

**AN  
INVESTIGATION  
INTO MENTAL  
HEALTH  
PROBLEMS  
WITHIN  
ADOLESCENTS AND  
HOW ART AND  
DESIGN BE USED**

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## INTRODUCTION



**“THE ARTS ARE A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF HEALTHCARE. EXPRESSIVE  
ART IS A TOOL TO EXPLORE, DEVELOP AND PRACTICE CREATIVITY AS A  
MEANS TO WELLNESS.” ~ WELLARTS ASSOCIATION**



## INTRODUCTION

Mental health is the silent epidemic of our current climate, it touches home with many people, including myself. As the quote above states you can use art as a tool to practice creativity as a means to wellness. This is a topic I'm particularly interested in and is a way we can look to aid the current mental health crisis within adolescences.

To begin with the topic, an understanding of what mental health problems adolescences have, the background of it and how people are currently aiding their mental health conditions, will be needed to give a foundation to the topic.

Mental health disorders can be a variety of conditions that effect a persons mental state, their moods or alter their sate of mind and the way the act. This can occur for a short or extended period of time. Mental health is comprised of three sections, emotional well-being, psychological well-being and social well-being. There are two main key factors that can effect mental health, these are biological factors such as genetics or inheritance or environmental factors, those being trauma and poverty. All mental health disorders are not the same for every person, it plays a large factor in every stage of a persons life, beginning at childhood, through adolescents and into adulthood. More than 50% of people will be diagnosed with a mental health problem throughout one out of three of the previous stated stages of life (Learn About Mental Health - Mental Health - CDC, 2021). Between the age of (10-19) being an adolescent is a unique formative time. Half of all mental health disorders commence at the age of 14, majority of these cases are untreated or have not become detected. The most common mental health disorders among adolescents are 1. Emotional - depression and anxiety, 2. Childhood behavioural - ADHD and conduct disorder, 3. Eating disorders - anorexia and bulimia (Adolescent mental health, 2021). A research study by Naylor et al., (2009, p.) on the mental health support services available in school found that pupils that are more educated on the topic of mental health showed higher sensitivity and empathy towards the subject - increased pro social behaviours and are less pejorative. Research also found that males are likely to deny help as they do not want to view as "weak" (Naylor et al., 2009). To support this adolescents are unlikely to use available services correctly if left to their own devices.

# INTRODUCTION

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# AIMS

To set out the aims of this investigation I look to achieve an understanding of adolescences with mental health problems. Find out what is causing this rise in mental health problems within this age group and if there are any main factors that contribute to this. My second aim is to research into how art and design is being used for adolescences with mental health problems.

# OBJECTIVES

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As for objectives, there are a few key steps that will need to be taken to reach the above aims, research the problems within the stigma around mental health and how this effects adolescences. Another would be to investigate how mental health is taught within schooling would this have an impact on self expression. Lastly can art and design have an effect on the way a person expresses their emotions, is there enough attention drawn to this method of self help/Therapy.

## METHODOLOGYS

# METHODOLOGYS

My methodology's with consist of mixed Methods as this method is extremely resourceful in understanding “quantitative between contradictions quantitative results and qualitative findings” (Mixed Methods: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis While Studying Patient-Centered Medical Home Models | PCMH Resource Center, 2021).

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Secondary research will also be taken place with facts and figures to support my primary research or too fairly contradict points. To begin I will need to conduct primary research into adolescences and their mental health. Due to the current climate of being in a pandemic, all interviews will be taken online. On the upper hand, adolescences have been stripped of their social life with their mental health taking a hit, this will be a perfect opportunity to find an insight of how they have been dealing with isolation and how they manage it. Another crucial step to be taken is exploring the app store, using ethnography, searching and looking at how people are reviewing and using “self help” apps, designed to aid in a mental health crisis. This will gain me an insight on what is working and what isn't, also to see how art and Design comes into play within the app, may it be a distraction or something that may calm the user. A survey will also be taken to adolescences and other age ranges, with crucial questions that will help my research and gain a strong insight into answering my problem.

