

SOCIAL DESIRABILITY, NEED FOR UNIQUENESS, AND THE ILLUSION OF
EXPLANATORY DEPTH IN PERCEPTIONS OF THE FINE ARTS

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BY

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DEDICATION

To my parents who have supported me in pursuing higher education when they could not and for those at Texas Woman's University who have encouraged me along the way.

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ABSTRACT

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This study explored how writing about the arts may lead to the illusion of explanatory depth and affect aesthetic appreciation levels. The study also explored the association between socially desirable responding, need for uniqueness and attitudes and perceptions toward the fine arts with how important people believe the arts to be. I hypothesized that levels of aesthetic appreciation of art would decrease due to the writing task. Further, it was hypothesized that social desirability and need for uniqueness would correlate positively with aesthetic appreciation of art as well as how important individuals report the fine arts to be to them personally would correlate with how important they believe the fine arts are seen in society. Aesthetic appreciation of the arts from pre-test ($M = 3.21, SD = .8$) to post-test ($M = 3.3, SD = .85$) actually increased; $t(201) = -2.31, p = 0.022$. Levels of social desirability did not correlate with aesthetic appreciation of art; $r(395) = -.012, p = .813$. Need for uniqueness and aesthetic appreciation of art correlated positively; $r(396) = .548, p < .001$. Lastly personal perceived importance of the arts correlated positively with perceived societal importance of the arts; $r(396) = .557, p < .001$. These results suggest that engagement in a writing task about arts increased awareness and aesthetic appreciation of art as well as that societal views influence personal views. These findings have implications in marketing and considerations for future studies.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Approximately 81% of Americans believe that the arts provide meaning for their lives, however in a recent study only 30% attended a musical performance, 24% visited a theatre performance, 22% visited a visual arts exhibit or gallery, 12% attended a dance performance, and 8% attended a media arts event that year (Americans for the Arts, 2018). If meaningfulness is a way that people subjectively evaluate how well a stimulus or concept connects with them, we can understand meaningfulness to then turn into receptivity and even knowledge about the concept at hand (Narens, 2002). Further, meaning is assigned to things based on how knowledgeable one is about them since knowledge requires a level of familiarity, awareness, or understanding (Narens, 2002). This highlights the idea that individuals may present themselves as receptive or even knowledgeable about the arts when they are in fact not as attached to the arts as they present themselves to be.

Although psychological research in perceptions of the arts is plentiful, a majority of the existing literature explores what aspects of art people find visually appealing and stimulating as well as which pieces of art they are more likely to consume (Hager, Hagemann, Danner, & Schankin, 2012). This study is one of the first to assess how writing thoroughly about the fine arts impacts aesthetic appreciation. The aim of having participants explain why and how they believe the fine arts are important in society is to expose a discrepancy between their presented selves and their actual selves.

This difference in how one presents themselves to be and how they actually are is an example of what is known as the illusion of explanatory depth in psychology, which suggests that individuals may incorrectly hold a belief that they understand and know about things on a

deeper level than they actually do. This phenomenon is presently studied in the domain of fine art along with the factors of social desirability and need for uniqueness which vary from person to person and are suggested by existing literature to play a role in perceived level of creativity, taste in music, and consumer patterns in fashion (Fritz, Schneider, & Villringer, 2016; Smith & Smith, 2006; Workman & Kidd, 2000). If social desirability and need for uniqueness can affect attitudes towards these areas, it is through the present study that we further understand what these traits are and their effect on perceptions of the fine arts in our society. We can also better understand perceptions of fine arts importance at not only a personal level, but also how important individuals perceive society views the fine arts. In a society that places value on individuality, this information allows us to understand further potential reasons why trends in fine arts spending and funding fluctuate as well as a factor into why some Americans do not behave in a way that aligns with their beliefs toward the arts (National Endowment for the Arts, 2012).

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Desirability

Socially desirable responding is the tendency of respondents to reply in a manner that will be viewed favorably by others (Paulhus, 1991). For example, an individual may report to volunteer time, money, or resources to a charitable cause because it is seen as desirable to do so, however they may not actually behave accordingly. Responding to questionnaires and surveys in a socially desirable manner poses a threat to the validity of those measures. The findings are mixed in assessing validity issues, but generally indicate that faked answers can be identified and removed to aid in statistical effect and data collection (Holden & Passey, 2010). We expect most participants to be observant and keen and to complete tasks with vigilance and honesty; however, we know that some participants, whether accidentally or deliberately, will not meet this standard.

This discrepancy in responding can reduce statistical power, blur researchers' understandings of data, and distort any conclusions that can be drawn from a study (McKibben & Silvia, 2017). Social desirability scales have been used widely by researchers and practitioners to screen individuals who bias their self-reports in a self-favoring and self-flattering manner (Uziel, 2010). Reasons that participants continue to respond in a socially desirable manner on surveys can be explained through social defensiveness and ego defense mechanisms. Social defensiveness may occur when an individual wants to protect their social image and can be achieved through a defense mechanism or technique the ego uses to distort reality in the face of dangers that might interrupt healthy psychological development (Williams, Rogers, Sharf, & Ross, 2019). This allows the participant to deny any social wrong-doing and protect and promote their own self-esteem. These theories argue that socially desirable responding stems from

vulnerable self-esteem, suggesting that personal wellbeing is associated with the individual's management of the impressions they project to others (Uziel, 2010).

Further, although participants are reminded of their anonymity in research, embarrassment is another reason participants engage in socially desirable responding (Kaminska & Foulsham, 2013). Self-discrepancy theory can help explain embarrassment because individuals compare their actual selves to both an ideal self which is the person they wish to be optimally, and an ought self which is the person they feel they should be. In relation to social desirability and the fine arts, one may not think the arts are of any importance but think that ideally, they should or ought to think that the arts are important (Bizman, Yinon, & Krotman, 2001).

