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# Springdale, Arkansas Public Art and Its Impact on Diverse Community Members

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Springdale, Arkansas Public Art and Its Impact on Diverse Community Members

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## Abstract

Where we live and how we feel about this environment shape our quality of life. Our geographical location can contribute to our self-perceptions and bond-forming. These are each prioritized by the National Association of Social Workers' (2021) ethics as essentials for overall health. The areas we live in steward different resources to meet local needs and priorities, ultimately achieving varying impact. Minimal, if any, research exists on topics such as Springdale, Arkansas' public art, the impactful qualities of public art as defined by members of the public, and how the public art may change individuals' navigation of and interactions within public spaces. This qualitative research used purposive interviews with Northwest Arkansas residents to explore the impact of downtown Springdale's public art on locals' lives and their social network diversity. Throughout the interviews several themes emerged. These include notions that the public art's impact on an individual is driven by the individual's 1) relationship with the art's setting, 2) self-identified commonalities with the art's content, and 3) perceptions of self. Implications for social work practice, policy practice, and future research are listed.

## Acknowledgements and Dedication

Thank you, sincerely, to my research chair and committee members without whom this endeavor would not have been possible. You each contributed deeply meaningful, personal mentorship across my areas of interest and study. You each spoke uniquely to who I am and why I am here, and your doing so made me feel seen and valued beyond measure. Whenever one endeavors in something new, the ability to witness others come alongside, uplift, and encourage us matters so much to our ability to persevere through the highs and lows. I entered this chapter of my life with goals to operate well amidst purposeful discomfort and to practice engaging meaningfully at the intersections of industries, sets of knowledge, and diverse lives. Your modeling of these behaviors and influence in this specific pursuit have changed me for the better.

Thank you so much, forever, to my parents and my sister, who each day espouse for me what it means to love others well. I dedicate my thesis to you. I am constantly in awe of your selflessness and the positive impacts enabled for myself and for the world based on the ways you lead your lives with humility, curiosity, and joy. This season necessitated more time apart than ever before, and yet I feel more intimately intertwined with each of you than at any other point in my life. Thank you for the chance to know you as an adult, to come to you in my vulnerability, and to share the experience of growing in our faith.

"Dry bones begin to rattle!" I am grateful for this time of heart-softening and rebirth in my life. The chance, after years in another field and frame of mind, to walk with grace into a new life surrounded by like-minded peers who motivate me and communities alongside which I am eager to continue to learn, serve, and grow. This life is far from random, and I am committed to continue to go where I am led. There is no place I would rather be.

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## The Social Need for Thoughtful Public Art

Public art can shape public mood, sense of self, and ideas about one's neighbors for the people who share its spaces (Kim et al., 2018; Tanguy & Kumar, 2019). It encompasses passive, active, static, dynamic, short- and long-term, and multisensory works united by their public nature (Americans for the Arts, n.d.). The National Association of Social Workers' (NASW, 2021) ethical principles suggest that input from diverse community members (e.g., those representing the various racial/ethnic, socioeconomic class, sexuality, gender, and age backgrounds of the community) into local development matters for local outcomes. This can include the impact of an area's public art and how one perceives they belong and feel connected to the community. Still, few, if any guarantees of community members' chance to contribute to public art decisions exist. The present study is inspired in part by the work of Hackemann (2018), who asked people in Brooklyn and Queens, New York about their awareness of a public art display. This was a sculpture by Jeff Koons located in Manhattan's Rockefeller Center and, although the sculpture received ample press, television features, and national print coverage by organizations such as the *New York Times*, almost none of those surveyed in New York City's other boroughs knew anything about it. Like Hackemann's study, this project explores community members' perceptions of a handful of public art displays located in Springdale, Arkansas. The site of this study faces similar community-building opportunities and risks, given its diverse racial, ethnic, and economic makeup, as it develops its downtown through art.

