

Brief Reports

Male Mail: A Survey of Men in the Field of Art Therapy

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Abstract

The questions in this survey were designed to solicit concrete data as well as more speculative information from men who work in an art therapy capacity. The results presented in this brief report provide a picture of how these men perceive the field of art therapy as a minority group within it. A variety of factors addressed included, but were not limited to, masculinity, individuality, feminism, stereotyping, semantics, inclusion, and exclusion.

Introduction

When I walked into the art therapy office of the University of Illinois at Chicago for my entrance interview in Spring 2001, the program assistant greeted me. As I looked around the colorful cinder block office, my eyes rested on a bulletin board with class photographs. I stepped closer and realized that these images were all of women. I was surprised to say the least. The program assistant smiled and assured me that the lack of male students was due to the number of male applicants rather than a departmental preference.

Since then I have talked to a number of men involved in the world of art therapy who experienced the same element of surprise when they discovered the gender disparity in the field; Elkins, Stovall, and Malchiodi (2003) reported that 91.3% of all members of the American Art Therapy Association (AATA) were women (6.2% men, 2.5% not specified). Because this commonality piqued my interest about how men feel in this profession comprised mostly of women, I decided to conduct a survey (titled the Male Mail survey). In addition, I viewed my mass mailing of 259 surveys as a way to establish contact with other men in the field of art therapy.

Editor's note: Robert Tavani, MA, MFA, ATR, was the only male 2003 graduate of the art therapy program at the University of Illinois at Chicago and currently works in Columbus, OH. Correspondence concerning this article may be directed to him at rtavani1@columbus.rr.com. The author dedicates this work to Lorenzo Phillip Tavani and wishes to thank Dr. Harriet Wadeson, Randy Vick, and Deborah Behnke for their support in the creation of this report.

Literature Review

Although there have been surveys addressing the general membership of the American Art Therapy Association (Elkins & Stovall, 2000; Gordon & Manning, 1991; Le Brie & Rosa, 1994; Pearson, Walker, Martinek-Smith, Knapp, & Weaver, 1996; Rauch & Elkins, 1998), the literature review for this project yielded no studies addressing the state of male practitioners in the field. The membership surveys listed above provide data based on demographic variables, educational background, employment variables, salary information, and longitudinal trends. Two first-person accounts of men entering the field of art therapy were found (Jones, 1978; Robbins, 1976). These accounts trace early male practitioners' journeys into the profession and are valuable historical documents for the profession. They do not, however, address the issue of gender disparity in art therapy.

Art therapy has always attracted more female students and practitioners than males (Junge & Asawa, 1994). I learned that a men's group meets sporadically at the annual AATA conferences and that focus groups at these conferences sometimes addressed men's issues (H. Wadeson, personal communication, 2003). Unfortunately, I was unable to locate documentation of these events. Despite the problem of little documentation on the subject, scholars may be able to explain gender disparity in agreement with Jung and Asawa (1994) who stated, "While there is no acknowledgement in the art therapy literature of the influence of the women's movement on the field, we believe that art therapy's evolution has shadowed this movement which has been centrally important in the 20th century" (p. 270).

These authors speculated that the gender disparity may have basis in cultural and genetic realities. "Whether this is genetically or culturally determined, women use their talents for nurturing. It is not surprising, therefore, that women with an artistic bent would choose to use their skills in working with people" (p. 271). Many would agree with this explanation, which has led to the research question for this study: "What is characteristic of the man who enters the field of art therapy?"

Cultural attitudes have been shifting as we have moved from modernist to postmodernist points of view. It may be

that current cultural attitudes play a part in men's involvement in art therapy as well as their responses to this survey. Rosenau (1992) characterized this shift in her observation that "the post-modern challenges to modern rational organization radiates across fields" (p. 7). Hutcheon (2002) noted that in postmodernism, appearance and image have priority over the technical, practical, and efficient. Henriques, Holoway, Urwin, Venn, and Walkerdine (1984) explained that in psychology, postmodernism questions the conscious, logical, coherent subject. If men in the postmodern age are surrounded by different cultural attitudes, it would seem that their own attitudes toward profession and gender inevitably would be affected.