Additionally, social comparison theory states that we base our assessment of ourselves on the standing of others, specifically our social image and value (Arnelsson & Smith, 2000). Because of this phenomenon where individuals evaluate themselves in comparison to others, the individual could believe that others perceive the arts to be more important than they do. Therefore, the individual uses this comparison to make an assessment about their self based on their own art appreciation levels and perceptions of fine arts importance (Arnelsson & Smith, 2000). People are motivated to ensure that their actual self matches their ideal and ought self; the greater the discrepancy between the identities, the greater the psychological discomfort (Bizman et al., 2001).

If most people would like to appear to be either knowledgeable about the arts, artistic, or creative, then self-reported measures of the aforementioned items have the potential to be biased by social desirability (McKibben & Silvia, 2017). Socially desirable responding in the arts has not received much formal examination in psychology or any other domain, therefore this study is

largely exploratory. The idea of social desirability is also not simplistic as it has much to do with what is acceptable or desirable behavior within the context of one's culture (Odendaal, 2015).

Along with cultural background, personal taste impacts if individuals think areas of the fine arts are important. Previous studies have looked at both visual art and music in assessing aesthetic appreciation. This includes how people respond to art and how preferences or tastes in art are related to personality traits (Hager et al., 2012). Specifically, studies that analyze aesthetic appreciation aim to provide evidence for what art humans think is pleasurable to experience as well as what art humans are more likely to spend money on (Hager et al., 2012). In research explicit to visual art, aesthetic appreciation is explored in nuanced ways, from consideration of the art itself to the influence of the frame a piece of art is displayed in (Silveira, Fehse, Vedder, Elvers, & Hennig-Fast, 2015). In music, aesthetic appreciation has been explored in today's popular music and in classical music. Music specifically has been shown to have a positive number of psychological effects including enhanced mood (Fritz et al., 2016). These are a few examples of how areas of the fine arts have been studied within psychology in the past. From an evolutionary perspective, the aesthetic appreciation of art in the human condition is intimately tied to our social and cultural practices because of a need to both express and experience meaning (Zaidel, Nadal & Flexas, 2013). Displaying a level of art competence or aesthetic judgement is a desirable quality and has value in mate selection and reproduction (Zaidel et al., 2013).

Previous literature acknowledges the idea that nobody likes to admit being unappreciative of the fine arts, as it is associated with having dull or uncultured taste (McKibben & Silvia, 2017). Researchers hypothesized that a one-sided contrast effect in art appreciation would indicate a component of social desirability (Elbert, Temme, & Gieszen, 1995). These contrast

effects exist when multiple stimuli are presented successively so that they are compared with one another. The results of the 1995 study demonstrated that when participants were shown multiple styles of art (in this case traditional and abstract), appreciation levels of one style increased (traditional art) without appreciation levels of the other style (modern art) decreasing (Elbert et al., 1995). These results replicated with traditional and modern classical styles of music as well (Elbert et al., 1995). Researchers explained that it could be due to how socially undesirable it is to admit a lesser appreciation of one style over another. Findings here provide evidence that evaluations of art and art importance have components of social restraint and desirability.

Other studies have asked individuals how much they knew about visual artists and art ideas to analyze how they perceive the arts. Respondents were also asked how often they visit art museums in general, how much training they have in art or art history, their age, and their education level. Results suggested that individuals who visit museums often and who had formal training in art had higher levels of arts knowledge and experience (Hager et al., 2012; Smith & Smith, 2006). The results of this study imply that level of development and experience or exposure to art is a contributing factor in determining the overall approach and level of sophistication in viewing, understanding, and most profoundly appreciating works of visual art (Smith & Smith, 2006). Additionally, cultural aspects are largely skewed in the psychology of art research mainly because of a lack of consensus on the definition and meaning of art across cultural lines.

The Illusion of Explanatory Depth

When responding to surveys, questionnaires, or interviews, people can also present themselves as having a far greater understanding of something than is realistic (Rozenblit &

Keil, 2002). Known as the illusion of explanatory depth, complex constructs or events (such as the fine arts) are claimed to be understood with far greater rigor and at a much deeper level than the amount actually understood by the individual (Fernbach, Rogers, & Sloman, 2013; Rozenblit & Keil, 2002). This phenomenon has been seen in subjects as young as grade 2 in their understanding and articulation of mechanical devices such as bicycle gears and crossbows and how they work (Mills & Keil, 2004).

In 2013, researchers adapted Rozenblit and Keil's (2002) original illusion of explanatory depth study from looking at how much individuals thought they knew and actually knew about the functionality of items like crossbows and bicycles, to looking at how much individuals thought they knew and actually knew about current political policies (Fernbach, Rogers, & Sloman, 2013). They found that extreme positions on political policies were affected by this phenomenon in that those who projected an extreme favoring or disfavoring towards the policies were, in fact, only moderate in their attitudes. The researchers were also successful in providing evidence for their hypothesis that individuals did not know or understand the political policies as well as they had believed or claimed that they did (Fernbach et al., 2013).

The illusion of explanatory depth has been identified in psychology only in these domains of articulating the mechanisms behind a stimulus and understanding how they work; therefore, existing literature does not yet include why this phenomenon may occur and suggests that implications may be quite limited (Alter, Oppenheimer, & Zemla, 2010). The present study followed Fernbach's lead in analyzing the illusion of explanatory depth in human psychology, specifically in the articulation of the fine arts.

Need for Uniqueness

Another source of the hypothesized discrepancy in actual and reported perceived importance and appreciation towards the fine arts in our society could be attributed to differing amounts of need for uniqueness. Need for Uniqueness Theory (Fromkin, 1970) suggests that although people are subject to conform and fit in (Asch, 1951; Milgram, 1963; Sherif, 1961/1988), they also feel a need to be special, to stand out and be unique. Individuals who have a higher need for uniqueness are characterized to behave in a way that shows off their unique identity despite the possibility of criticism for violating social norms (Fromkin & Lipshitz, 1976). Certain individuals report that they believe the fine arts to be of higher importance in our society as well as report a higher level of appreciation because of a belief that in doing so, they are standing out or are unique in their responses.