Washington County, Arkansas, the location of the city of Springdale, over indexes on population diversity versus the state of Arkansas overall. The U.S. Census Bureau (2019-a) All American Community Survey (ACS) demonstrated that Washington County's ethnic

representation featured a 17.0% Latinx makeup versus 7.6% of the population statewide in 2019. Additionally, non-English speakers were overrepresented with 4.4% responding that they had trouble speaking English versus 1.5% of Arkansans statewide. Washington County residents noted higher incidences of no health insurance coverage, 13.6% versus 9.6% of Arkansans. While 3.1% of Washington County residents identified as Asian, and 4.3% of Washington County households identified an Asian or Pacific Islands language as their household language, these qualities were only true of 2.0% and 1.4%, respectively, of Arkansas residents statewide in 2019. Springdale, as of 2019, featured 76.6% U.S.-born residents, 37.6% Hispanic or Latino, 19.4% uninsured below age 65, and 38.9% non-English-speakers at home above age 5 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019-b). Downtown Springdale's co-occurring cultural, racial, and economic diversities make it the ideal site for a review of the social impacts of public art in Northwest Arkansas.

Public art is a paradox: studies find that it both promotes and undermines equity. Some public art can promote network-building across communities or aspire to promote equity (Borghini & Baldini, 2021; Cartiere, 2014). Public art also risks perpetuating a top-down perspective of who knows best and who is in charge that isolates all others if executed inequitably (Cartiere, 2014). This matters, through the lens of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2021), because person-to-person connection and social equity are essential to life outcomes. Both pillars emphasize all people's need for substantive involvement in shaping their futures. The social equity ethic further specifies marginalized populations, based on financial status, identity, and, or heritage, as those at particular risk of being compromised. The public art decisions made in Springdale's downtown stand to similarly shift foot traffic and time spent in the area. This will either instigate greater cohesion or greater division among

Springdale's diverse residents. The future impact of Springdale's efforts to make the downtown space a destination (H3 Studio, 2015) for community building and connection remains unknown. How the downtown's art will contribute to the lives of diverse community members is likewise yet to be determined. A qualitative interview approach was used at purposively selected, culturally diverse events in Springdale to learn the impact of downtown Springdale's public art for participating residents and the diversity of their social networks.

## Literature Review

The literature review first defines terms that will appear throughout this research like public art, exposure to art, personal networks and perspectives, and impact. This section then delves into the research on public space and public art planning and public space and public art impact worldwide to arrive at research questions that address a gap in accumulated knowledge to-date.

### Public Art

I opt for a multifaceted, evolved definition of public art that maximizes inclusion and flexibility. This approach is affirmed by Graham (2006), who advocated for a more nuanced definition and suggested that not all art situated in public constitutes public art. The definition employed throughout this thesis stems from the work of Cartiere and Willis (2008), who accounted for both space- and intention-based considerations rather than one or the other. They set the condition that public art necessarily 1) confront issues of the public, 2) exist for and, or because of the public, and, or 3) be viewable publicly. Borghini and Baldini (2021) similarly assert that public art prompts dialogue across diverse members of communities, which is what North (1990) perceives as the value-add of art in public spaces, rather than generic appeal. These interrelated definitions of public art differ from that of Miles (1997), who proposed a solely

place-based definition of public art as any works made for readily accessed non-museum, non-gallery spaces. In summary, public art in the present research study refers to any art in and or for the public. The interviews used open questions to enable the participant to determine the scope of what they considered public art. The Springdale public artworks selected for direct feedback, though, featured a narrower scope of visual art in the form of murals and sculptural window installations. This approach excludes socially engaged art, which exists to affect change and shares more in common with other community organizing efforts than it does with other art forms (Simoniti, 2018).

**Exposure to Art**

Kisida et al. (2018) and Gallo et al. (2021) both equate arts exposure to experiences viewing art. Kisida et al. discussed exposure in the context of museum-based arts education during childhood, which they distinguished from experiences making art as a child. I instead focus on Gallo et al.'s description of exposure as a recurring, visual esthetic experience. This excludes many interactive community art forms such as kids' tables and musical performances.

