

Panel F2

Sala delle Colonne 1

Animation and Memory: Forms, Methods, Contexts, Practices



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Reframing Dementia: New Narrative Therapeutic Approaches to Aging and Elder Care

Art therapy applications with older adults have grown tremendously in recent years, spurred by evidence that both making and viewing art can positively impact measures of mental and physical health and social interaction [1]. Engagement with art experiences can foster a sense of purpose, self-expression, social and/or intergenerational connection, and ultimately the creation of meaning through integrating stories into a lasting legacy [2]. Animation is a relatively new media within the field of art therapy, a field built around the use of traditional art materials and often slow to adopt new media within research and literature despite the evolution of contemporary art practices.

This paper introduces the applications of stop-motion animation within art therapy in long-term care and senior living communities, positioning older adults, including those living with physical and cognitive impairments, as creators of personally meaningful animated content. The links between animation, personhood, and postmodernist theory in dementia care are also explored [3, 4].

Animation was introduced within numerous individual and group art-making formats, resulting in co-created animated works that:

- brought new life to existing art objects or collected artifacts, when traditional forms of art-making were no longer possible due to physical and cognitive changes
- translated one medium to another, for example giving spoken sound, image and movement to the written words of a poem, and allowing words to be accompanied by action
- invited collaboration in dementia care art therapy groups, fostering inclusion of multiple physical and cognitive abilities and forms of expression
- navigated the dementia and hospice experience, using cut paper collage and painting coupled with personal narratives spoken at end-of-life
- explored movement and metaphor within the experience of Parkinson's disease
- explored spontaneity and transformation in creating new, unexpected narrative structures to reframe the dementia experience
- celebrated shared memory by recreating moments significant to spouse caregiver - dementia care resident dyads

Animation introduced as a form of creative expression throughout these experiences encouraged a new definition of art object – in which anything from the surrounding environment could be a subject to be documented, manipulated, placed in time, or turned into a story. By entering the creative encounter without knowing what would be animated, both art therapist and older adult were encouraged to engage the surrounding environment with curiosity and playfulness, to explore the links between objects and memory. This also

often resulted in the creation of a novel product that enabled participants to see objects, stories, environments, and ultimately their abilities, in new ways.

The animation process itself offered numerous opportunities for meaning and reflection, as well as new ways of relating within the therapeutic relationship beyond traditional therapist/client roles, including teacher/student, co-collaborators, and director/assistant. The resulting animated works also often produced a creative contagion effect; for example, an animated pair of dancing figures led to hand-painted backdrops painted by peers within the community, ideas for future animations, and the desire to share the work with others.

Engaging older adults living with cognitive impairment as animators, storytellers, and directors gives them a voice that is far too often neglected in dementia care systems. Further, giving them the tools to create their own narratives – in which time can speed up, slow down, jump around, become fragmented or smooth, and objects can transform, appear and disappear – is an empowering reframing of the dementia experience. Such a creative approach to dementia care suggests a postmodern space in which meaning can be made and artwork can come to life.

Biography

Caroline Edasis, LPC (Art Therapist, Manager of Art Therapy, Mather LifeWays) is Manager of Art Therapy at Mather LifeWays, an Illinois-based non-profit organization founded in 1941, serving more than 40,000 older adults each year through senior living residences, its Institute on Aging, and neighborhood outreach. Edasis specializes in cultivating creativity, connection, and purpose with older adults living with dementia and other physical and cognitive impairments. Edasis also collaborates with the Northwestern University Inclusive Technology Lab to explore new interfaces for art sharing among older adults. She is a recipient of McKnight's Dignity through Technology Award for her work utilizing stop-motion animation with older adults.