Need for uniqueness has been studied in consumer patterns in fashion and clothing (Workman & Kidd, 2000). In that study, evidence was provided that supports the Need for Uniqueness Theory; individuals high in uniqueness motivation were characterized as more willing to manifest said uniqueness behaviorally by wearing or acquiring clothing that may help them establish a unique personal identity as well as a unique social image (Workman & Kidd, 2000). This also provides evidence for the idea that the need for uniqueness is inherently socially driven, therefore useful to be looked at in addition to social desirability in this context. The idea that one uses clothing as a vehicle to display their uniqueness or to gain a certain social image of themselves can also be said with fine art in the sense that individuals may use a false projected knowledge, understanding, or fondness of art in order to appear unique and gain a certain social image.

The need for uniqueness is more evident in western cultures (Park, 2012). In China, psychologists assessed the names of newborn babies and found an increase in the likeliness of

using unique characters in naming their children (Cai, Zho, Feng, Liu, & Jing, 2018). Findings suggest that the need for uniqueness is rising in China, which has historically been known to be collectivistic. The discrepancy in levels of need for uniqueness has also been seen between Korean and American samples about the false consensus effect (Park, 2012). This effect occurs when individuals overestimate the proportion of those who would agree with them on a topic or concept. Park's 2012 study provides additional evidence that the need for uniqueness differs across cultural lines, specifically between eastern collectivistic cultures and western individualistic cultures.

It is evident that the need for uniqueness appears across the realm of psychological research, even from correlating with the likelihood of one's belief in conspiracy theories (Imhoff & Lamberty, 2017), the amount of one's body appreciation (Gillen & Dunaev, 2017), and even with the interior design choices of townhome residents (Erasmus, Christie, & Kleyn, 2016). Because the research on the psychological need for uniqueness in fine art does not currently thoroughly extend past art consumerism, the current study provides evidence for how although individuals need to fit in and conform, they also need to stand out or be seen as special via their affiliations with the arts.

Attitudes

In psychology, an attitude is any positive or negative feelings toward an object, person, thing, or concept (Kitayama, 2017). When we like or dislike something, we have a positive or negative attitude towards it and perceive it to be either good or bad. Attitudes towards the fine arts are no different and vary from individuals who dislike art and perceive it to be bad to those who admire art and perceive it to be good. If an individual feels both a positive and negative way towards a stimulus they feel ambivalent, therefore having mixed or conflicting thoughts about

the object. Contrarily, if they do not feel strongly in either direction, they experience indifference and may altogether lack in their concern or interest of the stimuli.

These attitudes may change, although the answer as to how is complex and dependent on emotion, logic, and behaviors. For instance, offices and places of business may display pieces of art for consumers to look at to create more positive attitudes, display an interest in culture, and heighten sales; however, it does not lead to significant attitude changes over time (Garcia & Baker, 2001). Another form of attitude change is through dissonance. Dissonance occurs when the individual becomes unable to experience the positive object as they once used to (Acharya, Blackwell, & Sen, 2018). For instance, a pianist's attitude towards his or her craft would change after experiencing a major injury to one of their hands. Because individuals have a need to ensure that their beliefs and behaviors align, feelings of psychological discomfort may arise when they do not. This causes the individual to seek to resolve this inconsistency and relieve psychological discomfort. This example is one of many that provide evidence for the case that the formation of attitudes is often not governed by logic and rationality but is rather formed around emotions, sensory reactions, and values (Conner, Godin, Sheeran, & Germain, 2013). Literature in attitude formation and change provides evidence that these emotionally based attitudes are not easily changed by logic and reasoning (Conner et al., 2013).

Cognitively based attitudes, however, can be influenced by logical and rational examination (Drolet & Aaker, 2002). The object appraisal function is one way individuals process the information available in forming an attitude, the cognitive output is a pros and cons list. An example of this is in choosing a university to attend. Individuals likely consider cost, programs, organizations, location, and other areas that they have a positive or negative attitude towards. It is important to note that attitudes and behavior are not highly correlated (Kitayama,

2017). As mentioned previously, an individual may have a positive attitude toward volunteering, however, does not behave accordingly. In relation to fine art, individuals may have positive attitudes toward the fine arts without visiting art galleries, attending shows, or donating to their cause.

Attitudes are influenced by both environmental and genetic factors. In 2008, Eaves and Hatemi found that additive genetic effects, which are consisted of numerous genes, account for 50-70% of the variability in attitudes toward abortion and gay rights (Eaves & Hatemi, 2008). Attitudes like this, which are heritable through genetic composition, are more resistant to change (Tesser, 1993). The environmental component plays a role as well in that individuals are susceptible to be conditioned by the world around them to hold certain attitudes (Kissinger, Lee, Twitty, & Kisner, 2009). Attitudes are used by humans not only to help organize and interpret information, but to also express central values and beliefs, to protect self-esteem, and to maximize reward and minimize punishment.

Attitudes Toward the Fine Arts

In the era of the no child left behind act, the fine arts are listed as one of the eight major areas of study in American public education (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). However, the arts have been traditionally seen as less important than other core subjects despite their inclusion in the core curriculum (Eisner, 2002). Outside of the education system, a majority of Americans (81%) still believe that the arts provide meaning for their lives, however only 30% attended a musical performance, 24% visited a theatre performance, 22% visited a visual arts exhibit or gallery, 12% attended a dance performance, and 8% attended a media arts event (Americans for the Arts, 2018). These statistics are important in showing the discrepancy between beliefs and behaviors towards the arts in the general population.