**Social Networks / Personal Network**

A social network regards the people with whom you speak in-person or online (Quenette & Velasquez, 2018; Tawa et al., 2016). Quenette and Velasquez (2018) focused specifically on the people with whom an individual is connected on social media as constituting that individual's social network, while other literature emphasized the general act of speaking with each other as network-forming (Deutsch & Mackesy, 1985; Deutsch et al., 1991). This thesis adopts a similarly broad definition for social networks given the focus of this study in physical community environments rather than solely virtual spaces.

**Diverse Social Networks**

Diversity of one's social network is sometimes based on self-assessment of differences between one's own race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status and the perceived race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status of others with whom the individual interacts. Tawa et al. (2016) looked at diversity as the coexistence of white people and people of color, while Quenette and Velasquez (2018) added socioeconomic considerations. Given any individual's own overlapping identity qualities, though, and their infinite possible intersections with the identities of others, this thesis utilizes an understanding of diverse social networks as individually determined based on whatever criteria are salient for the respondent (Zellmer-Bruhn et al., 2008). This definition broadens the scope for additional considerations such as gender and sexuality diversity within one's social network – characteristics and identities that may alter one's access to and engagement with public art. It further accommodates the potential for setting to shape one's most salient identities. This thesis asks respondents to consider the relative diversity of their social networks by comparison to a previous point in time before the respondent experienced the local public art.

**Personal Perspective**

Van den Bos et al. (2011) considered an individual's ability to account for the motivations of others in addition to self as central to the evolution of that individual's social perspectives. They explored an individual's perspective-taking as something that evolves alongside the maturation of an individual's own brain. Frick et al. (2014) similarly looked at the trajectory of one's perspective-taking over their life course and affirmed that this skill involves increasing awareness of vantage points dissimilar to the individual's own views. This thesis utilizes personal perspective to mean how an individual perceives the world surrounding them

and acknowledges the potential for this perception to shift as the individual ages and interacts with the surrounding world. This includes the researcher's own personal perspective in conceptualizing, implementing, and disseminating the study, a lens that is discussed further in the reflexivity section.

## Impact(s)

Public art impact encompasses both the art's stylistic influence on the place it occupies and its effect on the people who experience it (Thompson et al., 2005; Vickery, 2007). Thompson et al. (2005) and Vickery (2007) explained that public art impact depends on how well it complements its setting, its assessed value according to the community and art professionals, whether it spurs changes in its setting, and how much it draws the community into dialogue. This thesis reviews local residents' perceived impact of downtown Springdale's public art on the region and, or self, using the definition enumerated by Thompson et al. and Vickery.

## Research Context

### *Public Art Decision-Maker Considerations*

Previous empirical studies of public art and public spaces analyzed both public art and space considerations for decision-makers (Chebat & Morrin, 2007; Hausmann & Poellmann, 2013; Thomas et al., 2015) and impact on community members (Arredondo & Bustamante, 2020; Kim et al., 2018; Tanguy & Kumar, 2019; Zebracki, 2013). Among the literature on decision-makers' considerations, researchers explored the relationship between a space's color scheme and onlookers' disposition and assessment of quality by cultural identity (Chebat & Morrin, 2007), the significance of and opportunities for leveraging social media within awareness strategies (Hausmann & Poellmann, 2013), and implications for diverse people stemming from art's role in their city's revitalization (Thomas et al., 2015). These studies

spanned a Canadian retail environment with 587 participants (Chebat & Morrin, 2007), 144 German performing arts centers (Hausmann & Poellmann, 2013), and an area of Memphis, Tennessee (Thomas et al., 2015). They utilized scaled, pre-test post-test questionnaires with a convenience sample (Chebat & Morrin, 2007), qualitative, multiprong case studies of specific sites and organizations (Hausmann & Poellmann, 2013; Thomas et al., 2015), a codified, web-based landscape analysis (Hausmann & Poellmann, 2013), and semi-structured interviews with community contributors (Thomas et al., 2015) to generate insights. Findings were examined in ways such as mediation analysis (Chebat & Morrin, 2007) and an iterative process (Thomas et al., 2015).

