

Transforming the Healing Spaces: Exploring the Impact of Interior Design on Art Therapy Rooms

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Abstract

Art Therapy is one of the widely used therapeutic methodologies in psychology with the motive of dealing and eliminating a person's anxious thoughts or emotions by teaching them how they can cope with their cognitive conditions. However, it is often noted that the clinical environment this procedure takes place in may hinder with the proper development of a patient's mental health. Therefore, an art therapy clinic should be designed in a manner that promotes and encourages proper shaping of a patient's cognitive state by indulging in less clinical-like environment situations. This research paper studies the necessary impact of interior design in order to create healing spaces such as the art therapy rooms that engages in user-friendly and functional designs, ensuring the well-being of patients. This paper therefore delves into the specific strategies that can be employed to optimize art therapy environments for enhanced patient outcomes through comprehensive literature reviews and analysis that investigates various elements of interior spaces such as lighting, air ventilation, colour psychology, furniture layouts, use of artificial and natural materials and so on, required for art therapy sessions and activities that would create a healthy, safe and intriguing experience for the users. This paper thus aims at providing valuable insights and recommendations for interior designers, architects and healthcare professionals dealing in such therapeutic settings for the creation of enhanced healing spaces that would positively impact the holistic care of the patients, promising a healthy recovery by undergoing and transforming the therapy sessions in a fun environment.

Keywords: Interior design, interior of art therapy spaces, stress reducing interior spaces, environment psychology, and color psychology

INTRODUCTION

The indoor environments in which any individual spends maximum durations (personal spaces or public spaces) do tend to create a lasting impact on the person's well-being. Multiple researches have already been conducted to show how interiors not meeting the aesthetics and functional standards tend to leave a dissatisfied result on an individual along with displaying poor connections with mental health. Every interior space should serve a purpose and should provide the cues to accomplish several tasks.

Thus, when talking about an art therapy space, the interiors of such sites should provide positive impacts on the patient's mood and behaviors [1].

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Art therapy- a therapeutic method of coping with anxiety, emotional and self-awareness issues in an interior environment needs to be effective enough to cast positive influence on the patients, whether it is in the form of the various art and craft activities, or the patient's interaction with the built spaces and while the art therapy is meant for encouraging expressions through art, the interior design of therapy spaces also plays a major role in ensuring a patient's healing and personal growth. If a therapy

space is poorly designed, then it can lead to the reduction of quality discussion between the counsellor and the patients. The aim of the research is therefore to understand how to design a less clinical environment that will lead to a comfortable experience for the clients.

Significance of Research

This report seeks answers for questions relevant in the study of patients and their interaction with the interior spaces, such as- Can the first impression of the therapy room and counselling spaces, influence the level of participation from the patient? Can interior aesthetics serve as a medium to provide healthy and safe therapy sessions? Can the interior built spaces affect the cognitive skills of the patients that would result in more expressive answers from them?

The art therapy rooms not only involve the patients but also the counsellors. It is therefore important to study the connection between the interior spaces serving as a technique for the counsellors to make the therapy sessions easier and encouraging for the patients. The paper thus talks about the ways in which smart and proper lay outing of therapy spaces would lead to enhanced art therapy sessions that would help in promoting mental well-being of the patients.

Methodology

This research paper findings are based on literature review. The chosen literature- articles, case studies and research papers were studied, summarized, and analyzed to understand how the presentation of interior spaces, lighting furnishings and décor can lead to improved interactions between the counsellor and the client in art therapy spaces. Different suggestive elements were added in the research to improve the space designing of the same. Relevant matter for the study was found by using search engine- Google and Google Scholar. Keywords such as “art therapy interior design”, “healing spaces”, “designing indoor therapy” and “connecting therapy with designing” were used during the research.

ART THERAPY

Art Therapy is one of the therapeutic measures used by therapists and counsellors to treat psychological distress such as anxiety, anger management, depression, substance use, depression, stress, overthinking etc. by promoting artistic methods which are believed to foster healing and mental wellbeing of the patients through creative expressions. This therapy includes various techniques such as collage making, colouring, doodling, drawing, finger painting, clay modelling, sculpting etc that are used as a medium by the patients to express themselves and enjoy the creative freedom for anyone ranging from a child to older adults. It usually takes place within indoor spaces where rooms are divided on the basis of the required activities and counselling sessions. Figure 1 illustrates an example of art therapy session taking place between the counsellor and the client [2].



Figure 1. Art Therapy Session (1).

Challenges Faced During Therapy Sessions

Patients during therapy sessions usually come across various obstacles. Most of them feel exposed or vulnerable, especially in open spaces while being with others. They also tend to struggle with their creativity aspect due to lack of inspiration or motivation to create something. Acoustic barriers and distractions, also lead to obstacles in the way of an individual to express themselves freely. Therefore, this arises the need to develop a comfortable and safe environment that would offer care and support to each individual who seeks help.