A 2012 study conducted in Illinois looked at arts attitudes of school principals and superintendents (Martin, 2012). It was found that 51% of Illinois school administrators believed that their schools provided the most or just shy of the most arts resources for their students, however, only 37% of their schools offered drama and only 24.5% offered dance (Martin, 2012). This provides evidence for the idea that a positive attitude toward the fine arts does not equate to behavior that fully promotes the arts. Further, most students who study art in higher education report that their educational expectations are met, however, they believe that the society surrounding them has a negative attitude toward artists (Yeniasir & Gökbulut, 2018).

Current Study

The current study explored the effects of writing about the arts to explore the illusion of explanatory depth on levels of aesthetic appreciation. Socially desirable responding and need for uniqueness were also explored in relation to aesthetic appreciation of art and personal and perceived societal attitudes towards art. I sought to provide information on the question of what happens to aesthetic appreciation of art after individuals are prompted to explain how they believe the fine arts are important by hypothesizing that aesthetic appreciation of art would decrease after participants were exposed to their actual level of consideration of the fine arts through the writing task. I also examined the question of whether social desirability and need for uniqueness predict when individuals are likely to promote a higher level of perceived importance of the fine arts. I tested the hypothesis that higher levels of socially desirable responding would predict higher ratings of art importance and appreciation. The same was hypothesized for the need for uniqueness, as a higher level of need for uniqueness was expected to predict higher ratings of art importance and appreciation. This was expected due to Western society's value of the fine arts as they are societally conceptualized as good and desirable to know, understand, and

experience (Boddez, Descheemaeker, Mertens, Truyts, & Van de Cruys, 2019). Literature also supports the idea that the need for uniqueness can be expressed through fine art, therefore, contributing to one's sense of standing out and being special, unique, and positively different (Workman & Kidd, 2000).

Lastly, I addressed the question of whether individuals believe the fine arts are equally important to them, as they are important in society. I tested the hypothesis that ratings of the personal importance of the arts and societal importance of the arts would positively correlate. This idea is supported by an array of literature which suggests that behavior seen as desirable in one's society would influence individuals within said society to present themselves as being personally associated with it as well, even if they are not (Smith & Smith, 2006; Hager et al., 2012).

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Participants

The sample consisted of 397 undergraduate students recruited from Texas Woman's University in North Texas. There was a disproportionate gender ratio as female students outnumber male students 9:1 at Texas Woman's University. Accordingly, 377 self-identified women and 19 self-identified men participated, one participant identified as non-binary. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 46, with a mean age of 19.25 ($SD = 3.01$). The participants were 35.6% Caucasian ($n = 142$), 33.1% Hispanic ($n = 132$), 21.8% African-American ($n = 87$), 14.8% Asian ($n = 59$), 1.3% Native American ($n = 5$), 1.3% Pacific Islander ($n = 5$), and 4% Mixed or Other ($n = 16$). Racial and ethnic frequencies overlapped due to the participants' ability to select more than one option. In this study, participants earned partial credit toward a course requirement for study participation. Participants gave informed consent electronically before the study began. The study was conducted completely online and created with PsychData software, and participants were able to complete the study at the time of their choice.

Procedure

Participants first reported demographic information. In addition to age, race, and gender, participants reported the degree they are currently seeking as well as if they have experience or are familiar with the fine arts. Participants were informed that for the purposes of the current study, fine art was defined as only the five areas of visual art, media art, dance, music, and theatre. Attitudes towards art forms such as poetry were not to be considered when answering items on the survey solely because of the operational definition in place. The final question in

this section asked participants how much they believe others think the fine arts are important on a 7-point Likert scale.

Once demographic information was collected, participants completed a series of Likert scales that directly asked their attitudes towards the fine arts. This initial section consisted of six 7-point Likert scales that asked how much the participants believed that various areas of the fine arts were important to them at a personal level (e.g., “Visual art is important to me personally”). A Cronbach’s α of .8 was found for this personal importance of the arts scale. Upon completion, six more 7-point Likert scales were presented, this time asking how much the participant believed that various areas of the fine arts were within our society (e.g., “Visual art is important in our society”). A Cronbach’s α of .92 was found for this societal importance of the arts scale. After completing the first 12 questions, participants completed the Art Reception Survey (ARS) (Hager et al., 2012) totaling 28 items. The ARS assesses aesthetic appreciation of art. Previous studies have demonstrated the high internal consistency of the ARS, with a Cronbach’s α for all six parts ranging from .83 to .90 (Hager et al., 2012). The current study found a Cronbach’s α of .92 for the ARS. The ARS items are 5-point Likert scales and range from 1 = *completely disagree*, to 5 = *completely agree*.

For this study, the ARS was slightly modified to gauge the participants' perception of fine art from a more general and broad perspective. Instead of participants completing the ARS by looking at a piece of visual art and responding only with their attitude towards the presented piece, items were reworded in aim to assess the participants' attitudes toward fine art in general. Amending the original validated scale allowed for an understanding of the broad construct of fine art rather than a subcategory of fine art, visual art. For example, the original item “I would consider to invest a large sum of money to buy this piece of art” was adapted to “I would consider to invest a large

sum of money to buy a piece of art”, the item “It is exciting to think about this painting” was adapted to “It is exciting to think about fine art” (Hager et al., 2012).

Following the ARS, participants completed the Vienna Art Interest and Art Knowledge Questionnaire (VAIAK). The VAIK is a 15-item survey consisting of 7-point Likert scales that assesses art interest and knowledge. Only the subscale measuring art interest was used (the 15 Likert scales) and not the 18 multiple-choice questions that measure art knowledge. (Specker et al., 2018). In this study, The Vienna Art Interest and Art Knowledge Questionnaire has high internal consistency reliability, with a Cronbach’s α of .81 for art interest.