Method

The main objective of the survey (see Appendix) was to get a sense of male respondents' feelings about gender, women, masculinity, and minority status in the field of art therapy. This objective was inspired by my own experiences as a lone male in a program with 13 female students and an all-female faculty. It was also inspired by my own ignorance of the gender disparity before entering the field of art therapy. As a studio arts faculty member, I had taught for a decade in college art departments. In that context, the male to female ratio favored men. Why, then, was I so unaware that in this artistic field, females outnumbered males?

The 12 items on the survey were developed to collect data about the attitudes and experiences of the male minority in the field of art therapy. Survey statements such as "When I hear the titles 'artist' and 'therapist,' I think..." had a dual purpose: to determine how men who are unaware of art therapy's gender disparity are initially influenced by the profession's title, and whether or not men associate a specific gender with the identifying terms "artist" or "therapist." It was as important to decipher the impact of the title "art therapy" as it was to determine why certain men gravitate to a profession dominated by women.

Survey packets were sent to all males listed in the *American Art Therapy Association, Inc. 2002-2003 Membership Directory*. In addition, art therapy department staff and instructors of several academic institutions distributed the survey to male students in their art therapy programs. The packet included a survey, a self-addressed stamped envelope for the return of the survey, and a cover letter explaining the motivation for the survey. Of the 259 packets mailed, only 10 surveys came back stamped "return to sender" which indicates a high accuracy rate for the AATA directory. Some participants did submit very interesting and sometime passionate testimonials as part of their responses.

Results

Of 249 surveys received, 112 (45%) were completed and returned on time. General percentages are given for responses, as well as percentages by age brackets (all percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percent). In some cases the age of respondents seemed to make little difference and in others a trend seemed to develop based

Table 1
Ethnic Distribution (N=109)

Ethnicity	Percentage Respondents
African American	3.0
Asian American	2.0
Caucasian American	87.0
Hispanic American	4.5
Native American	.5
Not Specified	3.0

Table 2
Age Distribution

Age Bracket	Percentage Respondents
80-89 (N=1)	1.0
70-79 (N=5)	4.0
60-69 (N=12)	11.0
50-59 (N=33)	29.5
40-49 (N=25)	22.5
30-39 (N=32)	28.5
20-29 (N=4)	3.5

on age. Tables 1 and 2 detail the age as well as the ethnic make-up of respondents in the survey.

Answers to questions 1a and 1b indicate that 56% of respondents were aware that females outnumbered men when they entered the field of art therapy; 33% were unaware of this gender disparity but would have entered the field regardless of this fact. Of those unaware of the gender disparity, 16% were uncertain whether or not they would have entered the field if aware of it. Figure 1 provides the age breakdown in relation to this item.

The female-to-male ratio in graduate programs attended by respondents averaged 17:2 without mentionable variation among age brackets. The ratio between professional male art therapists and female professionals (not necessarily female art therapists) is 1:3.

While 20% were not registered art therapists (ATR), 66% of respondents were. This 20% was comprised of art therapy graduate students, recent art therapy graduates working under supervision, and other professionals (14% did not respond to this item). A majority of respondents, 75%, worked in an art therapy capacity and 17% did not (with 8% providing no response). A substantial percentage of respondents (21%) believed that they have experienced professional advancement due to being male and 44% did not. Responses to question 11b determined that 17% expected professional advancement as a result of being male, whereas 51% did not. Overall, 36% were uncertain if gender has or will influence advancement, and 31% did not respond.