## SURVEY

A survey was sent out on multiple social media platforms such as facebook, instagram and snap chat, to reach out to adolescences and enquire about their mental health. In the survey it contained several questions relating to my topic that would lead me to insightful research. The survey came back with over 61 responses, with 83% being adolescences (15-24). This gained me a representation of how accurate the following questions would relate to adolescences. A survey was the most appropriate methodology to use as it reached a large audience without having to interview them one by one, it was efficient and gained me the insight I needed. Conducting the survey at the beginning of my primary research gave me a foundation of what direction to take my interviews, who to find more in-depth information from, regarding gender, age and interest. To begin, the survey found that 99% of people that were in the adolescences age bracket said that they had experienced mental health problems, with an overall 54 out of 61 people also said they have had mental health problems. This gave me an insightful start to my survey, knowing that having mental health problems is extremely prevalent in our current climate. My following question was to find out if people had ever acted upon having these problems, majority stated, that they have spoken to a friend or doctor. Although, it was interesting to

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find that 55% would find it hard to open up and mechanism, this can relate back to the quote stated above. Within this percentage, 5/9 makes said ted above. In answering the question 'if you knew that is would be hard for them to open up, claiming the leading gender that wouldn't be able to help you mental health, would you then consider open up, in comparison to women. When looking doing so?' 86% stated they would do so, leaving at what did people think adolescences do not with the question, why aren't more people doing speak up about their mental health problems, the so, this was also a good question I wanted to take main three answers were embarrassment, stigma to my interview stage. and not enough education. A useful link to this is that I found 98% of people said that there should be more education within schools around mental health, creating a problem that there might not be enough talk within schools. In the 29% that have tried apps to aid their mental health, within the comment section, almost all of the comments were negative about the apps, saying they didn't work or were only a short term fix. This was a useful observation to take forward to another one of my methodology's, looking at self help apps within the app store. A quote taken from the comment section that was perviously mentioned, stated "Im going onto anxiety journal's as they're full of different creative activities that i think would be more beneficial to me since i find painting and other forms of creativity calming". Seeing this was extremely useful to linking aiding mental health with art and design, giving me a direction in what I was going to include in my interviews. Within the survey 55% have used drawing/ painting as a coping

## INTERVIEW



### INTERVIEW A

AUSTIN BRYANT

To follow up from my survey, I thought it was crucial to delve into richer information, from adolescences. I took to interviewing a male and female both of the similar age of 22 and 23. I made sure that they came from very different interest and backgrounds as I wanted to be able to contrast the data. From my survey, I could see that females are far more open in contrast to males, so it was crucial I had opposite point of views. I began with reaching out to a male named Austin Bryant who is a graduate, mental health working within a Psychiatric hospital, due to his schedule we were not able to talk on video. This lead to him answering an in-depth amount of questions and to have them emailed back to me on a document. I began by asking if he kept a journal or had any interest in art or design, he stated that he does neither. This was common among the answers within men on the survey and is clearly a running theme. When talking around mental health an education he has a view of

"I do think there should be although I think they should be led by a professional and not teachers. It would need to start when kids are young, so it is normalised before they get older and go to secondary school as I don't think secondary school kids would buy into it without being raised on it. I don't know if it would help me emotionally grow up but I think it definitely would have helped be more open and relaxed when talking about emotions. I think that for kids who go through proper trauma this could be extremely beneficial and a start on preventative mental health issues."

This related back do the introduction on page one and complies with the three main stages of adolescences growing up. It seems

throughout the interview and surveys a large amount of people stated that the importance of having the education in school.

Further on throughout the interview a question was asked if he found it hard to open up, he stated that he does find it hard to open up, keeping the reoccurring theme of males finding it hard to open up about their feelings. This can be supported by my survey with 5/9 male adolescences finding it hard to open up. Following up with the question If you found out the benefits using art to express your emotions, would you consider doing it? He responded with a no, stating he wasn't good at ideas and wouldn't know how to start. This might be a misconception of drawing, that people assume that they have to create a perfect picture rather than expressing their feelings, this might be an interesting topic to further discuss. Regarding my last question on the stigma behind mental health, his reply consisted of understanding there is a stigma and the word "man up" is a common misconception. He stated that people often do take things to heart more than they should do, a different answer than what I was expecting. An addiction question was asked around his work space, working with mental health patients and if art therapy was on offer and if it was beneficial to the state of mind. With response to the question he said and quote "I don't personally do that stuff with them but I do see people occasionally make play dough sculptures and I know one lad on the ward really quite likes drawing so I'd say yeah it seem beneficial if they actually buy into it". Taken from this interview was valuable information around how a male views art and mental health, I wanted to contrast this interview with Perkins, to see if there are any similarities within the answers.