After completing the initial 12 items as well as the ARS, participants completed the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR; Paulhus, 1991) to measure socially desirable responding, operationally defined in the present study as the behaviors which are culturally sanctioned, approved of, and seen as desirable to act on, but which are improbable of occurrence. In this case, the higher the respondents’ score on the BIDR, the higher amount of social desirability they are attributed. This 40-item survey consists of 5-point Likert scales. Scores were averaged and analyzed as continuous variables with higher scores indicating a higher likelihood of dishonesty and socially desirable answering. The BIDR has been found to have a satisfactory Cronbach’s α of .86 (Holden & Fekken, 2017). In this study, the BIDR had a Cronbach’s α of .59. Upon completion of the BIDR, participants completed the Uniqueness Scale (or need for uniqueness scale; Fromkin & Lipshitz, 1976). The 32 items in this measure consist of 5-point Likert scales and assess if participants are low or high in their need to stand out and be different (Fromkin & Lipshitz, 1976). The Uniqueness Scale has been found to have high test-retest reliability ($r = .87, p < .001$)

and discriminant validity in negative correlations with the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1983; $r = -.08$), the Audience Anxiety Scale (Paivio, 1965; $r = -.57$), and the Social anxiety subscale of the Activity Preference Scale (Lykken, Tellegin, & Katzenmeyer, 1973; $r = -.44$). These data show that need for uniqueness bears negative relations with multiple kinds of anxiety (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). In the present study, the Uniqueness Scale had a Cronbach's α of .65.

Upon completion of all measures, participants were prompted to engage in a writing task adapted from Rozenblit and Keil (2002). This psychological phenomenon known as the illusion of explanatory depth has also been engaged in analyzing social desirability and extreme positions in political attitudes. Fernbach et al. adapted Rozenblit and Keil's original work to accomplish this (2013). This section of the study was largely adapted from the works of both Rozenblit and Keil as well as Fernbach et al. in looking at the illusion of explanatory depth (Rozenblit & Keil, 2002; Fernbach et al., 2013).

Participants were randomly assigned into two groups. The first group was prompted to write as thoroughly as possible about the importance of the following in society: a.) music, dance, and drama (theatre); and b.) visual and media art. Participants were prompted to be specific and reference artists and works that are of particular significance in society. This group served as the experimental group. It is important to note that before completing the task participants were told that their responses would be scored from 1-7, with 7 being the most thorough understanding, participants were not actually scored. The other half of the participants served as a control group and were prompted to write about their day. Participants in both groups were instructed to write a minimum of 150 words on the writing task. Participants in both groups who did not write more than two sentences were removed from the sample. Lastly, all

participants repeated the ARS as well as the 12 items that directly ask for their level of the personal importance of the arts as well as their level of how important they perceive the fine arts to be in society.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

An a priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1.9 to determine the minimum sample size required to find statistical significance using an independent means t-test analysis. With a desired level of power set at .95, an alpha (α) level at .05, and a moderate effect size of .5 (d), it was determined that a minimum of 88 participants in each of the two groups would be required to ensure adequate power. The researcher collected 202 participants in the experimental group and 195 in the control group (Cohen, 1988). The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 25 (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. Items in each measure (ARS, Vienna Art Interest, and Art Knowledge Questionnaire, BIDR, and Uniqueness Scale) were reverse scored if needed and then averaged as their authors recommended. Therefore, scores for each measure are analyzed as continuous.

Mixed ANOVA

A mixed ANOVA was conducted to compare differences both within and between subjects on their score of the ARS pre-test and post-test. The mixed ANOVA analyzed the first hypothesis regarding an expected decrease in scores from the pre-test to the post-test due to the writing intervention. There was no significant main effect of time, $F(1, 395) = .022, p = .881$. There was also no significant main effect of condition, $F(1, 395) = .244, p = .622$.

The mixed ANOVA did find a significant interaction between pre-test and post-test and condition of the participant, $F(1, 395) = 12.87, p < .001, \eta^2 = .032$. This tells us that the writing

task had a different effect on aesthetic appreciation levels of participants in the experimental condition than the control condition.

Paired and Independent Samples *T*-Tests

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the means of the ARS pre-test and ARS post-test scores for all participants from the mixed ANOVA. Experimental group pre-test scores ($M = 3.21, SD = .8$) increased in their post-test scores ($M = 3.3, SD = .85$); $t(201) = -2.31, p = 0.02, d = .11$. Control group pre-test scores ($M = 3.26, SD = .75$) decreased in their post-test scores ($M = 3.18, SD = .77$); $t(194) = 2.97, p < .05, d = .11$.

I further used *t*-tests to compare the scores of the Likert scales that measure personal perceived importance of the fine arts and perceived importance of the fine arts in society. In the experimental group, personal importance pre-test scores ($M = 5.04, SD = 1.59$) were significantly different than personal importance post-test scores ($M = 5.38, SD = 1.59$); $t(198) = -3.95, p < .001, d = .21$. Likewise, societal pre-test importance scores ($M = 5.71, SD = 1.49$) were significantly different from societal importance post-test scores ($M = 6.1, SD = 1.27$); $t(200) = -4.54, p < .001, d = .28$. This result did not support the hypothesis that predicted decreased scores after the writing task.

In the control group, personal importance pre-test scores ($M = 5.26, SD = 1.49$) were not significantly different from personal importance post-test scores ($M = 5.33, SD = 1.62$); $t(194) = -1.05, p < .30, d = .04$. Likewise, societal pre-test importance scores ($M = 5.75, SD = 1.5$) were not significantly different than societal importance post-test scores ($M = 5.63, SD = 1.57$); $t(194) = 1.68, p = .094, d = .08$. Pre-test and post-test scores in both personal and societal importance showed no statistical difference between experimental and control groups.

Additionally, a paired samples *t*-test showed a significant difference between the average score for personal importance ($M = 5.15, SD = 1.54$) and the average score for societal importance ($M = 5.74, SD = 1.49; t(196) = -8.23, p < .001$).