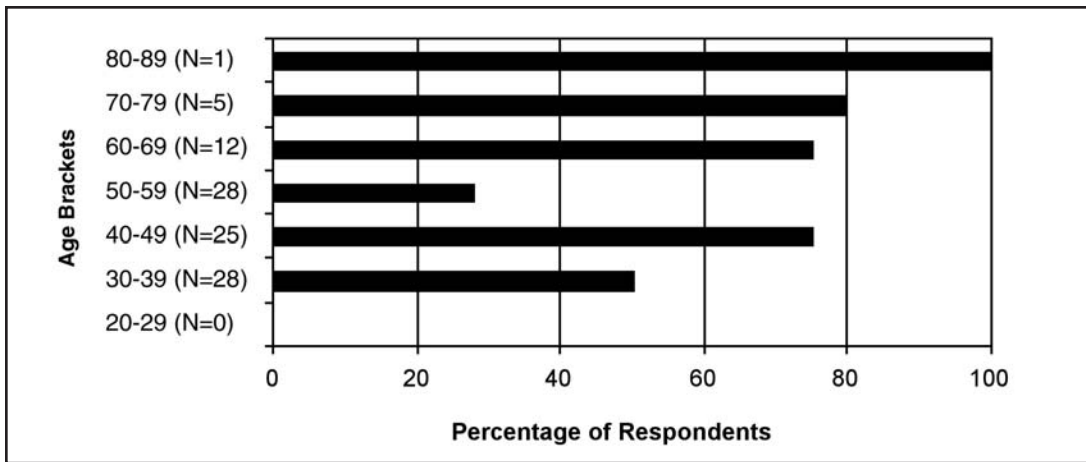


Figure 1
Awareness of Gender Disparity by Age Bracket

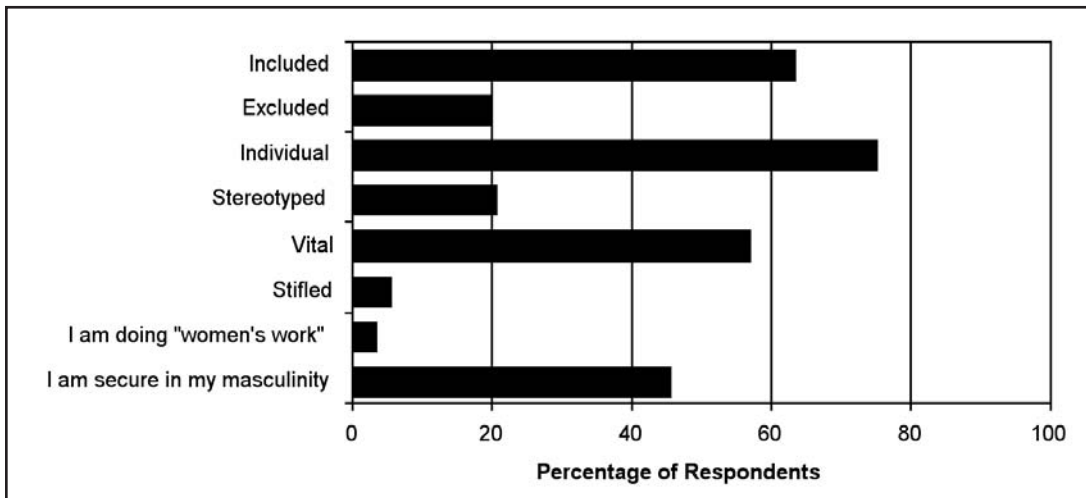


Figure 2
Perceptions of Respondents by Self and Others