Enhancing Space Through Interior Design

When talking about connecting the art therapy rooms with interior design, it is significant to notice how proper designing of the interior spaces can lead enhancement of such areas through the improvement of the mental well-being of the patients by creating a supportive and aesthetic environment for healing. The spaces can be enhanced by ensuring comfort, safety and calmness of the clients seeking therapy. Colours, lighting and use of natural elements too are essential factors that could contribute to the relaxing atmosphere, encouraging self-expression- thus fulfilling the very purpose of art therapy.

INTERACTION WITH THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

It can be said that a stressed client or a patient will not be aware of his surroundings. It is true to some extent; however, the surroundings still influence the mind subconsciously by leaving a particular effect on an individual. For example- feeling anxious in an unknown place while being relaxed in a familiar space that is visited daily. It tells how our surroundings do leave an impression on our thoughts and behaviors which can either make us feel comfortable or stressed [3].

Following are some cases or theories derived from the literature research that indicates the same.

Study on Counselling Room Design

A group of researchers in one of their studies, conducted an experiment on 80 participants (undergraduate students) to understand how a counselling room can affect the patient's view of seeing oneself and the counsellor. The study mainly focused on lighting and decorative elements through four distinguishing setups- The first one was with the decoration. The second one excluded the decorations. The third one focused on bright lighting while the fourth one focused on dim lights. The participants were assigned one of the four situations at a random call and each participant went through a structured interview with the interviewer, followed by a questionnaire.

While analyzing the results, it was noticed how the participants exposed to low and dim lighting felt calm and relaxed during the interview sessions as compared to the participants exposed to the bright light. It was observed that low lighting caused the participants to be more engaged in the entire process, resulting in an interactive session. At the same time, the decorations and no decorations cues gave mixed responses. It was therefore concluded that the design aspect of counselling rooms, influenced the communication and interaction of the participants. Lighting, being considered as an important element of interior design thus suggests how diffused and calm lights with no glare can provide a more subtle and comforting experience to the client which is necessary for their open expression outcomes.

Theory of Environmental Psychology

Environmental psychology, also known as space psychology states that humans always interact emotionally and mentally with their surroundings. It tells as to how a patient may verbally interact with the counsellor during a therapy session, but he also interacts with the built environment of the therapy space i.e. the interior design of the room. The human mind subconsciously gets influenced by the size and placement of the furniture, the lighting systems, the use of natural decorative elements such as flowers or plants etc. The patients do interact with the furniture by either sitting or lying down on the sofa or couches during therapy sessions and thus, the fabric and textures also play a crucial role in determining whether the patient is comfortable enough or not. Similarly, the patient's expressions and communications get affected by the colour scheme used during the therapy.

Analysis of the Literature

The above discussed study and experiment shows and supports the belief that redesigning of a therapy space can prove to be beneficial for the clients as the motive of the therapy can only be fulfilled if clear discussion and freedom of expression is provided from both the client and counsellor's side. This scenario can easily be achieved by creating an interior space which promotes creative learning, trust and comfort of the patient by focusing on the various necessary elements such as- lighting, colour psychology, placement of furniture, acoustics and privacy in design.

DESIGN SOLUTIONS

An art therapy centre includes spaces to perform activities like clay making, pottery, painting, drawings and lounge areas to sit. Some might also include space for Yoga and meditation. The above discussed theories and studies suggest multiple design aspects which can be considered and improved in the interiors of the therapy rooms that will enhance the healing spaces as a whole. The suggested interior design aspects help promoting more privacy, comfort and relaxation to the clients, making it easier for them to adjust and cope with their psychological distress.

Architectural Features

Single rooms, separated through any form of rigid partition provide seclusion and privacy to the patients, which is ideal for them to open up and interact with the counsellor since it reduces the anxious thoughts of being watched. Other notable suggestion involves the use of large and low windows in the therapy spaces. Windows that also provide the outdoor view of nature through the glass play a crucial role in creating a relaxing and innovative space for the patient to showcase his emotions through different artistic activities as the outdoor natural environment might offer positive distractions to an individual, thus providing inspiration. Figure 2 depicts the window openings which can be incorporated in a therapy room. The view of nature through large window openings help in stress reduction, not only for the clients, but also for the counsellors. It is also advised by the designers and researches to avoid long corridors that might lead to perception issues. Instead, spatial flexibility should be encouraged through the use of movable partition panels that can be used or removed as per necessity.

The therapy rooms should also follow the universal design standards such as accessibility and ease of use. The elements used in framing the structure of the room should be user friendly and easily accessible to all. Nowadays, smart technology for light control and curtains opening can be used during the sessions as well [4].