Pearson's Correlations

Correlations were conducted to look at the relationship between scores on the BIDR with scores on the ARS pre-test. Results of the Pearson correlation for scores on the BIDR and scores on the ARS pre-test across all participants showed no correlation; $r(395) = -.012, p = .813$.

A second correlation showed that scores on the Uniqueness Scale and scores on the ARS pre-test across all participants did significantly correlate in a positive manner as the researcher hypothesized; $r(396) = .548, p < .001$.

Finally, correlations were conducted between averaged ratings of pre-test personal importance of the arts and averaged ratings of pre-test societal importance of the art. The Pearson correlation found a significant positive correlation as expected; $r(396) = .557, p < .001$. Table 1 shows correlational values between measures.

Table 1

Correlations of Measures in Perceptions of the Fine Arts

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. ARS pre-test	-				
2. BIDR	-.01	-			
3. UNIQ	.55*	.01	-		
4. Personal Importance	.05	.06	.09	-	
5. Societal Importance	.08	.06	.06	.56*	--

Note. ARS = Art Reception Survey. BIDR = Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding. UNIQ = Uniqueness Scale.

* $p < .01$

Exploratory Analyses

A correlation was conducted to analyze the scores from the Vienna Art Interest and Art knowledge Questionnaire (presently only measuring art interest) with pre-test scores of the Art Reception Survey. Findings showed a significant correlation in that scores on the VAIK positively correlated with scores on the ARS ($r(396) = .652, p < .001$). VAIK scores also correlated significantly with scores on the Uniqueness scale ($r(396) = .455, p < .001$). Correlations between the VAIK and the personal importance were not significant ($r(396) = .032, p = .523$). Correlations between the VAIK and societal importance scales were also not significant ($r(396) = .017, p = .742$).

Further, 21 of the 397 undergraduate participants reported to be currently pursuing a degree in the fine arts. I removed those participants from the sample to see if the previous results would change. Findings showed that for participants who were not pursuing a degree in the fine arts (non-art majors), the correlation between personal importance and societal importance was still significant ($r(376) = .551, p < .001$). The non-art majors also showed no significant correlation between social desirability and aesthetic appreciation ($r(376) = -.029, p = .578$). They also showed a significant correlation between need for uniqueness and aesthetic appreciation ($r(376) = .542, p < .001$).

Data for the sample of 21 participants who reported to be currently seeking a degree in the fine arts (fine art majors) showed a strong correlation between personal importance and societal importance ($r(20) = .614, p = .003$). Interestingly, the fine art majors did show a statistically significant correlation between socially desirable responding and aesthetic appreciation which the non-art sample did not ($r(20) = .455, p = .044$). The fine art majors also demonstrated a correlation between uniqueness and aesthetic appreciation ($r(20) = .574, p =$

.008). Lastly, *t*-tests were used to look at differences in mean scores of personal overall art importance and perceived societal art importance between the fine art majors and the non-art majors. An independent samples *t*-test showed that art was significantly more important personally to fine art majors ($M = 6.62, SD = .74$) than non-art majors ($M = 5.06, SD = 1.53$); $t(396) = 4.62, p < 0.01$. A second independent samples *t*-test showed that there is no significant difference in perceived societal importance between fine arts majors ($M = 6.33, SD = 1.06$) and non-art majors ($M = 5.7, SD = 1.50$), but was approaching significance ($t(396) = 1.91, p = .057$).

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

This study sought to explore how writing about the arts affects people's appreciation and interest in fine arts as well as how the factors of social desirability and need for uniqueness affect these levels of appreciation. The current study found that individuals who wrote thoroughly about their knowledge and affinity of visual art, media art, dance, music, and theatre were more likely to show an increase in their overall appreciation of art than individuals who simply wrote about their day. Socially desirable responding was not a correlate of levels of art appreciation. This supports previous literature suggesting that socially desirable responding socially desirable responding is not as big of a threat as other factors such as inattentive responding including measures of the fine arts (McKibben & Silvia, 2017). However, need for uniqueness was in fact a correlate in that those higher in need for uniqueness displayed higher levels of supposed art appreciation, likely because in doing so they are portraying themselves as special, unique, and as one who stands out in a positive way. The present study also revealed information about the relationship between how individuals report that the fine arts are important to them on a personal level and how important they believe the arts are in our current society. The finding that individuals reported that the fine arts are of less importance to them personally than how important they believe them to be in society provides insight as to why most Americans believe the arts are meaningful however do not attend art shows, exhibits, or discussions.

Self-discrepancy theory can help explain the findings partially in that individuals evaluate their actual selves to both an ideal self, and an ought self. One may not think the arts are of any importance but think that ideally they should or ought to think that the arts are important (Bizman et al., 2001). Additionally, social comparison theory states that we base

our assessment of ourselves on the standing of others. Because individuals examine themselves in comparison to others, one could formulate that if the individual believes that others appreciate and perceive the arts to be important in society then the individual would be affected through this phenomenon (Arnkellsson & Smith, 2000). This is seen in the current study with reports of personal arts importance correlating positively with perceived societal arts importance.

People are motivated to ensure that their actual self matches their ideal and ought self; the greater the discrepancy between the identities, the greater the psychological discomfort (Bizman et al., 2001). Respondent reception towards the fine arts increased with an explanation of what they currently know and believe about different areas of the arts.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The central finding from this study that engagement in a writing task increased reception to the fine arts rather than decreased it can be addressed in future directions within and outside of the arts. This happened because participants were actively engaged in their explanation of why and how they believe the fine arts are important. In discussing the fine arts, participants may have realized they could successfully elaborate on how and why they believe the fine arts are important through citing specific artists or pieces as they were prompted to do. Their success may have led them to become more aware that they not only believe the fine arts are important but that their behaviors too align.

Marketing and advertising research can use this evidence in efforts to encourage consumers to engage (through writing or other means) cognitive resources towards their product or concept. Specific to the fine arts, those in sales may want to allocate efforts towards sparking discussions of the fine arts in order to increase reception to their cause, further potentially increasing ticket sales or attendance.