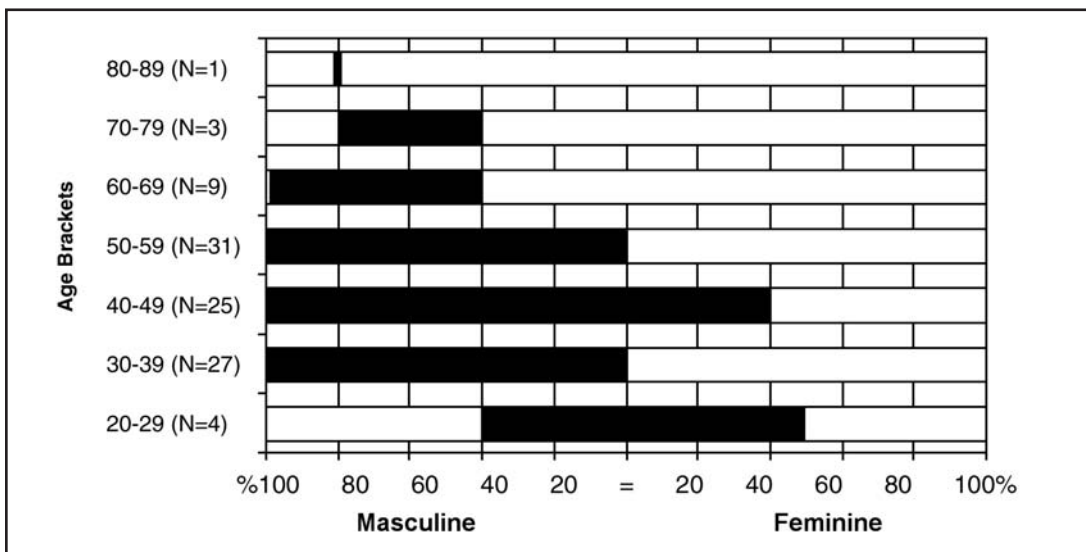


Figure 3
Location of Self on a Masculine-Feminine Continuum

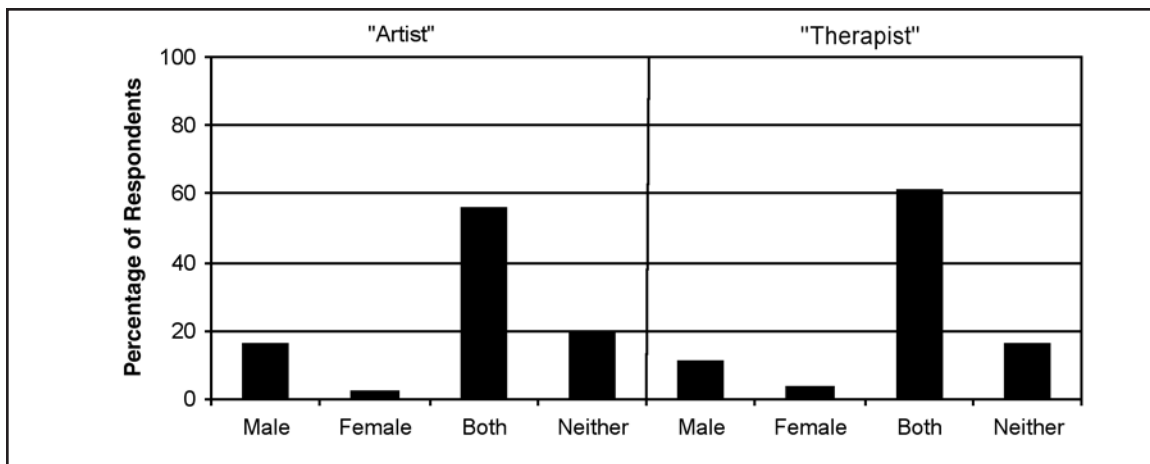


Figure 4
Associations to the Titles "Artist" and "Therapist"