## INTERVIEW



### INTERVIEW B

**SOPHIE PERKINS**

Later on that evening I conducted a FaceTime call with Sophie Perkins, a third year illustration student from USW. I asked the same interview questions as I did with Bryant, both a similar age but different background, to see if their passions and occupation could be a factor. The beginning of the interview Perkins stated how her passion was art and how she finds enjoyment within creating a successful project. In comparison to Bryant, Perkins previously kept a journal in school but quotes "I have far too many thoughts that constantly change and not enough time to even think about having a journal". This may contribute to the stresses of becoming an adult and not having the time to express in a journal as you would in school, with time being limited to daily life as a young adult. With regards to education, Perkins gave similar answers as Bryant, while explaining "learning at a young age how to accept certain feelings and deal with emotions would help a lot of people", a popular answer amount most adolescences.

Within the interview Perkins stated, how she does numerous activities to de stress such as cooking, walking and some times creating, she stated "I struggle a lot with creating work consistently so being in a pandemic has been really tough to create. I still feel guilty a lot of the time but I can only go at my own pace". The theme of creating art that has to be of a great standard is common through the survey and to Bryant , people seem to think that when drawing it has to be "good" rather than something to express themselves with, this is a theme I will also want to discuss - people not drawing as they have a pressure to make it look "good" rather than using it to express themselves. Supporting this Perkins described using art to de stress as child was helpful and a way to distract herself and

explore emotions as a child, but as she grew older found it "more of a chore because it's for my degree most of the time". To contrast this, when asked if she knew the benefits of using art to express her emotions Perkins states "I have used art as a release of stress and pent up energy for my whole life, so I can only say I plan on continuing to use art as one of the ways I express my emotions". This shows that it is still an available avenue to help her express her emotions but yet again the pressure of "making it look good" comes in the way.

To end the interview, I ended with the same question around mental health stigma and how could you break it, in which Perkins replied "I think creating more artwork do to with mental health or ways of dealing with different issues may be a way forward, I also try to share things about dealing with different mental health issues that i resonate with on my stories on Instagram or on Facebook etc when I see a helpful post so that others who want to understand more about or relate to depression / BPD for example, can educate themselves in their own time". This is interesting view in comparison to my other interview. Perkins states that there should be more education and is more sympathetic towards the question, with knowledge on specific mental health problems. Throughout my research I have found women to be more sympathetic towards the topic. Research has found that men find it hard to open up and women more vocal about their feelings.

# OBSERVATION

Within my survey, many people mentioned a few apps that helped their mental health, self care if you will. I wanted to investigate deeper into what people are using on the store and observe their views. Firstly, I looked at the popularly suggested "headspace" app. My initial research was to find out what it entailed, stated by the company themselves "Headspace is an app that teaches you how to meditate. Meditation has been shown to help people stress less, focus more and sleep better. Headspace is meditation made simple, teaching you life-changing mindfulness skills in just a few minutes a day (How Does Headspace Work?, 2021)." Within the apps store it claimed a 4.5 star rating, with a large customer satisfaction, although I began to become suspicious as there was a number of bad reviews. To weight up the pros and cons, I made a table to point out the key facts I pulled from a number of reviews that stood out.

Positive review points -	Negative review points -
Ability to push the user to overcome anxiety and depression	Too many advertisements unless paying for the app
Be able to change the users thought process	Sessions become repetitive unless paying for the app
Manage stress	Limited peached unless paying
Healthy coping mechanism	Not worth the money
	No subtitles, unfair on people with hearing difficulties

It was clear to see that regarding mental health this app is widely praised for its ability to manage stress and a healthy coping mechanism, a quote I pulled from one review (you can find this in the appendix) is "This app has helped me manage and overcomes my depression and anxiety. Whenever I felt anxious at any point, I would turn to



# OBSERVATION

the app to help calm and settle my anxiety". To contrast this quote, I found one from and adolescence that stated "Im only 13 and I am usually very stressed and getting to sleep is really difficult for me. Headspace helped me avoid that and now because of the cost, I cannot used this". Its show this app can be used for mental health and sleep assistance, giving the app a multi use, with an over all satisfactory rating.