Future studies that wish to look at factors that correlate with aesthetic appreciation should look at personality traits such as neuroticism, agreeableness, or openness to experience rather than socially desirable responding or inattentive responding as need for uniqueness showed significant results. Outside of art, the need for uniqueness is potentially correlated with other concepts or domains that are seen to make the individual appear as special and as one who stands out from the crowd. Likewise, although the personal importance and societal importance of the art scales created by the researcher are not published measures with initial reliability and validity, the scales are promising to include alongside the ARS.

Future directions should also consider including presenting pieces of actual fine art to participants, this would include showing pictures of visual artworks, clips of musical compositions, videos of performative art, or ideally presenting these pieces in person to prompt reaction.

Information from exploratory analyses can be used in future directions by considering differences in major and exposure to the arts in how important individuals perceive the arts to be at a personal level and through the eyes of society. Further, although the VAIAK was used in the current study mainly in attempt for the respondent to become aware of their lack of knowledge and actual perceived importance (as the measure asks items such as “How often do you visit art museums and or galleries?” and “How often do you visit talks of art or art history?”), results from exploratory analysis support the evidence collected from the ARS and Uniqueness Scale and can be considered in future directions. Additional consideration should be in data analyzation and utilization of analyses such as multiple regression in aims to look at factors that may predict aesthetic appreciation.

Strengths of the present study include significant findings in that writing about the fine arts leads to higher levels of aesthetic appreciation. Although this finding did not support my initial hypothesis, it is a major finding with implications for how individuals can make efforts to increase the overall reception of the fine arts in others. Strengths also include the finding that respondents reported the fine arts to be significantly lower of importance to them personally than the fine arts are in society in the measures constructed by the researcher. Future directions should consider this data and implications of this finding suggest that generally, individuals will admit to caring about or believing a certain construct such as fine art is less important than how important they believe society holds that construct to be.

Weaknesses of this study include skewed gender and age demographics in that results cannot be generalized to Americans or even undergraduate students. Future studies should address this by collecting a more representative sample and considering gender differences in the perceived importance of the fine arts along with differences in need for uniqueness. The fine arts are more socially normed towards the female population. Males affiliated with the fine arts are more likely to be seen by others within society as feminine or an indicator of same-sex desires for men (Cartei & Reby, 2012; Sinfield, 1999). This could affect results in a sample with more representation of self-identified males.

Lastly, the fine arts are difficult to operationally define and measure in psychological research mainly due to differing cultural views as well as a lack of a definition that is collectively agreed upon in society (Fenner, 1994), however, that should not take away from their potential to be studied in the way in which we perceive their importance in western society and what that tells us from social and other frames of reference. Future studies should analyze differences in the way that fine art is operationally defined in research as well as include items on branches of fine art such as literary art, historical artifacts, and fashion design, which were not included in the present study. Additional consideration should further distinguish between art knowledge, art interest, and art relevance and importance as some may think that art has value without personally appreciating it.

This study is one of the first to consider the illusion of explanatory depth in the articulation of art interest and knowledge and expand on its literature and functionality in human psychology and in aesthetics. It provides evidence that art is a construct that if one is interested in and receptive of, they may be more likely to wish to be someone who stands out, is special, and is unique. It is also through the findings from this study that the fine arts have potential new

ways of being promoted, advertised, marketed, and above all being brought awareness to and increasing arts reception of within certain individuals.

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APPENDIX A

Demographic Questionnaire
Personal Importance of the Arts Likert Scales
Societal Importance of the Arts Likert Scales
Art Reception Survey (Hager, Hagemann, Danner, & Schankin, 2012)
Vienna Art Interest and Art Knowledge Questionnaire (Specker et al., 2018)
Balanced Inventory of Socially Desirable Responding (Paulhus, 1991)
Need for Uniqueness scale (Fromkin & Lipshitz, 1976)
Illusion of Explanatory Depth Writing Task (Adapted from Rozenblit & Keil, 2002)

Demographic Questionnaire

Please indicate your age in years

Please indicate the gender to which you identify as

Male

Female

Non-binary/Non-conforming

Please indicate your sexual orientation

Please select all ethnicities in which you identify as

White/Caucasian

Black/African-American

Hispanic/Latino

Asian

Native American

Pacific Islander

Mixed or Other

What is your major?

Are you currently majoring in or seeking a degree in the fine arts? (dance, music, visual art, media art, theatre)? If so, please indicate your desired degree.

Please discuss what personal experience and familiarity you have with the fine arts

On average, how much do you think that other people believe the arts are important in comparison to yourself?

1 = People believe the arts are much more important than I do, 7 = People believe the arts are much less important than I do.

Personal Importance of the Arts Scale

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements

1 = completely disagree 7 = completely agree

1. Visual Art is important to me personally
2. Dance is important to me personally
3. Music is important to me personally
4. Media Art is important to me personally
5. Theatre is important to me personally
6. Overall, fine art is important to me personally

Societal Importance of the Arts Scale

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements

1 = completely disagree 7 = completely agree

1. Visual Art is important in our society
2. Dance is important in our society
3. Music is important in our society
4. Media Art is important in our society
5. Theatre is important in our society
6. Overall, fine art is important in our society

Art Reception Survey (Hager, Hagemann, Danner, & Schankin, 2012)

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements

1 = completely disagree 5 = completely agree

1. I would consider investing a large sum of money to buy a piece of fine art
2. Fine art is beautiful
3. Fine art is pleasant
4. Fine art thrills me
5. I feel inspired by fine art
6. With regards to its content, fine art remains inaccessible to me
7. I can relate a piece of fine art to its historical context
8. I know fine art when I see it
9. I have an idea of what the artist is trying to convey with a piece of fine art
10. I can relate a piece of fine art to a particular artist
11. It is exciting to think about fine art
12. I would like to learn more about the background of fine art
13. It is fun to deal with a piece of fine art
14. Fine art is thought provoking
15. Fine art makes me curious

