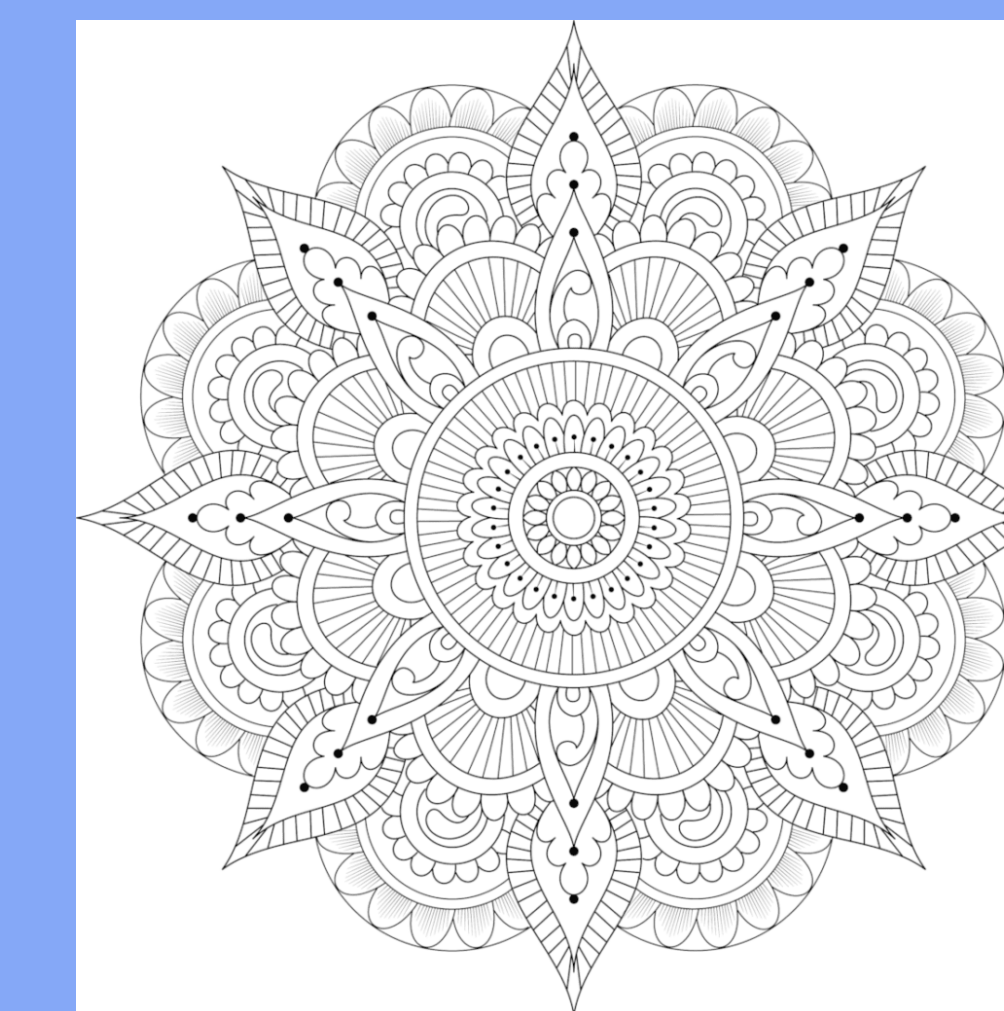


# Coloring Away the Blues: Exploring the Therapeutic Effects of Art Activities on Well-Being



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## Introduction

For college-attending emerging adults, college can be the most rewarding and the most anxiety-provoking phase of their lives.

This can be due to a variety of stressors:

- Academic
- Emotional
- Financial
- Pandemic

As a result of these stressors, some college students experience challenges with mental health, both short-term and long-term (Towbes & Cohen, 1996). Thus, it is important to develop various ways to help college students effectively deal with stress and anxiety, to help not only ensure well-being but also facilitate future success (Sakin, 2010).

## The Current Study

Although it may seem intuitive that art making is stress relieving, few studies have addressed this claim (Waller, 2006). Hence, this current study examines the effects of art making on stress and anxiety levels in undergraduate students.

## Hypothesis

Previous research suggests that art making may reduce commonly experienced stress and anxiety by providing a temporary, relaxing escape from reality (Walsh, Chang, Schmidt, and Yoep, 2005). Reflective of this, three hypotheses were created.

1. There will be more stress and anxiety in the pre-art activity surveys.
2. There will be less stress in the post-art activity surveys.
3. The clay condition will be more effective in reducing stress and anxiety.

## Method

This study used an experimental-comparison research design as this design can be found used in previous research in Beere (2019) and Curry & Kasser (2005). Participants include fifty students enrolled at the College of Wooster. Data collection consisted of self-reported pre- and post-test surveys that were administered before and after participants completed a 20-minute art activity (either 2D, coloring, or 3D, working with clay).

- Student Stress Scale (Holmes & Rahe, 1967)
- Perceived Stress Scale (Roberti et al, 2004)
- State-Trait Anxiety Scale Inventory Form Y-1 (Spielberger, Gorsuch, Lushene, Vagg, & Jacobs, 1983)

## Results

Results from a paired samples t-test suggest that a brief period of art making has a real stress and anxiety reducing effect. In addition, results from an independent t-test show there was no significant effect for art type,  $t(48) = -.400, p = .345$ , despite the clay group ( $M=34.22, SD=7.44$ ) attaining a larger decrease in scores than the coloring group ( $M=36.91, SD=6.82$ ).