The literature revealed several considerations for public space and public art planning and impact. For planning, Chebat and Morrin (2007) shared a statistically significant finding suggesting that color palettes of a retail space, for instance, may shape senses of products' quality within those spaces based on an onlooker's cultural background. The research proposed the usefulness of a social media presence to define a project's caliber as well as boost awareness and audience insights (Hausmann & Poellmann, 2013). This was based on findings for a prominent German performance venue which prioritized high social media response rates, shareable content creation, and virtual experiences that complement and extend their in-person offering (Hausmann & Poellmann, 2013). Research on art to achieve locals' sense of place found, for Memphis' Crosstown Arts, value in intermingling old and new community and art features as well as convening diverse pockets of the community simultaneously (Thomas et al., 2015). Still, threats to the project emerged from truncated reporting on the project that overemphasized the insertion of art and made some people more wary of gentrification. This

underscored the need for continuous review to ensure a project's intended outcomes, despite challenges, reach fruition.

### *Public Art's Community Member Impact*

Literature that focused on how public spaces and art are received (Arredondo & Bustamante, 2020; Kim et al., 2018; Zebracki, 2013) and valued (Tanguy & Kumar, 2019) by local people leveraged quantitative (Kim et al., 2018; Tanguy & Kumar, 2019; Zebracki, 2013) and qualitative research methods (Arredondo & Bustamante, 2020; Kim et al., 2018). These studies employed a descriptive question matrix and ethnography (Kim et al., 2018), a binary logistic regression model (Tanguy & Kumar, 2019), and visual and content analyses (Zebracki, 2013). Quota sampling of 1,111 people at six public art sites in the Netherlands and Belgium, for instance, generated scaled responses about select public artworks' appeal and free responses about the installations' relationships with their placements (Zebracki, 2013). In Sweden, mixed-methods, pre- and post-test surveys and a focus group sampled 22 residents and local professionals to consider whether participating in the researchers' virtual program impacted locals' feelings of contribution to the real community's related construction work (Kim et al., 2018). Another study in London, England used yes versus no feedback on willingness to contribute financially to public art at two of three prices to assert the value of such work (Tanguy & Kumar, 2019). This study relied on 469 surveys of daily travelers and local inhabitants around two public art sites.

Literature on impact suggested that while people may feel better about a public space than its art (Zebracki, 2013), they may also discern, as did 84% of one sample, that rotating public art in their community can bolster their sense of pleasure (Tanguy and Kumar, 2019). Public art by different makers can generate a spectrum of reactions, and the public may focus

most on elements of the art they understand, like dimensionality, missing more emotive takeaways (Zebracki, 2013). Even when a particular public artwork is less well-received, Tanguy and Kumar (2019) shared a statistically significant finding that this did not shift their viewers' eagerness to financially contribute towards the feasibility of upcoming work. Education level did significantly moderate one sample's curiosity about art but not its sense of the art's appeal (Zebracki, 2013), while income level did not matter for another sample's willingness to financially support art (Tanguy and Kumar, 2019). A positive relationship was found between curiosity and ongoing pursuit of art and individuals' eagerness to financially contribute to public art in their area (Tanguy and Kumar, 2019). Tanguy and Kumar (2019) found that attendance to a museum or gallery on more than three occasions in the past twelve months increased chances of financial contribution to public art by 6.3 times among their sample. Their income-related insights, however, were not statistically significant among participants earning less than £15,000. Zebracki (2013) did identify a difference in public art usage by education level. Zebracki demonstrated those with lower degree level attainment best identifying with public art as a location marker and those with higher degree attainment as more interested in the work as a point of discourse. Still, findings varied significantly per installation and place.