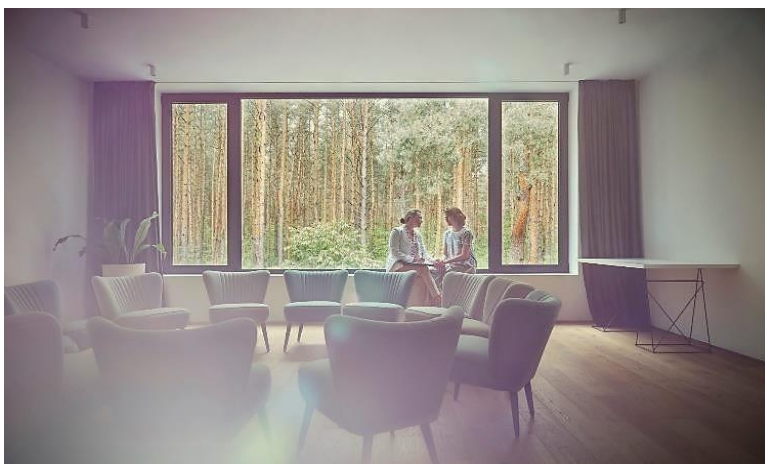


Figure 2. Exposure to Nature Through Windows in Therapy Rooms.

Lighting

When talking about lighting, it is important to understand that indirect lighting, diffused lighting or dimlights serve as the suitable option for the therapy as compared to the bright, glare or direct lighting.

Figure 3 explains the difference between direct and indirect lighting.

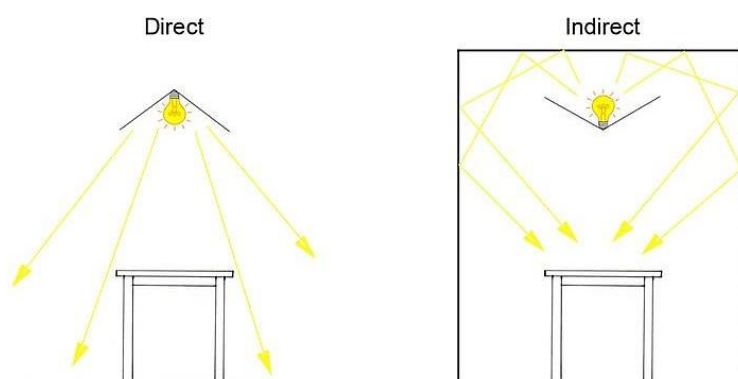


Figure 3. Difference Between Direct and Indirect Lighting.

In order to avoid direct beam, the light mediums can be used sparingly in the form of spotlights or accent lights, wall washers etc. The accent light may help the clients focus on a particular artwork which calms them, serving as a positive distraction. Other than this, it would be suggested to give a sense of empowerment to the patients by providing them with the option to increase or decrease the brightness of the room through the different light and lamp fixtures. This serves as a means to initiate the session where they can start expressing themselves by adjusting the room lights according to their comfort and need. Natural lightings through large openable windows and soft lighting can create a positive impact on the patients suffering from anxiety and depression as well as displays a more appealing and likeable impression from the counsellor's side.

Materials and Textures

Researches have shown that the clients in similar spaces were noticed to be more comfortable with wooden furniture as compared to glass or metal. However, it is advisable to not use wooden surfaces on wall, floor or ceiling for more than 45% since it starts becoming overwhelming due to loss of stress relieving effects. Figure 4 illustrates the use of wooden furniture in a therapy room which is considered ideal for the space.

Other than the use of wood, clients also prefer use of materials which do not leave their impressions on the space- such as handprints left behind on a glass table. Thus, use of similar materials must be avoided.

It was also noted that the use of soft fabrics such as rugs and carpets as a form of soft flooring or soft furnishings is appreciated by the clients as they create a sense of comfort.



Figure 4. Use of Wooden Furniture in a Therapy Room.

Colour Psychology

Colour psychology serves as a complex term when we consider it in therapy rooms since the way of perceiving the colours varies from person to person. While patients dealing with depression might be more benefited by the vibrant colours, but this colour scheme might prove wrong for people dealing with anger issues. On the contrary, warm blues can induce calming effects on a patient's anxious thoughts. Colours which match the intensity of it can be beneficial as well. However, blue-green hues might create an unwanted wave of sadness and reduced energy levels. It is therefore important to understand the impact of warm and cool tones of colours and to ensure that colour choices are benefitting all. For this, patients can be divided into different groups depending upon their needs and similarly, colours can be allocated to provide functional relief in therapy sessions. Figure 5 shows the difference between warm colours and cool colours on a colour wheel [6,7].

