groups for fun activities to get to know the city, when she came across this figure drawing group in Prague.

3.3.5 Enter Figure Drawing Sessions

Lily did not expect much from figure drawing, just a way to spend the time abroad and have a chance to do some sketching. She told me the most surprising thing was how peaceful the session was.

And they still have the music, and everyone’s just doing their thing [...] and you just... draw the poses? And you just watch. And it’s quite nice [...] You can look around and see other people’s drawings, and they are pretty so it’s nice.

She was happy to see no instructor telling her what to do or how to go about the sketching. Still, there was a helpful structure: particularly with the fast poses. She told me the fast paced poses gave her a chance to warm up without being in her head. They took the pressure off of perfectionism by focusing on speed.

It’s clear what’s the first drawing of the day- just looks like shit, the second one nearly looks human and the third one is really okay.

She tells me that almost immediately she felt a relief, a lifting of the pressure to make something. At the session she finally understood the concept of warming up, and because of

that she was able to make so much more art than she even thought possible. Her limits were being pushed, while she felt more relaxed than ever.

Cause at home I wouldn't really be like "Oh let's first do some ugly ones just to get into it!" I'd just start and be sad when it doesn't work [...] At home I wouldn't make 15 drawings in that amount of time, I would just do one.

Lily tells me that in terms of motivation, it is helpful to lose control. Having an instructor tell you what to draw and how would be overbearing, but the time restrictions are conversely freeing.

[When drawing on your own] you decide on the poses you select to draw. And often they're like photographs that are very.. like ooh that's a dynamic pose or whatever. And here [model drawing] you just deal with the hand you're dealt. That's actually kind of nice that you have to do like maybe some harder or less interesting or weirder poses or not flattering and you can do that, which I think is cool.

Figure drawing does give you a chance to practice interesting and unique poses you may not have chosen yourself. However, this is not the only benefit when compared to practicing at home. Lily tells me that when working at home, the urge to work on something complete is hard to overcome. Switching to another piece can feel like quitting, even if it is the more effective form of practice. While Lily mentions she has given up on drawing a pose during her sessions, she tells me it is rare and can hardly recall these occasions. When she does give up on a pose during the session, it is easy to clear her head and jump right back in with the next one. When practicing at home it seems much easier to simply give up and put the sketchbook away.

And once she formed a habit of attending, Lily gained more peace from reflecting on her work. The repetitive nature of figure drawing allows for a clear view of progress. She tells me this in itself became motivating. I remembered feeling similarly at the end of one of my sessions. I'd written in a diary entry:

I felt a kind of peace with my progress. Paging through the pictures on the metro, I forget about the last few weeks and just look at this line here or the shading there. The way my perspective captured a unique emotion elsewhere. I list back to the earliest pages of the sketchbook. There is a relief in visible progress.

3.3.6 Semi-Social Experiences

Is drawing social? Lily tells me when she started creating art she felt it was not social whatsoever. She tells me it was personal and individual “it's mine, it's private.” However, figure drawing introduced an element of community. Lily tells me she was surprised how easy it was to get to know people there.

So now it's become, not such a super personal, private thing, but it's still mainly something you do alone. But even in like the figure drawing session, it still feels like a thing you do on your own. It just happens to be other people there doing it on their own.

The act of making art is still something you “do alone,” but the company is not unappreciated. Art is not social but it is an opportunity to be alone together. Her first time attending the session she only knew one person. However, she finds that it does not matter much whether the people attending are familiar faces.

Because it's not really social, like you do your thing on your own and you don't really talk to each other. But then, like before hand or afterwards, you have a little break, and you nearly always start a conversation with someone. At least for the Tuesday one, both times I went, I always did at least a teeny tiny comment to someone else like ‘Oh what did you think?’ It's just so nice. A little, a tiny bit of social interaction as well

The atmosphere encourages her to speak to people during the breaks even if she does not know anyone. It is much easier and more rewarding to show her art to people doing art, to people that understand. In that way the people at figure drawing sessions are approachable simply on the basis of being there and participating. The social relationship is then built on the mutual appreciation for the craft.

3.3.7 The Future: Creating the ideal Community

Lily seemed, to me, the least invested in figure drawing. She enjoyed it, clearly, but she had a “take it or leave it” attitude with the hobby, and assured me she liked to drift from subject to subject. It surprised me then, at our last interview, that she had went back to the Netherlands and started her own figure drawing group.