Vienna Art Interest and Art Knowledge Questionnaire (Specker, Forster, Brinkmann, Boddy, Pelowski, Rosenberg & Leder, 2018)

1. An artwork has to primarily be beautiful for me to like it
2. I enjoyed art classes in school
3. I like to talk about art with others
4. I have many friends/acquaintances that are interested in art
5. I cannot stand ugly artworks
6. Art has to be about an exact representation of the world
7. I'm interested in art
8. Art should first and foremost be decorative
9. I'm always looking for new artistic impressions and experiences
10. In everyday life I routinely see art objects that fascinate me
11. I come from an art interested family
12. How often do you visit art museums and/or galleries?
13. How often do you read books, magazines or catalogs about art?
14. How often do you look at images of artworks (catalogs, internet, etc.)?
15. How often do you visit talks about art or art history?

Balanced Inventory of Socially Desirable Responding (Paulhus, 1991)

1. My first impressions of people usually turn out to be right
2. It would be hard for me to break any of my bad habits
3. I don't care to know what other people really think of me
4. I have not always been honest with myself
5. I always know why I like things
6. When my emotions are aroused, it biases my thinking
7. Once I've made up my mind, other people can seldom change my opinion
8. I am not a safe driver when I exceed the speed limit
9. I am fully in control of my own fate
10. It's hard for me to shut off a disturbing thought
11. I have never regret my decisions
12. I sometimes lose out on things because I can't make up my mind soon enough
13. The reason I vote is because my vote can make a difference
14. My parents were not always fair when they punished me
15. I am a completely rational person
16. I rarely appreciate criticism
17. I am very confident of my judgements
18. I have sometimes doubted my ability as a lover
19. It's all right with me if some people happen to dislike me
20. I don't always know the reasons why I do the things I do
21. I sometimes tell lies if I have to
22. I never cover up my mistakes
23. There have been occasions when I have taken advantage of someone
24. I never swear
25. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget
26. I always obey laws, even if I'm unlikely to get caught
27. I have said something bad about a friend behind his/her back
28. When I hear people talking privately, I avoid listening
29. I have received too much change from a salesperson without telling him or her
30. I always declare everything at customs
31. When I was young I sometimes stole things
32. I have never dropped litter on the street
33. I sometimes drive faster than the speed limit
34. I never read sexy books or magazines
35. I have done things that I don't tell other people about
36. I never take things that don't belong to me
37. I have never taken sick-leave from work or school even though I wasn't really sick
38. I have never damaged a library book or store merchandise without reporting it
39. I have some pretty awful habits
40. I don't gossip about other people's business

Need for Uniqueness Scale (Fromkin & Lipshitz, 1976)

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements

1 = completely disagree 5 = completely agree

1. When I am in a group of strangers, I am not reluctant to express my opinion publicly
2. I find that criticism affects my self esteem
3. I sometimes hesitate to use my own ideas for fear they might be impractical
4. I think society should let reason lead it to new customs and throw aside old habits or mere traditions
5. People frequently succeed in changing my mind
6. I find it sometimes amusing to upset the dignity of teachers, judges, and "cultured" people
7. I like wearing a uniform because it makes me proud to be a member of the organization it represents
8. People have sometimes called me a "stuck up" individual
9. Other's disagreement makes me uncomfortable
10. I do not always need to live by the rules and standards of society
11. I am unable to express my feelings if they result in undesirable consequences
12. Being a success in one's career means making a contribution that no one else has made
13. It bothers me if people think I am being too unconventional
14. I always try to follow the rules
15. If I disagree with a supervisor on his or her rules, I usually do not keep it to myself
16. I speak up in meetings to oppose those I feel are wrong
17. Feeling "different" in a crowd of people makes me feel uncomfortable
18. If I must die, let it be an unusual death rather than an ordinary death in bed
19. I would rather be just like everyone else rather than be called a "freak"
20. I must admit I find it hard to work under strict rules and regulations
21. I would rather be known for always trying new ideas than for employing well trusted methods
22. It is better to always agree with the opinions of others than to be considered a disagreeable person
23. I do not like to say unusual things to people
24. I tend to express my opinions publicly, regardless of what others say
25. As a rule, I strongly defend my own opinions
26. I like to go my own way instead of acting on approved rules
27. When I am with a group of people, I agree with their ideas so that no arguments will arise
28. I tend to keep quiet in the presence of persons of higher rank, experience, etc.
29. I have been quite independent and free from family rule
30. Whenever I take part in group activities, I am something of a non-conformist
31. In most things in life, I believe in playing it safe rather than taking a gamble
32. It is better to break rules than to always conform to an impersonal society

Illusion of Explanatory Depth Writing Task (Adapted from Rozenblit & Keil, 2002)

1. “For the next task, please write as thoroughly as possible about the importance of music, dance, and drama in our society. Please be specific and reference artists and works that are of significance in society. Your writing will be scored from 1-7 with 7 being the highest score. Responses that provide the most thorough and understanding explanations will earn 7's. It is important that you write your response in as much detail and length as possible to accurately assess your points. Your response should be no less than 150 words.”
2. “For the next task, please write as thoroughly as possible about the importance of visual and media art in our society. Please be specific and reference artists and works that are of significance in society. Your writing will be scored from 1-7 with 7 being the highest score. Responses that provide the most thorough and understanding explanations will earn 7's. It is important that you write your response in as much detail and length as possible to accurately assess your points. Your response should be no less than 150 words.”
3. “For the next task, please write as thoroughly as possible about your day. Please be specific and reference things that have happened or are expected to happen. Your writing will be scored from 1-7 with 7 being the highest score. Responses that provide the most thorough and understanding explanations will earn 7's. It is important that you write your response in as much detail and length as possible to accurately assess your points. Your response should be no less than 150 words.”