Moving away from a meditation app, within the app store I also came across another app that was used for self help that included being creative. The app Lake : colouring books had a 4.7 star rating with 5.1K reviews, making it relatively reliable. This app allows the user to colour in pictures created by artist on the app. This creates a space for people who may not be able to draw well and the people who are more experienced. Within the reviews many people stated that this helped their mental health, one quoted "this helped so much with my anxiety and depression. I highly recommend this app to anyone who finds colouring helps their mental health issues too". Throughout the reviews many stated that colouring and drawing aided their mental

health. Looking back with the interviews I conducted, Perkins supports this idea. Within the app, there are different sections to colour in, some being a premium service. This is a common down fall through self help apps on the app store, there is only so far you can navigate throughout the app before paying a premium price. A large amount of the one star reviews on the Lake app are regarding adolescence not being able to afford the price.

Throughout my observation through the app store, research shows there are apps people use for a short amount of time before having to pay a price. Coming back to adolescences, this may not be an option for many as they do not have a steady flow of income.

## DISCUSSION

# DISCUSSION

Looking into the topic of adolescences seeking help, people that fall in under this are largely unaware how to seek help for emotional problems and strongly feel the stigma among the topic. It is found that many adolescents favour the support of talking to friends and family rather than an organisation or help centre (How mental health can be affected at various stages of development | Centre for Mental Health, 2021).

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Throughout my survey it was found 41% of adolescences would turn to friends over anyone else. Indicating that professional help available might seem too daunting and would feel far more comfortable to speak to. Taking this as an individual study this may take the majority of people may find it comforting in speaking to someone they already know. To contrast this may not be the case for every adolescence as they may not have a close relationship or may be socially awkward. Social awkwardness is a theme I will further discuss in regards to therapy. Among adolescences seeking help and acting upon treatment, whether it be self help or clinical, the proportion of people doing so has significantly increased. 1

in 4 people aged 16–74 with symptoms of a common mental health illnesses were receiving a type of mental health treatment in 2000 (23.1%) and 2007 (24.4%). By 2014, this has increased to more than one in three (37.3%). This can be supported by my survey, in which I can cross reference the top answer for “what do you do to cope” and it being “self care”. This tells us that adolescences are taking action in their own hands when it comes to their mental health issues, with the question rising why?

Taken from my survey the most popular answers in regards to coping mechanism, self care and talking to someone came

## DISCUSSION

at the top, with art and drawing following in forth. From this information this attains that people express hard feelings in different ways. Social networking plays a large part in seeking help within adolescences. Amongst adults aged 16 - 24, 91% are using social networking, with around 33% are likely to search up online information on mental health issues. Frequently, 73% of adolescence turn to other avenues to seek information, such

as TV, radio, social networks, and websites. In comparison to the 11% that actually seek help from professionals or GPs. It is seen easier to access and use a 24 hour service online, rather than a face to face appointment (Adolescent mental health, 2021). This again supports my factor that people are frightened of speaking to professionals, this may be due to the fear of being spoken down to or their problems disregarded. I can support this with the research from my surveys and interviews with people assuming that adolescences are afraid to speak up due to embarrassment, stigma and not enough education. Stigma has been brought up many times and is a large factor behind mental health issues. The problem with the stigma is that research suggested that people are there for one another, but are unsure on how to bring it up in a discussion. This leads me to a communication problem within adolescences, this may tie into being socially awkward. Through research it was found adolescents were the age group that was less likely to seek treatment, giving the question of why this could be? Being the age band of adolescences one of the most influential and important stages of life, this can be a great cause for concern.

## DISCUSSION

Therapy is the top treatment in the UK for mental Health Disorders, being used and successfully treat almost all of mental Health problems. There are many types of therapies, among the top are cognitive behavioural therapy - one on one help with a professional paying direct attention to the problem, impersonal therapy - interactions with friends and family and lastly supportive therapy - the use of art and music to allow you to express and process emotions and feelings. (Is Online Help Safe?, 2021). From research, amongst the 61 participants 41 didn't know what art therapy was and how it was used. This indicated people aren't aware of how it can be a valuable tool for their mental health or a way to express their feelings in such a way.