I asked her how this happened, and she spoke to me very technically. She found a place to hold the meetings and invited groups of random people from Facebook or WhatsApp, “we take turns modeling and drawing.” Sometimes friends, sometimes strangers, Lily had

successfully recreated the atmosphere (“really good vibes”) that she enjoyed at the sessions in Prague.

Sometimes it's more quiet and more focused. Sometimes people are chatting a bit more. But it is like chill.

She started these sessions because she found the ones in Prague fun and wanted to continue. Organizing her own sessions was “a bit more responsibility, but it doesn't really actually effect, I think, the drawing itself that much,” she was still able to focus on the experience and engage in the community in the same way.

She tells me she does not think that there is any direct link between drawing, or figure drawing, and her mental wellbeing, at least not specifically.

I mean it is very calming.

But then I think it's the same to just read like a book for two hours, depending on the book though, but in general. Doing that sort of thing is similar, it's just something. In a way that it is almost sort of meditative. So I guess then model drawing can do this help like help just relax you and ground you. Uh as any other thing that is similar would do

The meditative or relaxing state is potentially helpful, but it is not the motivation for attending the sessions. Why does she attend? What was valuable enough to build the sessions into her life, not only as an occasional attendee but organizer.

Because I enjoy doing it and it's also nice to see the progress, you know, from the first time you did it to like now. Nice to see how your progress is this cool. If you realize you've learned something and that your understanding or skill has increased, this is nice to see.

[...] it's nice to meet with people who have similar interests. It's also just a fun way to spend the night” The community, along with the scheduling, helps with motivation to draw

[...] it also kind of keeps you, you know, drawing even if you don't necessarily feel like it that day. The groups going out. So you do it together.”

Lily herself narrows it down to two main factors: improvement of skill and community. Figure drawing sessions provide a scene where one does not have to be compromised for the sake of the other. Relationships are not sacrificed for the sake of spending time on the skill, instead the relationships are build on top of an appreciation for the craft: alone, together.

4. RESULTS: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Through the implementation of thematic analysis, I found the major themes present in the narratives. They can be divided into four major categories: perceptions of themselves, art and creativity, interacting with the real world leading to challenges, coping strategies that are addressing these challenges, and the formation of a new future forward identity.

From the thematic analysis it was clear that within the participant's identities were certain social representations of "what does it mean to be an artist / creative person," for example values they held, a concept of an intrinsic motivation to create, etc. These came to head with the "real world" that challenged these ideas (am I creative/an artist), and the more important these characteristics were to that identity, the more uncertain they felt about their application of these values and ideals. From there coping strategies were developed (taking a break, community, etc.,) this is where figure drawing shines as an opportunity to implement these coping strategies (a less stressful approach to art). They were motivated by a desire to meet these challenges through art rather than without it. Finally the participants used this time of unrest as an opportunity to reflect and adjust their understanding of their own identity to something better matching the coping strategies.

4.1 Perceptions of Themselves, Art and Creativity

4.1.1 Finding Value in Creation

All participants expressed the opinion that they valued their passion for creating art work. Part of creating artwork involved a passion for improvement which inspires the love for it. Improving and getting better at specific skills or using certain materials was listed by all subjects as an important aspect of the sessions. Whether they were doing it for fun or for skill, everyone wished to see improvement session to session. It was further specified that this growth was personal and not necessarily tied to the other people in the environment. While others could serve as a source of inspiration and learning, the majority of comparison was placed on the self, session to session, over weeks, months, and years.

Art involves a constant improvement of skills, fueled by a love for learning and creating. For the women I spoke with, it started as imaginative and carefree in childhood, but quickly the desire to improve developed. Because the relationship people have evolves with them as they grow. And soon they're copying Manga Instructional drawing Books or trying to

draw portraits of friends and family. Even if they don't realize they are "practicing" or what skills they are improving, there is born a drive and a passion.

At its best making art motivated by wanting to be better, but in a "fun" way. Participants spoke about how much they enjoy learning new things, such as skills of anatomy or shading or perspective. This can manifest in the goal of creating some beautiful artwork, or a more abstract goal of getting a "better eye." Mastery of the skill can allow for expressing powerful ideas with more precision. However, sometimes it is the improvement itself which is the goal. The constant push to improve skills was spoken about candidly and openly. The participants suggested that this drive for self-improvement latches onto the notion of talent and skill, creating a circular process of improvement → talent → improvement.

4.1.2 Integrating Art into One's Identity

Participants spoke about identity. They spoke about how important art was to their self identity at different times. Some spoke about the feeling of being "an artist," especially as a child, and the treatment that it resulted in: the perception of being special, gifted, appreciated, accomplished.

