

Ellen Smallwood

Master in Art Therapy, Concordia University,
Director: Dr. Janis Timm-Bottos

GROUP ART THERAPY FOR YOUNG-MID ADULTS WITH EPILEPSY: A PSYCHOSOCIAL INQUEST EXAMINING MULTIPLE WAYS OF KNOWING

Epilepsy is a condition that carries the weight of psychosocial stigma. A common statement in treatment is that when it comes to epilepsy, seizures are often only the tip of the iceberg (Havlena & Stafstrom, 2012, p. 64). People living with this condition may experience psychological consequences such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, perpetuated by social isolation and instances of discrimination (Baker, 2002). A diagnosis with epilepsy can bring negative changes in feelings of self-worth, as well as fragmentation in the sense of self, personal identity, and sense of control (Bruckland, 2016). Mondanaro (2008) relates that epilepsy and depression have a 'symbiotic' affiliation. In Canada, depression affects 4.5 percent of the general population, however for people with epilepsy, rates of depression are estimated at 9-22 percent in community settings and 27-58 percent in tertiary care epilepsy centers. While 2.5-6.5 percent of the general population experience anxiety disorders, it is estimated that people with epilepsy experience anxiety at a higher rate of 15-25 percent (Macrodimitis, Wershler, Hat, Hamilton, Backsdermott, & Mothersill, 2011).

This presentation will showcase a pilot study for young-mid adults with epilepsy (ages 18-45 years old) held at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal (MBAM) art-hive in Summer 2018. This mixed methods study was conducted by an art therapy Master's student (Ellen Smallwood) at Concordia University, investigating the impact that group art therapy may have on wellness, self-esteem, and quality of life for people living with epilepsy. Art therapy's potential to address the psychosocial component of the epilepsy treatment module in Canada will be explored, as well as the experiences of participants in a clinical-community art setting that is representative of society's culture. A collaborative endeavor, neuropsychological tests were conducted with Dr. Signy Sheldon (McGill University) and on-site supervision by MBAM art therapist Stephen Legari.

Finally, the experience of the researcher/student's role in this study will be discussed. Developing epilepsy as a young adult, Smallwood explores the importance of representation in clinical, community, and research settings for populations who may face psychosocial stigma; examining the contributions that can be made by voices who have been historically excluded from their own systemic destiny.