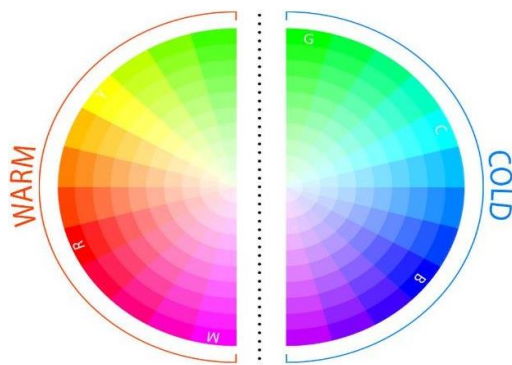


Figure 5. Warm and Cool Colours on the Colour Wheel.

Air Ventilation and Indoor Plants

Use of sufficient ventilation is necessary for good air quality. The designers can also opt for some special scents for enhancing the odor of the room. Potted plants or indoor plants which helps in air purification can also be installed in interior spaces. These plants such as- Areca palm, Peace Lily, Spider plant etc are excellent air purifiers which also increase the aesthetic appeal of the therapy spaces along with providing numerous other health and psychological benefits. Figure 6 shows the image of indoor plants which can be used to enhance the mood and appeal of a space [8].



Figure 6. Placement of Indoor Plants.

Encouraging Creativity

The main motive of art therapy is to reduce the psychological stressors with the help of artistic techniques that helps a patient or client to express their views and emotions in a creative manner. For this, the room sizes should be studied as creativity can shine in open spaces instead of compacted rooms [9]. Different rooms should be assigned for different type of activity performance and natural cues such as sunlight and plants should be promoted for providing inspiration and motivation. Other than this, wall decoration of inspiring paintings should be used to encourage innovative designs and ideas. Figure 7 shows an example of an art therapy room which seems spacious with open windows, emitting natural light as well as the use of blue tones that can be calming for the patient [10].



Figure 7. Example of an Art Therapy Room.

Mistakes to be Avoided

After discussing the suggestions to add in the interior designing of the therapy spaces, it is also necessary to understand the mistakes that need to be avoided such as using closed spaces with no windows or overwhelming use of furnishings. Such a room can suffocate the patients, thus trapping them in a confined area which won't provide them any inspiration or motivation to indulge in artistic means of expressing themselves. Similarly, the design should avoid cluttered spaces. Neat and tidy rooms should be used instead to please the patients by relaxing their mind. Other than this, the design should also focus on eliminating potential triggers such as the use of sad paintings or some artwork which can lead to underwhelming thoughts for the patient. Detailed attention on the acoustic systems should also be provided in the design by using soundproofing panels and fabrics that wouldn't result in any hindrance for the client's attention span. The designers should also check the used furniture in the design spaces to be of proper size and proportion. It is recommended to use same seating height for both the counsellor and the patient for the latter to not feel inferior to the counsellor.

SIGNIFICANCE AND LEARNINGS

The above mentioned design suggestions that were derived after analysing the studies and theories concerning interior design and mental well-being of an individual gives the basic understanding of how human mind is influenced by the environmental factors such as lighting, colours, furniture placement, sizes and shapes etc. Therefore, therapy rooms too need to adapt and make its features more functional by redesigning the art therapy spaces according to the patient's needs. There were several challenges observed in the existing art therapy rooms such as- inadequate comfort due to exposure in clinical environment, lack of privacy while consulting with the counsellor, distractions in the form of visual or auditory obstacles and lack of motivation to express. These challenges were met and tackled through the suggested design solutions that recommended soft furnishings and use of natural elements to increase comfort levels, use of partition walls and curtains to ensure privacy, use of soundproofing materials and soft textures along with a properly studied colour scheme to avoid distractions like

external noise and creative artwork displays matched by colour scheme and large windows connecting to nature for promoting creativity and motivation. These suggestive measures can be applied in the redesigning of the art therapy rooms to utilise each space for the growth and betterment of patients.

CONCLUSION

Mental well-being is a serious concern worldwide. While it is fortunate to observe numerous therapy and clinical spaces to treat the patients, it is often noted that the spaces lack in its design quality which is equally important to make the healing process easier by providing care and attention to every individual. The need of redesigning the interior spaces of therapy rooms therefore arises and after considering the previous observations and research as well as the design suggestions that can efficiently meet the requirements of the therapeutic spaces, it can be concluded that interior design plays a crucial role in enhancing the healing spaces, thus making the journey of healing easier for the patients. It is required for the designers and architects to consider the category of patients which the therapy space is planning to deal with in order to bring for specialised designs and colour schemes that would prove to be essential in shaping the individual. The paper therefore concludes by stating that the interior design elements can be used in an art therapy space, serving as a medium to ensure proper healing and well-being of the patients.

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