They all felt, at some point, that there was some distinction between them and others who may be a different kind of person who makes art: Artists, real artists, professional artists, fulltime artists, artists with exhibitions. They all felt strongly connected to their specific relationship with art. It was not enough to simply say "I am an artist": they all emphasized their skill level, their medium, and the direction they were going in.

They also spoke about making the kind of artwork that corresponds to their identity. Whether it is a hobby artist making personally fulfilling art and refusing commissions, or working at a community center or a school and making art that reflects the positive encouraging environment. There was more than one way to find one's artwork fulfilling, but all the participants were reaching for that accomplishment.

4.2 Interacting with the Real World Leading to Challenges

However, people don't always succeed in evading the negative effects of this drive. When their drive meets real world challenges, or moments when their skills were not sufficient for their goals, the drive was not a sufficient enough tool to process this 'failure'. When the focus

on improvement is too strong you can end up unsatisfied with all the work you make. This perfectionism, which in healthy amounts creates a clear pathway for improvement and learning, can in this circumstance keep the artist from appreciating their work.

The self-criticism it fosters leads to the potential for a flawed relationship: doubting one's own skill and place, a sudden inability to create, and a lack of motivation sometimes even connected to deeper issues such as depression. Developing a relationship with art can have some pitfalls. All participants mentioned either experiencing or actively keeping at bay: imposter syndrome, burnout, and issues with motivation.

4.2.1 Imposter Syndrome

When focusing on improvement or self-betterment, there is the risk of focusing on the negatives. Constantly searching for mistakes, as Eve put it, could lead to an inability to see your work objectively, or as a whole. Some people reconcile that by not making art professionally, and not having the pressure to improve for others' demands.

Others, particularly those engaging in art professionally experience imposter syndrome vividly. Even though they may feel that objectively their art must be up to standard in order to work professionally, they still struggle with feelings of inadequacy fueled by perfectionism. This feeling is completely divorced from skill.

4.2.2 Burnout

All participants spoke about experiencing burnout. Sometimes art can fluctuate, when you lack energy it is a difficult hobby to take up. Burnout was described as particularly severe when it occurred in an environment with no support, guidance, or community. Those experiencing it described a change moving from an environment where they felt driven to improve their technical ability, to being out of their depth. When it felt as though their values did not represent the expectations of the environment they were left disheartened and uninspired. In severe cases it could coincide with depression and a general dissatisfaction with life.

4.2.3 Lacking Motivation

There was a lot of overlap between burnout and a lack of motivation. However, the distinction I have chosen to highlight is that with burnout, the women felt unable to create even when they made time for it. A lack of motivation refers to the times they were not short on inspiration, but only energy to actually sit down and start. Participants spoke about needing a certain amount of physical or emotional energy to be able to draw, a threshold you have to pass to even be able to begin.

On days that you “can’t leave the house,” you also can’t find the energy to start creating, even if you find the process to be something that brings energy. If you do not have art supplies already laid out on the desk, you will find yourself unable to gather the energy it takes to take them out and begin. This can happen in combination with depressive episodes or burnout. The inability to get the energy to take part in something you find value in spiraling into a general dissatisfaction with yourself as an individual (feeling like you are “wasting time”).

4.3 Coping Strategies Addressing the Challenges

The people I spoke with found themselves alone in new countries, in states of burnout, feeling uncertain about their abilities. However, engaging in figure drawing– and its community– allowed them to direct themselves into the relationship with art that they preferred. The environment of a figure drawing session lets art just be “practice,” takes away the high pressure of working on an artpiece, and lets the meditative, rejuvenating, aspect of creation take over.

The pressure of making mistakes or keeping up to a certain standard is lessened, and the self criticism does not hold as much water. When they felt frustrated or unable to reach a level that they expected from themselves, participants claimed it was easy to move on without getting stuck or overwhelmed. You could simply skip a pose, or change your approach, change your medium, and try something new.

The importance of learning, and developing skills does not lessen with the pressure. In a big way or a small way. But to the participants, developing skills went beyond the technical. Within their experience in art, learning was far more important than talent. Much of the positive experience came from working on a skill and watching it improve. This was often

done through copying existing artworks. Model drawing, however, allows for a more difficult and comprehensive learning experience: with the model in 3D space and an ability to look at multiple angles.