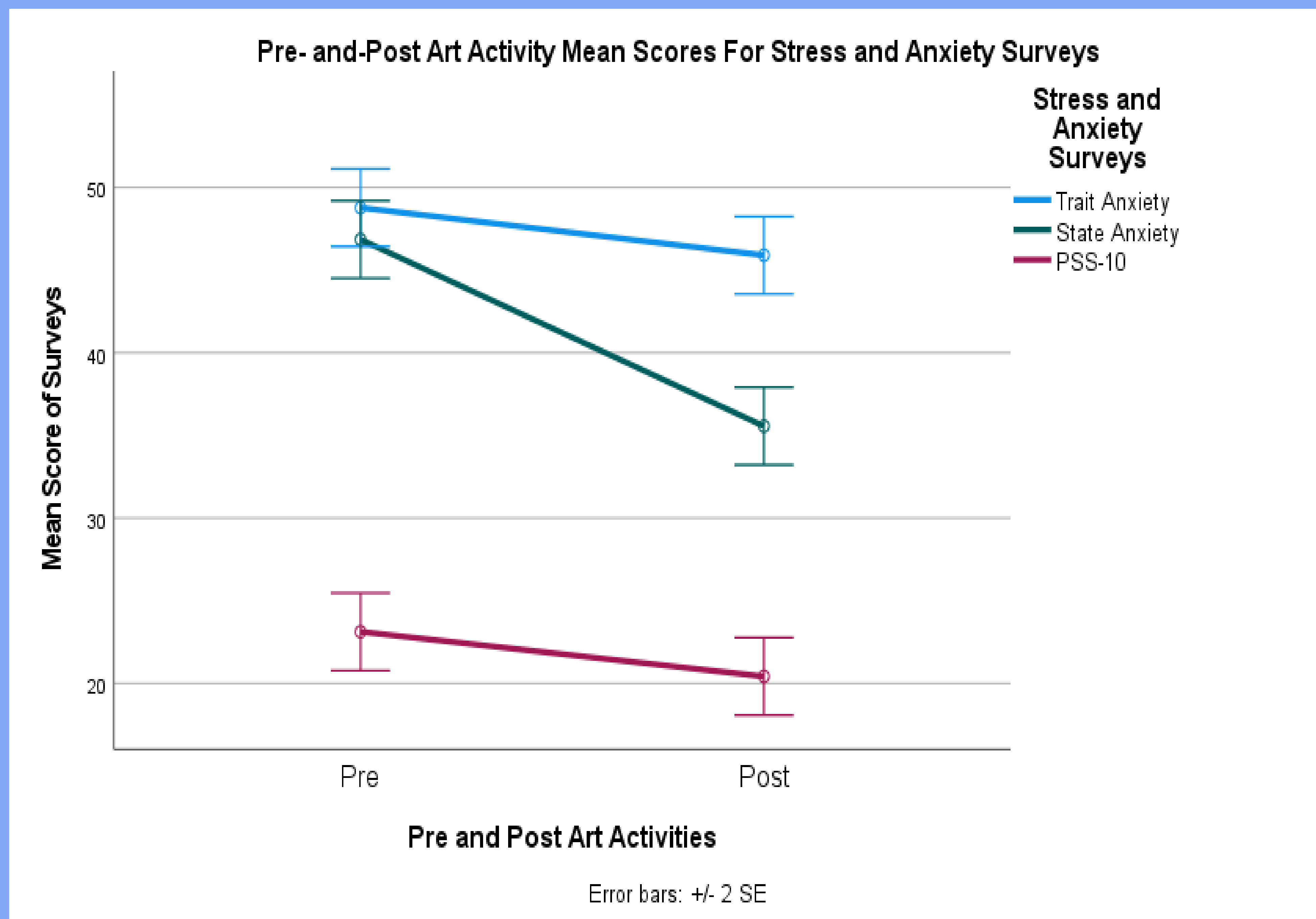


Figure 1. Mean score of stress and anxiety per survey. Participants plotted PSS-10 and STAI-Y1 (state and trait) mean scores pre-art activity and post art activity.



Figure 2. Anonymous clay figures created during this study.

## Discussion

Consistent with previous research, results from this study found:

- Art making, clay and coloring, was associated with a significant drop for both stress and anxiety levels.
- The relaxing effect of art making is significant, which reinforces the notion that entering a flow-like state can decrease stress and anxiety.
- The healing powers clay may have on stress and anxiety as visual self-expression, can help one to cope with negative feelings or experiences in their lives.

Results from the current study highlight the importance of delineating which method might be the most effective at reducing undergraduate stress and anxiety.

## Limitations & Future Implications

Although this study did show significant results, it is important to acknowledge three major limitations that could be addressed in future research.

Limitations include:

- uneven number of participants (27 in experimental, 23 in control group)
- potential temporary effects of art
- participants awareness of actions being monitored

Future studies, facilitated by an art therapist through a minimal contact approach, could offer college students a place to learn skills for managing stress and experience anxiety reduction.

## Optional Exit Survey

Respondents described the experience as calming and relaxing, fun, and an effective way to be present.

- “I could definitely tell a difference after in how anxious I felt, as in I feel better now.”
- “I found the drawing very relaxing, and I might start implementing it into my real life.”
- “I am glad I can set aside this time to think about myself and how my life has been going.”