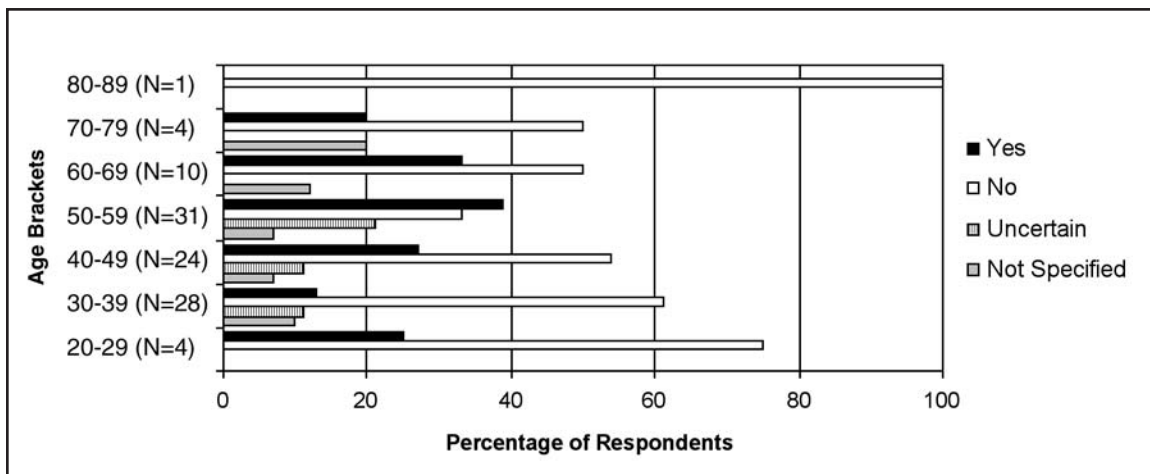


Figure 5 Response to the Question, "Do you consider yourself a feminist?"

Figure 2 indicates how men felt about themselves in the field of art therapy and how others perceive them. A majority, 64%, of respondents felt included, while 20% felt excluded; 75% felt treated as individuals while 20% felt stereotyped, and 57% felt vital while 5% felt stifled. Only 3% of respondents believed that they are perceived in society as doing "women's work," and 41% felt that they are perceived as secure in their masculinity. A majority of respondents, 64%, believed that they are perceived as an integral part of the mental health system.

Question 2 asked each respondent to locate himself on a "masculine-feminine continuum." As Figure 3 displays the range for each age group, the following data offers overall percentages. Overall, 80% of respondents located themselves on the masculine side of the continuum. Seven percent located themselves as equally masculine and feminine, and 2% located themselves on the feminine side of the continuum. Of the respondents, 11% chose not to respond.

Figure 4 presents the data relating gender associations to occupational titles. When asked which gender comes to mind when the titles "artist" or "therapist" are mentioned,

56% responded "both" (genders) under the title "artist," and 61% responded "both" under the title "therapist." "Female" was selected by 2% for "artist," and 3% selected "female" for "therapist." "Male" was selected by 16% for "artist" and 11% selected "male" for "therapist." "Neither" was selected for the title "artist" by 19% of respondents, 7% selected "neither" for "therapist," and 14% left the question unanswered.

In Figure 5, 27% of respondents consider themselves feminists, and 50% do not, 8% are uncertain and 15% did not answer this question. These percentages are surprising and particularly interesting in relation to age, and will be discussed later in this paper.

Discussion

Why have a substantial number of men approached art therapy unaware of its gender disparity? Does the name of our profession, which is a combination of the titles "artist" and "therapist" influence men's perceptions of gender when considering the field? The assumption of this research was that men, more often than women, are associated with the

titles “artist” and “therapist” and, as a result, men who hear the title “art therapist” might equate male artist and male therapist with male art therapist. However, respondents to this survey did not seem to support this notion. When considering the term “artist,” the majority of participants (75%) responded either “both” or “neither.” For the term “therapist,” the majority (77%) endorsed “both” or “neither.” This finding seems to suggest largely non-gendered associations to these terms among the men sampled. When a specific gender was selected, “male” was endorsed more frequently (16% for “artist,” 11% for “therapist”) than “female” (2% for “artist,” 4% for “therapist”). This may suggest a trend toward gendered perceptions but may also indicate associations with a same-sex professional role model from the respondents’ lives.