The extra challenge in figure drawing was appreciated. A clear goal and chance to improve regardless of present skill level: whether focusing on anatomy or learning a new medium, figure drawing is flexible enough to allow participants the space to form and achieve their own goals at whatever level they are at. Drawing after work helped Charlie because it was hers, it was for her, she could draw whatever she wanted with whatever medium. Figure Drawing helped her in particular, because of the satisfaction and accomplishment, the ownership and control of herself. Lily suggests that not drawing does not necessarily signify anything about her mental state; she may simply not have the time or space to draw but be engaging in something else that provides a similar benefit. However, she did confirm that drawing does provide a benefit. Times when she is drawing she experiences a greater self-satisfaction.

The experience of figure drawing also involves a relationship that does not exist at home drawing figures from a phone screen: between the model and the artist. Whether that is feeling a connection between the art piece and the model, or experiencing a variety of bodies as something “worthy of art.” All of this produces a personal relationship with art that encourages slow and healthy growth.

4.3.1 Finding A Creative Community Addressing Impostor Syndrome

In the highly individual hobby and profession of visual art, figure drawing can be one of the few times people experience the creative community. This is incredibly important for forming a healthy relationship with art, however, as the community experiences address every struggle the solo artist experiences.

The community attending the sessions is diverse, people who do art professionally, as a hobby, not at all but just love it. Remarkably friendly people. Participants found that they made friends quickly. She tried other communities but likes the art one the best. They found it easy to strike up a conversation because of shared interests and activity. You especially have the opportunity to learn techniques from people. They felt they had an opportunity to learn from their peers during the breaks.

Participants spoke about the comfort that comes when you start to recognize the people that attend. You appreciate the welcoming environment. Even if you came alone and didn't speak the dominant language, someone would notice you and have something to say. The environment is the perfect combination of friendly and focused; you can count on nice conversations with interesting people, however, the environment is not "too" chatty. This helps with the full uninterrupted immersion into the activity, but also makes the environment feel more secure and comfortable. While not "too serious," the shared respect for the art and for the model bonds the community further. The opportunity to be with other people, socialize, ask for help, but also to be alone.

Having a creative community creates a support network that helps build self-confidence as well as inspiration. This was a great counter to imposter syndrome: here was a community you were a part of just by the desire to be there. The community provided examples of the many pathways one could take with art. For some, seeing examples or directly getting advice from people in the community with experience. An environment of friendly, supportive peers in real life means that you can ask for advice from people you would normally just be jealous of. Or if you feel too self-conscious to ask for advice, you can directly observe the techniques in action, seeing your peers succeed, and even sometimes make mistakes. You can also ask for proper feedback at the sessions, there is the opportunity to be taught at the session by people who you respect. Eventually the confidence people felt in this community could bleed into their regular life.

4.3.2 Scheduling and Motivation

All the participants spoke about issues with motivation: times that they could not get started even though they felt they had something to create. They all felt that the figure drawing sessions addressed this problem, and in fact, it was an important factor for why they were attending in the first place. Having a community based, scheduled event does wonders on the motivation to create. Participants felt that this "commitment" could push them out of their comfort zone just enough to reignite their creativity.

Participants even claimed that this was the best effect model drawing has had on her mental wellbeing. They felt attending sessions was motivating them to make time for and focus on something they found valuable. The sense of satisfaction that came from following

through on something important for their identity, or deemed more valuable than other activities, inspired a self confidence that they felt was valuable for their wellbeing. Taking a break from art and turning to self improvement in their social life or in the form of improving other hobbies generally seemed to help with burnout. Participants felt that figure drawing sessions would “be there” for them even after these breaks, and while they felt the sessions helped them practice art more consistently, they did not feel pressured to attend.

4.4 Formation of a New Future-Forward Identity

At the final interview, all participants had plans to continue attending figure drawing sessions, here or in their home country. They all felt as though they wanted to reinforce the position art had in their life (individually and socially), and felt that figure drawing was a practical and fun way to accomplish this.

They all looked to move forward in their relationship with art. Whether that was taking it into their own hands and establishing a new community, moving forward in their personal life and career, or even considering new career paths engaging in art in a different way. They all felt a need for balance within this relationship, keeping focus on a variety of interests and needs.

They had all addressed the issues they had when their identities were met with the real world. Lily, who felt she was not an artist, but someone who turned to art whenever she felt inclined, ended up unsatisfied with her lack of motivation to create. Creating her own model drawing sessions allowed her to keep art in her life to the extent that she wanted, on days when she felt her intrinsic desire to create did not match her motivation to begin. Charlie, who felt that she was satisfied with herself in the role of art teacher realized that she wanted to take more time to develop her own personal art: whether by considering a further career in illustration or participating in exhibitions. She realized that finding a sense of belonging in a creative community (school or figure drawing) was crucial for her development as an artist, but that it did not have to stop her from further development individually. Eve found out that her identity was unstable: she was unsure about her career and ability to balance art with a healthy lifestyle. She realized she needed to find peace with her position and take valuable time to recharge before she makes a decision. For a career that often leaves her in solitude, she

trusts that the community in figure drawing will support her to recharge rather than relapse into her burnout.

