

The Connection Between Creating Art and Reducing Negative Emotions: The Case for Drop-In Art Centers on College Campuses

by Jared Michael Levine, Class of 2021

Thesis Advisor: Professor Patricia Rodriguez Mosquera

Objective

Whether creating art can increase positive emotions, reduce negative emotions and decrease anxiety in college students are the questions addressed in this thesis.

As today's students face challenges to their academic studies, social interactions, and perspective on their future as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, creating art can potentially help them overcome these challenges.

If as hypothesized, making art can enhance positive emotions, lessen negative emotions and reduce anxiety, then these findings support the creation of drop-in art centers on college campuses.



Inspiration

For me, drawing and printmaking have provided a break from the academic and social pressure of college during a pandemic. My goal was to see if a research study looking at the connection between creating art and lessening negative emotions could provide support for drop-in art centers on campus similar to the mindfulness opportunities that already exist.

The two images on this poster are my original work. The dog drawing is representative of Milo, my 12 year old golden retriever. The octopus piece is titled Silly and Free. Both works of art were created for my Print Culture class during Spring, 2021.

Method

A one-week study was conducted which included four consecutive days of 30 minutes of art creation.

Nineteen students participated in the study.

First, participants completed quantitative measures of negative and positive emotions, anxiety (state and trait), resilience, self-esteem and hope and a narrative measure about expectations for the four day art making experience.

Then, the participants engaged in 30 minutes of art creation on four consecutive days using a pencil and paper. Each day, the participants completed a shorter version of the quantitative measures presented at the beginning of the study, and answered a narrative question about their feelings regarding creating art.

When the four days of art creation were completed, the participants were asked to fill out the same quantitative assessments as on the first day of the study and answered narrative questions describing their feelings about their art project and whether anything significant had happened in their life during the week.

Results

Participants' intensity of anger, sadness, dissatisfaction with self, shyness and fear decreased after the art creation days. Moreover, levels of hope increased and levels of trait anxiety decreased after the art creation days.

Regression analysis showed that a more intense experience of positive emotions after creating art on Day 1 of the daily part of the study predicted lower levels of dissatisfaction with self and sadness after the four art creation days that completed the study.

Content Analysis of Narratives

The importance of the positive emotions from creating art on Day 1 was shown not only by the quantitative results, but also from analyzing the participants' narrative answers which, for instance, showed a large number of references to feeling relaxed and peaceful after Day 1.