Delving into the topic of art therapy, the main question of this report, numerous clinical reports have supported the therapeutic pros of art therapy, making it a success especially in adolescences (Art Therapy, 2021). To adolescences, art therapy is seen as a personal and nonthreatening way of treatment, it brings back to a previous point of people within this age group being too embarrassed or viewing it as too risky to admit, making art therapy the best outlet within this age group (The Power of Art Therapy on Mental Illness | Destinations For Teens, 2021). A quote taken to back this up from an online research paper is "teens feel that they "lucked out" by having a therapist who is not interested in verbal cross-examination. Instead, their therapist is interested in their opinions of their world as expressed through imagery" (art therapy within adolescences, 2021). The main intake from research into art therapy is that adolescences are more drawn to these sorts of therapies as they provide a variation of ways to address painful feelings and trauma without talking. Being a huge rise in social media, antisocial behaviour among adolescents is the highest it has ever been, this may connect in the factor of the rise in art therapy due to the lack of communication needed within treatment sessions. Teenagers

that are spending a lot of time on social media is damaging their ability to learn effective socialisation and communication skills, therefore defaulting them to be unable to communicate through words (THE POWER OF ART THERAPY FOR HEALING MENTAL ILLNESS, 2021). Within schools this could be an opportunity to integrate mental health education, as they can then use tools like social media to gain awareness or even spread the word. Taken from my survey 62% of participants do not think there are many resources for mental health problems, coming back to education this could be a way to make aware of art therapy to adolescences at a young age or stage of growing up.

A topic that was brought to light within my interview is many people viewing art as an activity that needs to be performed perfectly, in other words people find if they are producing "good" art they are turned away from the thought. When the participants intent behind art work is self expression rather than producing good quality art, the value in the art becomes more of an emotional benefit. A quote taken from an online website that is insightful towards art is "The process we go through to create our art, to transform a mental image into something physical, is a reflection of our thought processes. How many times in a day do you stop to consider what or how you are feeling?"(Self-Expression and Creativity: Managing Feelings - SMART Recovery, 2021). This leads to using art as a tool of self progression in reflecting on how and why we feel emotions. 86% of survey participants stated if they knew these benefits of using art as Therapy they would then practice it.

## SUMMARY

# SUMMARY

In summary of this research document, I have found many insightful topics and opinions I would like to further push forward to the next stage of my investigation. One of them being the education behind mental health. I have found how important it is to be educated on this topic in order to benefit a person's mental well-being. Being taught about mental health and how to look after it would be a valuable assistance to many children with difficulty processing their emotions. Learning healthy coping mechanisms at a young age can have a lifelong impact on a person's life and should be recognised globally. Another theme that has come to light is lack of communication within the topic, my research has shown that it's not the topic people do not want to talk about but how the topic can be brought up. This is a

communication problem I have identified and want to expand in my next stage. This was an outcome I took by surprise within this research, therefore the need to expand on the communication issue. Adolescents are learning to take their mental health issues into their own hands, resulting in dealing with these emotions through self-care, friends or others using meditation or colouring apps. Research has found that people are less likely to talk to professionals as it seems their problems may get ignored or it's too daunting. This again highlights misconceptions around the stigma and mis-education. Within the next step of my investigation I'd like to focus my question around the lack of communication and education within adolescents and their mental health and how I can solve this through design.

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# APENDICES

## Appendix 1 - Interview questions

1. What do you think about drawing and art, is it something you enjoy doing?
2. Do you keep a journal?
3. In school, do you think there should be some classes in self-care and dealing with your emotions, do you think this would have helped you emotionally grow up?
4. You have mental issues or experienced any for a short period of time?
5. What do you enjoy doing?
6. What do you actually do to de stress?
7. What do you do as a coping mechanism?
8. Do you find it easy or hard to open up?
9. Have you ever used art to de stress?
10. If you found out the benefits using art to express your emotions, would you consider doing it?
11. As a male, do you feel the stigma around mental health, if so how do you think you could take the stigma?