For all the participants, the figure drawing sessions served as more than an opportunity to exercise their identities and values in practicing art. The existence of a creative community and real life examples allowed for them to reevaluate those identities, and consider what direction they want to take in the future. The decisions participants came to were not necessarily permanent, it was clear their relationship to art was fluid. In these moments, however, participants felt they had some control over this relationship and what role they wanted it to play in their life.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

In my research I set out to answer: what is the experience of participants in figure drawing sessions? What is the perceived impact of figure drawing on their lives and wellbeing? I found that the figure drawing sessions allow for a possibility for participants to interact with a community positioned in the artworld, and redefine their identity. The participants felt some sort of identity for themselves in the art world— whether that be artist or hobbyist, it rested on their perceptions of themselves as driven, creative, etc. However, as they encountered challenges in their lives, this identity felt incongruent. Were they not a motivated person, a creative person? They followed with an attempt to rebuild, while keeping art prominent in their lives. They ended up finding a way to cope with these challenges, and based on these methods redefined their identity with art.

5.2 Interpretation and Explanation of Results

The findings of this study were in line with the previous research on the potential benefits of art. I found support for the ideas I outlined in the introduction: creative communities, mastery, and focus.

Art is in many cases an individual hobby or career. However, people turn to communal ways of engaging with it. The participants all found an art community helpful to their well-being, whether they found close friendships, engaged with the space only occasionally, or formed their own art community in their home country. This is in line with previous research

suggesting that participating in the arts promoted the creation of social communities as well as wellbeing (Nitzan, 2021). The participants exhibited comfort in a sense of belongingness in the arts community, even if they were members of multiple communities (Baumeister, 1995). The participants emphasized the importance of the environment, and that a community of people with similar interests facilitated a relaxing, low-pressure, friendly environment (Sapouna, 2016).

The next subjects I felt confirmed previous research was the experience of focus and mastery. However, I have chosen to combine these because they were frequently referenced in combination. The participants spoke about having a chance to truly focus on their work. The existence of an art space without distractions and the social agreement to be quiet and focused. On top of this, they emphasized focus as something helping them with improvement, accomplishment, and ultimately mastery.

Charlie's discussion of the model, in particular, supports William Berry's concept of figure drawing as a unique way to connect with the model and the body. According to Berry, the focus is also a byproduct of this connection.

And the contemplation of the form of the model, a fellow human being, may be compared to an act of humility in which the artist temporarily forgets his or her physical frailties and imperfections and marvels at the diversity possible within human form. While transferring your total attention to another human being in an attempt to seize the uniqueness of the living form, you can experience pleasurable release from self. This kind of satisfaction comes not so much from the process of drawing itself (Berry, 1977, p. 4).

Regardless of whether this connection is accurate, participants experienced both this connection to the model and a profound state of concentration. All the participants put emphasis on improvement and mastery; they felt attending sessions was a way to improve their skills and focus on small improvements that were achievable. Csikszentmihalyi's idea of flow is in line with this concept.

The optimal state of inner experience is one in which there is order in consciousness. This happens when psychic energy—or attention—is invested in realistic goals, and when skills match the opportunities for action. The pursuit of a goal brings order in awareness because a person must concentrate attention on the task at hand and momentarily forget everything else (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008, p. 6).

Their state of focus was enabled by their attempt at mastery. The existence of “realistic goals” and the quickly changing poses forced a total investment of their attention. The participants also found that focus facilitated positive emotions: relaxation and fun alike. The attempt at mastery (of certain skills, step by step) also allowed for empowerment and a sense of accomplishment or power or talent. This is in line with previous research suggesting that self-expression and creation both are empowering as means of “being involved in meaningful activities” and getting support (Van Lith 2010, 652). In this way, the feeling of “mastery” was achieved incrementally, via small improvements session to session, rather than focusing on a certain goal or desired skill-level.