Another possible explanation of men’s neutrality with respect to gender may have to do with the historic beginnings of the profession in the United States. The American Art Therapy Association was established during an era of civil rights in the country (Junge & Asawa, 1994). Equality was in the forefront of society and this hybrid profession combined two disciplines that were decidedly male-dominated, art and therapy, to create a third that was different. Also of interest is postmodernism, which many cultural critics began discussing in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Postmodernism espouses hybridization over purity, inclusion rather than exclusion, and intuition rather than reason (Rosenau, 1992). There are strong similarities between art therapy and the characteristics of postmodernism. Have the postmodern characteristics listed above permeated our culture to such a degree that the men in art therapy no longer think in terms of male and female professions? Or do men simply rest assured that they dominate most professions? More than half the respondents were aware of the gender disparity when they entered the field of art therapy but nearly 40% were not aware of this imbalance. Also, the level of awareness was less in younger age brackets; these data could support the possibility of a societal shift in men’s expectations about gender in the professional world. Of the respondents now involved in art therapy, fewer than 5% feel that they are doing “women’s work.” If art therapy was created during an era that strived for inclusion and art therapy is inclusive, then it seems reasonable to think that the men in the field do not consider it a “woman’s profession.” The foundation of art therapy is rooted in the belief that all can benefit through art making, an activity that is often perceived as exclusive to a select few. Perhaps it is through attitudes of inclusiveness and accessibility that art therapy avoids being thought of as “women’s work” by the men in the field.

There were interesting responses to the question, “Do you consider yourself a feminist?” At least one-half of each age bracket replied “no” except for those in the 50-59 age bracket in which “yes” outweighed “no.” Men who range in age from 50-59 reached adulthood during the 1960’s and 1970s, and lived during the era of the civil rights and women’s liberation movements. Perhaps witnessing these events has influenced their interpretation of the meaning of feminism. A large percentage of “no” responses, over 75%,

came from the 20-29 age bracket. Is the ratio in this youngest age bracket reflective of the backlash that affirmative action seems to have perpetuated? Or have these younger men grown up in a world where feminist core issues such as equality in the workplace are seen as “givens”? It would be interesting to ask men of these varied age brackets, “What does feminism mean to you?” It may be that younger men find these labels ineffective or restrictive. Answers to this question might shed light on these very interesting responses.

On a masculine-feminine continuum, almost three-quarters of men located themselves on the masculine side. It is interesting to note that age brackets are somewhat divided but again in an unexpected way. Men in the 80-89, 70-79, and 60-69 age brackets perceived themselves as the most masculine, whereas respondents from the 20-29 age bracket located themselves far lower on the masculine side and well into the feminine side of the continuum. As a matter of fact, self-perceptions of having characteristics associated with the term “feminine” increase as age decreases with the exception of the 40-49 year-old age bracket. This is interesting in relation to the question “Do you consider yourself a feminist?” One might assume that a man who is a feminist would also consider himself closer to the center of the continuum and a man who is not a feminist would be at the higher end of the masculine continuum, but these results do not support that conclusion. Could it be that with age a man feels more comfortable with himself and therefore his gender? Has the importance of male masculinity decreased throughout the years? Or does the nearly equal masculine/feminine location for the participants in the 20-29 age bracket suggest a lack of perceived separation and a greater embracing of one’s “feminine side”? Is a man’s perception of masculinity influenced by the number of women who surround him? After all, the younger men of this survey are art therapy students and therefore likely to be surrounded by many female classmates.

In terms of level of professional involvement, the current survey shows nearly 75% of respondents work in an art therapy capacity and more than 60% are registered art therapists. These results are similar to those percentages cited in “Title” and “Type of License/Registration/Certification Held” by the Elkins et al. (2003) survey. In general, men in the field of art therapy feel positively about themselves professionally. Twice as many men in the field responded that they feel both included and seen as individuals rather than excluded and viewed in a stereotyped manner. Approximately one-half feel they are “an integral part of the mental health system” and “normal.”