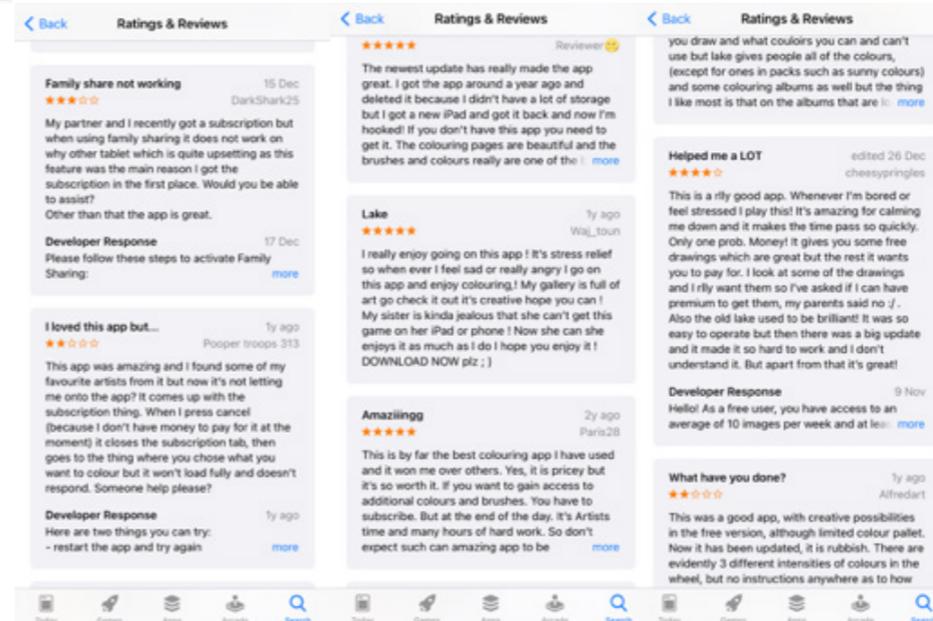
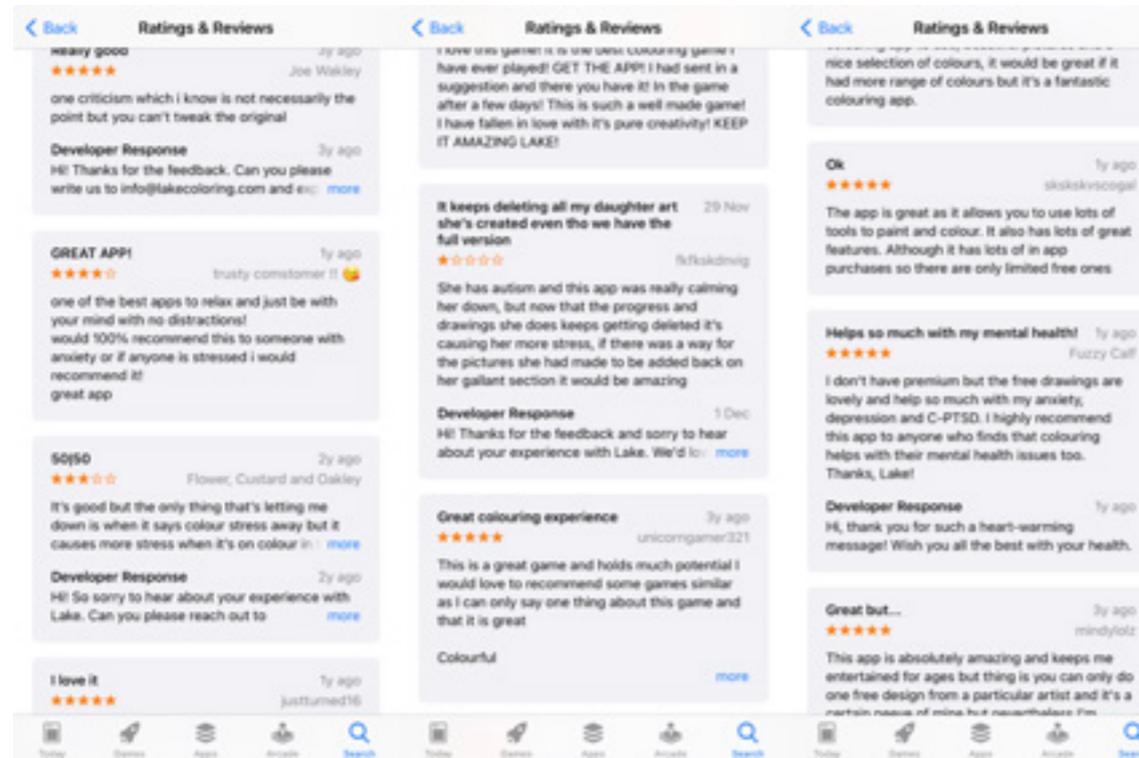
# APENDICES

## Appendix 2 - survey

1. Age -
2. Gender
3. have you experienced any mental health problems within your lifetime?
4. if so, have you ever acted upon it? e.g talking to a friend or to a doctor.
5. If you ever felt like you were struggling with your mental health, who would you turn to?
6. Would you find it hard to verbally talk to someone about suffering with a mental illness ?
7. If you have ever felt anxious or down, what do you do to cope ?
8. if you stated "other" please share what that is below
9. have you ever considered drawing as a form of relaxation or coping mechanism
10. if you knew more benefits of how drawing and painting could help you mental health, would you then consider doing so?
11. are you familiar with art therapy and how it's used?
12. in a few words, what would you do to help a friend or family member that is suffering from mental health problems?
13. do you think there should be more education on mental health within school?
14. do you think there are a lot of resources for mental health problems?
15. People from the age 10-24 are less likely to ask for help regarding their mental health, why do you think this?
16. have you ever used any apps to help your mental health?
17. if you stated yes, please share your thoughts on them?