The participants also found participating in figure drawing affirming to their sense of self. They did not feel constrained to one identity or even to the concept of being an artist; instead, they felt that their experience with art made their identity malleable, and they felt empowered to adjust it to best suit their needs. These findings showed that even within one understanding of art as beneficial to someone’s life there are a variety of ways it can be experienced, understood, and expressed. This is in line with previous research on the subject, such as Gwinner’s (2015) study *‘A Contributing Life’: Living a Contributing Life as ‘a Person’, ‘an Artist’ and ‘an Artist with a Mental Illness’* which found that “personal and socially organised limitations were not necessarily resolved, nevertheless the meanings that each artist attributed as ‘a person’, ‘an artist’ and ‘an artist with a mental illness’, emphasized heterogeneous and fluid dimensions embedded in individual contextual awareness to live a contributing life,” (Gwinner, 2015, p. 306). It seems that this finding is not limited to artists with mental illness, and can be found in other ways of engaging with the arts.

5.3 Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study brings to light figure drawing sessions specifically as an opportunity for establishing the artist community discussed as beneficial to mental wellbeing. It also suggests that these communities do not hinge on a large amount of social interaction, brief opportunities for socializing and large stretches of time spent being “alone together” are also effective. The participants all felt at home in their community, despite varied amount of socializing and time spent within it.

The study also delves further into the experience of figure drawing. Although the participants had different relationships with art, they all had a similar experience of focus and mastery. It seems that the experience of figure drawing has the potential to be calming and rejuvenating as well as exciting.

The experience of the participants also suggests that there are potentially more definitions of an artistic identity than are known in pop culture. These people suggested that art can on some level be a social experience. The participants were also aware that their relationship with art was malleable. They suggested a great variety of ways of identifying with art in the artworld. They also felt they had the ability to evolve and form their own definitions and understandings within it.

5.4 Limitations

This study was only able to measure perceived effects not actual effects on mental wellbeing. This study does not encompass any psychological evaluation of the participants. The comprehensive examination is limited to the experience not of the population. The sample size is intended to allow for a case study examination of the ways this experience can manifest. It is not intended for extrapolation to the general population, nor does it describe how the experience *must* manifest. It is ultimately limited by the memory and desire for recall the participants, including me, have and as such is subject to human error.

5.5 Unanswered Questions and Future Research

Further research could delve into a comparison of this way of engaging with the arts to others, or even other hobbies and their communities. There would also be a benefit in further investigation of the intersection of identities. I spoke with female expats and their experience, however this is not the only demographic that attends these sessions. Participants' experience with art could vary on many other identities: gender, generation, social class, etc. Further research could investigate more interconnections of these identities.

My research did touch on the participants' impression of the model, however, further research could also investigate the experience of the model. Additionally, the experience may vary in other countries if they have a different history with figure drawing or a different

attitude towards art. Further research in these directions could encapsulate the greater experience beyond the capabilities of a case study.

5.6 Conclusion

In the heart of Prague sits a small community-led figure drawing session. A practice dating back to the ancient Greeks, kept alive by artists and hobbyists alike. While its efficacy in the artworld is up for debate (it is no longer seen as the sole path to mastery), modern-day people find it a refuge from the popular conception of the solitary artist. Through engaging with this community, people have the chance to define and redefine themselves as artists and individuals. I have aimed to shine a light on this community, and through this suggest ways in which participating in figure drawing sessions has been beneficial for participants not simply as artists, but as people.

My goal was to understand and explore the experiences of women with different backgrounds attending figure drawing sessions. To achieve this, I analyzed each person through the lens of their position in the artworld. This led to uncovering the experiences of people with different roles in the artworld, forming an understanding of the different identities even within each position. Whether a hobbyist, teacher, or professional artist, participants were faced with difficult choices. With each position also came unique challenges, such as the loneliness of arts-based professions, or the difficulty to self-motivate. However, the participants shared a passion for the craft, which allowed them to face these challenges head-on. Participating in live model drawing, while not motivated particularly by improving mental wellbeing, served as a space for participants to be inspired by their peers or their own ability to improve, and resulted in a positive and motivated attitude that met these challenges and even overcame them.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, T. E., Holman, S. J., & Ellis, C. (2015). *Autoethnography*. Oxford University Press.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497-529.
- Berger, J. (2012). *Ways of seeing: Based on the BBC television series with John Berger*. British Broadcasting Corp.
- Berry, W. A. (1977). *Drawing the human form: methods, sources, concepts: a guide to drawing from life*. Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3:2, 77-101
- Bungay, H., & Clift, S. (2010). Arts on prescription: A review of practice in the UK. *Perspectives in Public Health*, 130(6), 277-281.
- Cavanagh, B., Haracz, K., Lawry, M., Wales, K., and James C. (2021). Changes in emotions and perceived stress following time spent in an artistically designed multisensory environment. *Med Humanit.* 47(4):e13. doi: 10.1136/medhum-2020-011876. Epub 2021 Jan 22. PMID: 33483433.
- Chilton, G. (2013). Art Therapy and Flow: A Review of the Literature and Applications. *Art Therapy*, 30:2, 64-70. DOI: 10.1080/07421656.2013.787211
- Collard-Stokes, G., & J. Irons, Y. (2022). Artist wellbeing: exploring the experiences of dance artists delivering community health and wellbeing initiatives. *Research in Dance Education*, 23:1, 60-74. DOI: 10.1080/14647893.2021.1993176
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2008). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. HarperCollins.
- Danto, A. (1964). The Artworld. American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Sixty-First Annual Meeting. 571-584.
- Demerouti E., Bakker A., Peeters M. & Breevaart K. (2021). New directions in burnout research. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 30:5, 686-691. DOI: 10.1080/1359432X.2021.1979962
- Dickie, G. (1974). "What is Art? An Institutional Analysis" in *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis*, 426-437.