Further support for these positive feelings by men may be offered by the following data. In the history of the American Art Therapy Association there have been 19 presidents. Of these 19 presidents, 3 (15.8 %) have been men. This is a higher percentage than is represented in the membership for men (6.2%). Five (17.2%) of the 29 Honorary Lifetime Members (the profession’s highest honor) are men. This suggests that although male practitioners are a minority in the field of art therapy, they are disproportionately represented in leadership and significant contributions that are

recognized by the profession. However, nearly one-half of men surveyed do not believe that they have or will experience professional advancement based on their gender. In the field of art therapy, male practitioners' positive feelings are evident in their attitudes toward the profession. In addition, it seems that minority status has not had ill effect on their ability to hold the field's highest honors and positions.

Conclusion

This survey was an attempt to understand how male art therapists perceive themselves in the field of art therapy. Some responses provide concrete data and other responses require speculation to determine trends or meaning. Follow up surveys and questions would clarify the more speculative aspects here and would certainly lead to a deeper understanding of men in the profession. If there is anything truly significant about this survey, it is the higher than typical response rate of nearly 50%. The response to the Male Mail survey signifies that many men in the field of art therapy are interested in the issues addressing gender, women, masculinity, and minority status.

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Appendix

Survey for Men in the Field of Art Therapy*

1. When I entered the field of art therapy
 - a. I was aware of it as a field with a gender disparity Yes___ No___
If you answered "no" above, please answer b.
 - b. If you had been aware of this gender disparity, would you have entered the field?
Yes___ No___ Uncertain___
2. Please place a mark indicating your self on the masculine-feminine continuum.
Mas. 100 80 60 40 20 = 20 40 60 80 100 Fem.
3. When I hear the titles "artist" or "therapist," I think

<u>Artist</u>	<u>Therapist</u>
Male ___	Male ___
Female ___	Female ___
Both ___	Both ___
Neither ___	Neither ___

continues on next page

Appendix (continued)
Survey for Men in the Field of Art Therapy*

4. As a man in the field of art therapy (check all that are appropriate).
- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| I feel included _____ | I feel excluded _____ |
| I feel like an individual _____ | I feel stereotyped _____ |
| I feel vital _____ | I feel stifled _____ |
| I feel appreciated _____ | I feel compromised _____ |
| I feel special _____ | I feel ordinary _____ |
5. As a male art therapist or art therapy student, how are you perceived in society? Check all that are appropriate.
- | | |
|--|-------|
| I am perceived as doing "women's work" | _____ |
| I am perceived as normal | _____ |
| I am perceived as an integral part of the mental health system | _____ |
| I am misunderstood | _____ |
| I am perceived as an oddity | _____ |
| I am perceived as secure in my masculinity | _____ |
| I am perceived as courageous | _____ |
6. a. What is your age?
b. Where were you born?
c. Where do you live now?
d. What is your ethnicity?
7. a. Do you work in an art therapy capacity? Yes____ No____
b. Are you an ATR? Yes____ No____
-If yes, for how long?
-If you work as an art therapist, what is the female to male ratio amongst the professional staff?
c. If you are an art therapy student, when and where did you begin your training?
d. If you are a "professional affiliate of AATA," what is your primary profession?
8. a. Do you or will you use art therapy assessments in your art therapy practice?
Yes__ No__ Uncertain__
b. If yes, do you prefer qualitative or quantitative assessment approaches?
Qualitative__ Quantitative__ Neither__ Both__
9. Do you consider yourself a feminist?
Yes__ No__ Uncertain__
10. a. What is your educational background?
B.F.A.____ B.S.____ M.A.____ M.F.A.____ M.S.____ Ph.D.____
Other (explain please):
b. What is/was the female to male ratio in your school's art therapy program?
Undergraduate __:____ Graduate__:_
11. a. Have you experienced professional advancement as a result of being a male?
Yes____ No____ Uncertain____
If "yes," please specify.
b. Do you anticipate professional advancement as a result of being male?
Yes____ No____ Uncertain____
If "yes," please explain.
12. Is there anything you would like to add? Feel free to add an additional sheet of paper.

*If you would like to receive a copy of these results, please check here ____ and return in the self-addressed stamped envelope before March 1, 2003.