# APPENDICES

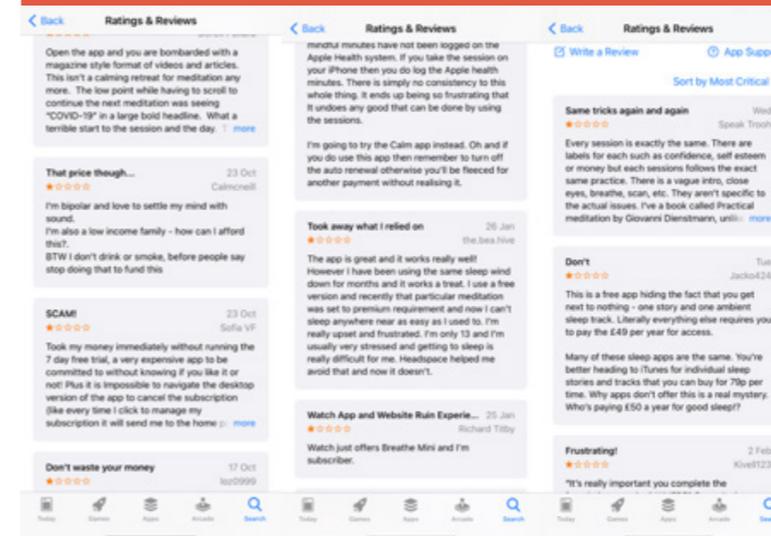
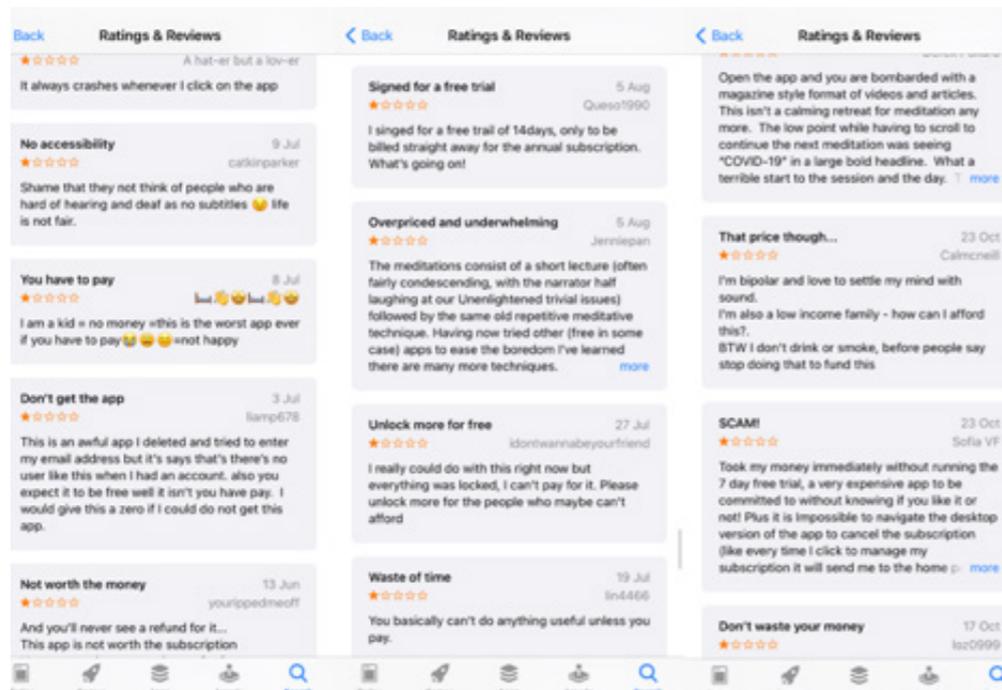
## APPENDIX 3 - OBSERVATION OF APPS WITHIN THE APP STORE



APPENDICES

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 3 - OBSERVATION OF APPS WITHIN THE APP STORE



# APPENDICES