- Esman, A. H. (1979). The Nature of the Artistic Gift. *American Imago*, 36(4), 305–312.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/26303372>
- Esman, A. H. (2006). Psychoanalysis and the art of the mentally ill. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 54(2), 645–655.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00030651060540020501>
- Gaspar da Silva, M. (2023). Storytelling Embroidery Art Therapy Group With Portuguese-Speaking Immigrant Women in Canada (Groupe d’art-thérapie de récit par la broderie avec des femmes immigrantes lusophones au Canada). *Canadian Journal of Art Therapy*. DOI: 10.1080/26907240.2022.2160546
- Gwinner K., Knox M., & Brough M. (2015). ‘A contributing life’: living a contributing life as ‘a person’, ‘an artist’ and ‘an artist with a mental illness’. *Health Sociology Review*, 24:3, 297-309. DOI: 10.1080/14461242.2015.1058176
- Hagman, G. (2010). *The Artist's Mind: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Creativity, Modern Art and Modern Artists* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203841129>
- Hanchett Hanson, M., & Glăveanu, V. P. (2020). The importance of case studies and the evolving systems. *Handbook of Research Methods on Creativity*. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781786439659.00023>
- Hocoy, D. (2005). Art Therapy and Social Action: A Transpersonal Framework. *Art Therapy*, 22:1, 7-16. DOI: 10.1080/07421656.2005.10129466
- Jacobson-Levy M., & Miller G. (2022). Creative Destruction and Transformation in Art and Therapy: Reframing, Reforming, Reclaiming. *Art Therapy*, 39:4, 194-202. DOI: 10.1080/07421656.2022.2090306
- Kaimal, G., Ray, K., & Muniz, J. (2016). Reduction of Cortisol Levels and Participants' Responses Following Art Making. *Art Therapy*, 33(2), 74-80doi: 10.1080/07421656.2016.1166832. Epub 2016 May 23. PMID: 27695158; PMCID: PMC5004743.
- Kearney L, McCree C., & Brazener L., (2021). Making it together: a service evaluation of creative families: an arts and mental health partnership. *Advances in Mental Health*, 19:2, 139-151. DOI: 10.1080/18387357.2019.1684828
- Kiernan F, Chmiel A, Garrido S, Hickey M, Davidson JW. The Role of Artistic Creative Activities in Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic in Australia. *Front Psychol*. 2021