### *Public Art and Space Interactions*

Members of the public possess a myriad of art experiences or lack thereof. Although Zebracki (2013) observed that the public more highly reviews "decorative-figurative…more conventional" versus "abstract works" of public art, Kim et al. (2018) demonstrated that insight collected from the public can inform abstract and even virtual art. Further, Kim et al. found that this art may ultimately connect some of its participants with their city. In Kim et al.'s case, 73 percent of sampled individuals experienced a sense of control in the virtual reality installment

and 41 percent experienced perceptions of contributing to something beyond themselves. Unfortunately, findings for Kim et al., and most of the literature reviewed, were not presented by ethnicity or race. As the virtual art in one case enabled personal touchpoints with an evolving public space, Zebracki demonstrated that intimate knowledge of a public space may build comfortability with that space's public art. Zebracki suggested that ultimately this would extend to positive regard towards the space and art's mutual goodness of fit.

These outcomes are especially relevant for spaces undergoing change, like downtown Springdale. The virtual art studied by Kim et al. (2018), for instance, enabled greater realization about, and then positive sentiment regarding, a development project in the same area. In the case of Zebracki (2013), public spaces themselves exhibited a moderately significant relationship with people's evoked memories, while only a fifth of the sample held memories tied to the public art. Tanguy and Kumar's (2019) forward-looking emphasis revealed that residency near a public art site and parenthood sparked greater willingness to contribute financially to public art by 2.9 times and 2.3 times, respectively. They also observed that perceived positive, overall life impact drove people's motivation to pay for public art by 8.6 times. Still, readers must grapple with the roles of race and ethnicity and how they may influence ideas about U.S. public spaces and public art when forming theories based on existing, global research.

### *Public Space Impact by Demographics in Springdale*

Researchers in Springdale, Arkansas instead focused on public spaces overall and what they mean to new residents of color by the degree of spaces' white racialization (Arredondo & Bustamante, 2020). This racialization is shaped not only by spaces' saturation of white people but also their perpetuation, through physical artifacts, of whiteness-framed world views (Anderson, 2015). The researchers viewed spaces and populations of interest and hosted long-

form, qualitative interviews of both convenience-based and purposive origin, all of which was enabled by relationship-building with community groups (Arredondo & Bustamante, 2020). Arredondo and Bustamante's (2020) research, although not specific to public art, helped demonstrate differences in public space sentiment per demographic group. Their findings for the Jones Center in Springdale, Arkansas suggested that if a public space utilizes subliminal clues that prioritize the dominant race over ethnic and racial minorities, this will impact marginalized groups' ideas about the space overall. Latinos in Arredondo and Bustamante's study felt unwanted at the Jones Center after an entrance price was instituted for specific functions within the space. The fee consequently pivoted their activities like break-dancing to unofficial spaces like the hallways, and the space's décor worked to uphold a notion of welcoming diversity while possibly diverting attention from reality. This, in theory, induced greater estrangement from Latinx community members with compromised memories of the space.

Arredondo and Bustamante's (2020) case study of the Jones Center in Springdale demonstrates the potential for diversity efforts to fail to exceed a surface-level impact while dominant racial and ethnic groups mistakenly believe equity was achieved. Arredondo and Bustamante point to the Jones Center's Cinco de Mayo display as a way that the facility presents itself as inclusive but reduces Latinx local life to stereotyped costume and decoration on predetermined days. Just as public art shapes the landscapes it occupies, these researchers note the impact of food and signage that assume a norm of whiteness on non-white people's perceptions of the surrounding space. Further, they identify that these perceptions influence whether and how people of color use the Jones Center. The region's housing crisis and its potential gentrification-related impact on people of marginalized identities stands to compound the stated risk (Deloney, 2019; Grajeda, 2021).