Content Analysis Table

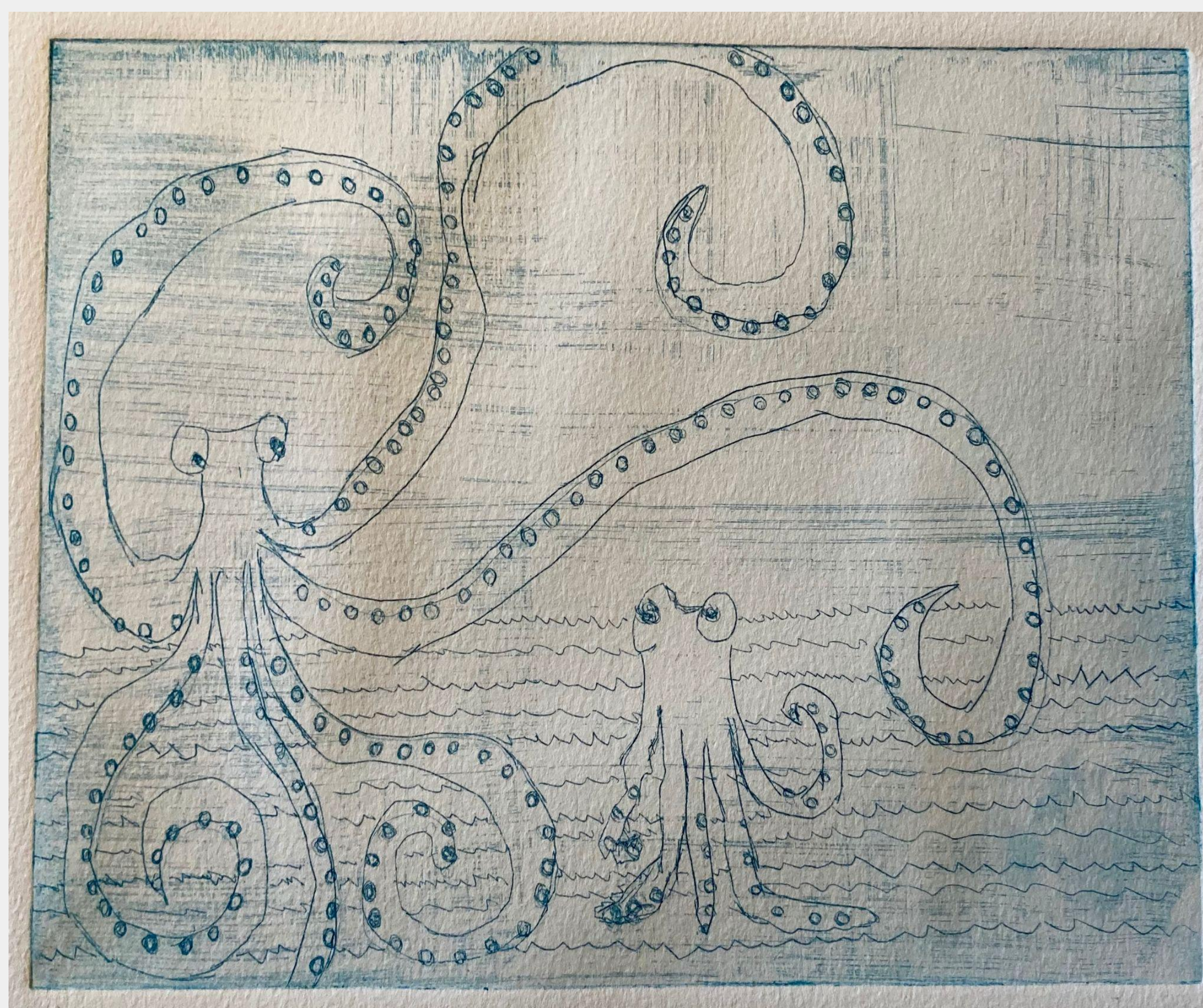
Category	pre	day 1	day 2	day 3	day 4	post	total
Feeling relaxed/peaceful	19	18	11	13	10	14	85
Feeling focused	6	5	2	4	1	1	19
Feeling good/happy	1	7	6	4	5	8	31
Having fun	5	4	1	1	0	10	21
Taking time for one's self	10	4	5	1	1	9	30
Negative feelings related to artistic process	0	6	2	1	2	10	21
Description of artistic process	5	7	12	20	24	72	140
Positive feelings related to artistic process	13	8	10	10	7	31	79
Unique	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Totals	59	59	49	54	51	156	428

Relevance of Narrative Responses

There was no requirement or expectation that the participants had any artistic background or experience. In fact, one participant wrote: *"I am not an artist."* Yet this participant also wrote, *"I feel proud of what I created."* The participant added, *"Overall, it was cool. It made me feel good. It was fun and served as a productive break."* Another participant stated: *"I am not a very good artist, so I just tried to draw peaceful little scenes. I usually felt very peaceful and calm while creating my drawings."* These statements support the idea that participants with little artistic experience found something that made them feel good, peaceful and calm in the art creation process. This sense of peace, calm and personal satisfaction is also seen in the words of another participant, who wrote, *"I have had so much fun creating art this week. It has made me feel very calm while making it, and has given me a sense of peace and creativity. I think I see myself as a more capable and artistic person this week."*

Discussion

The study results demonstrate the importance of taking that initial step and beginning to create art to the well-being of students. Moreover, the positive emotions sparked by the first day of art creation seem to have had an 'undoing effect' on levels of dissatisfaction with self and sadness by the end of the study, resulting in a decrease in the levels of these negative emotions.



Conclusion

This study provides persuasive support for the introduction of drop-in art centers on college campuses to improve student mental health and well-being.