- Aug 25;12:696202. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.696202. PMID: 34512453; PMCID: PMC8423921.
- Lecours, B. J. (2019). Drawing club as a participatory exploration of public engagement with art. Masters thesis, Concordia University.
- Leckey, J. (2011). The therapeutic effectiveness of creative activities on mental well-being: a systematic review of the literature. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 18: 501-509. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2850.2011.01693.x>
- Lena, J. C., & Lindemann, D. J. (2014). Who is an artist? New data for an old question. *Poetics*, 43, 70-85. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2014.01.001>
- Lloyd C., Wong SR., Petchkovsky L. (2007). Art and recovery in mental health: a qualitative investigation. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 70(5), 207-214. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/030802260707000505>
- Lo, A. (2021). Using the occupation of the creative arts to promote mental health in young people: Positive Mindset Creative Arts Festival. *World Federation of Occupational Therapists Bulletin*, 77:1, 28-32. DOI: 10.1080/14473828.2020.1834256
- Luzzatto P., Ndagabwene A., Fugusa E., Kimathy G., Lema I., & Likindikoki S. (2022). Trauma Treatment through Art Therapy (TT-AT): a 'women and trauma' group in Tanzania. *International Journal of Art Therapy*, 27:1, 36-43. DOI: 10.1080/17454832.2021.1957958
- Martin L., Oepen R., Bauer K., Nottensteiner A., Mergheim K., Gruber H., Koch SC. (2018). Creative Arts Interventions for Stress Management and Prevention-A Systematic Review. *Behav Sci (Basel)*. 8(2):28. doi: 10.3390/bs8020028. PMID: 29470435; PMCID: PMC5836011.
- Nead, L. (1992). *The female nude: Art, obscenity and sexuality*. Routledge.
- Nitzan A, Orkibi H. (2021). "We're All in the Same Boat" - The Experience of People With Mental Health Conditions and Non-clinical Community Members in Integrated Arts-Based Groups. *Front Psychol*, 12:661831. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.661831. PMID: 33815238; PMCID: PMC8010183.
- Niu, X., & Latzman, R. D. (2021). The relationship between creativity and psychopathology: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 282, 722-738.

- Oliver, C. (2004). *Anatomy and perspective: The Fundamentals of Figure drawing*. Dover Publications.
- Pensoneau-Conway, S. L., Adams, T. E., & Bolen, D. M. (2017). *Doing autoethnography*. SensePublishers.
- Riessman, C. K. (2020). *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. SAGE.
- Rose, E., Bingley, A., Rioseco, M., & Lamb, K. (2018). Art of Recovery: Displacement, Mental Health, and Wellbeing. *Arts*, 7(4), 94. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ARTS7040094>
- Ruiz, J. (2022, February 16). Art therapy and art as therapy - what's the difference? *Counselling Directory*. <https://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/memberarticles/art-therapy-and-art-as-therapy-whats-the-difference>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 61, Article 101860. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860>
- Řiháček, T., Čermák, I., Hytych, R., Čermák, I., Chalupníčková, L., Chrz, V., & Plachá, V. (2013). Narativní analýza. In *Kvalitativní analýza textů: Čtyři přístupy* (pp. 75–105). essay, Masarykova univerzita.
- Sagan, O. (2014). *Narratives of Art Practice and Mental Wellbeing: Reparation and connection* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203569047>
- Sapouna L & Pamer E. (2016). The transformative potential of the arts in mental health recovery – an Irish research project, *Arts & Health*, 8:1, 1-12. DOI: 10.1080/17533015.2014.957329
- Sayej, N. (2020, October 19). The Guerrilla Girls: “We upend the art world’s notion of what’s good and what’s right.” *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/oct/19/the-guerrilla-girls-interview-art-world-rebels>
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the Social Sciences*. Teachers College Press.
- Staricoff, R. (2006). Arts in Health: A Review of the Medical Literature. Arts Council England, Research Report. 36.

- Stuckey, H. L., & Nobel, J. (2010). The Connection Between Art, Healing, and Public Health: A Review of Current Literature. *American Journal of Public Health*, 100(2), 254-263. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2008.156497>
- Swami, V. (2017). Sketching people: Prospective investigations of the impact of life drawing on Body Image. *Body Image*, 20, 65–73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2016.12.001>
- Toll H., Winkel M. (2019). Art Therapy: Expanding Borders and Boundaries Through Artistic Responses (Art-thérapie : élargir les frontières par des interventions artistiques). *Canadian Art Therapy Association Journal*. 32:2, 63-66.
- Totterdell, P. and Poerio, G. (2021). An investigation of the impact of encounters with artistic imagination on well-being. *Emotion*, 21 (6). pp. 1340-1355. ISSN 1528-3542
- Urban, M. (2021). Pun(K)TUM: Artworld and theories to understand it = Svet Umenia a teórie K Jeho Porozumeniu. Faculty of Artand Design at Jan Evangelista Purkyně University.
- Van Lith T., Fenner P., & Schofield M., (2011). The lived experience of art making as a companion to the mental health recovery process. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 33:8, 652-660. DOI: 10.3109/09638288.2010.505998
- Wiesner, A. (2021). Introduction: Autoethnography, personal narrative and reflexive writing as a method of inquiry. *Human Affairs*, 31(3), 249–251. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2021-0020>
- Zarobe, L., & Bungay, H. (2017). The role of arts activities in developing resilience and mental wellbeing in children and young people a rapid review of the literature. *Perspectives in Public Health*, 137(6), 337–347. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1757913917712283>