### *Downtown Springdale and Northwest Arkansas Development and Public Art*

The Jones Center's increased revenue from restrictive usage fees and cost-cutting for diversity and inclusion enabled greater investment in Springdale's downtown according to the facility's leadership (Arredondo and Bustamante, 2020). This divestment at the Jones Center recreational facility does not guarantee investment in belonging-based efforts downtown. Developer H3 Studio's (2015) plan for downtown Springdale outlines roles for diversity and equity, arts and culture, and public space development, but the plan's next steps do not directly address diversity within future arts-based partnerships or area development. The plan promotes diverse meal options, recreational programs, and living accommodations as well as the usefulness of art and public space to support diversity, but what qualifies as sufficiently inclusive is unknown. Although the plan references contributions from 300 neighbors of downtown Springdale, these participants' own demographics are not shared. Of those listed on the steering committee, client group, and technical advisory committee, no persons of color are identifiable through a Google search. Further, the chair role for the development plan was held by a representative of Tyson Foods, Inc. (H3 Studio, 2015). Tyson Foods, Inc. of Springdale does contribute to local development (5NEWS Web Staff, 2021; Tyson Foods, Inc., 2020), but the organization also holds a reputation for reprehensible worker treatment, especially among those who are marginalized, that spans decades (Lakhani, 2021; Reiley, 2020; Employment Standards Administration, 2006).

Several downtowns of Northwest Arkansas maintain policies for public art that account for social justice, which suggests the same is possible for emerging arts policies in Springdale. A map of Northwest Arkansas by Y Illustrations (n.d.) is included in the appendix as Figure 1. The City of Fayetteville Arkansas (n.d.) and City of Bentonville (n.d.) embed equity and accessibility

considerations into their policies for public art through requests for qualification (RFQ). These requests are reviewed by an arts council, and the City of Bentonville extends its transparency with a listing of its decision-making benchmarks. While Fayetteville and Bentonville's Arts Councils formed around 2007, a plan for the Downtown Springdale Arts District did not arrive until late 2019 (Dabbs, 2020). Dabbs (2020) defined the district's perimeter as Meadow Avenue, South Shiloh Street, Grove Street, and the Arkansas Missouri train route. It exists less than one block south of Emma Avenue, an anchor of the community along which reside nonprofits such as those that serve the Marshallese community (Arkansas Coalition of Marshallese, n.d.), teenagers (Teen Action & Support Center, n.d.), and people without health insurance (Community Clinic, n.d.). The plan presented by Dabbs (2020) detailed intentions to develop further art-related policies but, as of autumn 2021, the only policies available pertained to the Downtown Springdale Alliance (2021) Mural Grant.

The Downtown Springdale Alliance (2021) Mural Grant emphasized approachable public art, financial returns for businesses, and disqualifications for artists. These disqualifications raise concerns about the program's possible impact on diverse community members. Downtown Springdale Alliance disqualified, for instance, proposed works that were interpretable as political despite encouraging works that reference Springdale's dynamics and past. The organization further denied applicants who either personally or, among their relatives, have a criminal history or are known to disturb Springdale's spaces or communities. The organization provided no further detail about the relevance of an individual's family-wide criminal history or how a political work is defined. These prerequisites to public art creation are especially worrisome for diverse representation given data from the American Civil Liberties Union (2019). This organization finds that Arkansas experienced the greatest acceleration of imprisoned people of

any U.S. state from 2012 through 2017, with women and black people above age 18 among the most impacted populations. Marginalized populations likely added meaningful presence to downtown Springdale pre-arts district and ongoingly (Arkansas Coalition of Marshallese, n.d.; Community Clinic, n.d.; Teen Action & Support Center, n.d.), but new policies for public space adornment prompt questions about who will continue to feel welcomed. The potential disconnect between current public art goals and impact in Springdale, and what this disconnect could mean for diverse residents, asserts the need for research that directly engages community members. This study marks a step towards addressing the need for continuous resident feedback on downtown Springdale's local public art and what it means to them and their sense of community.

## Research Gap and Emerging Questions

The literature review affirmed a lack of insights on the impact of public art, globally, as well as in Springdale, Arkansas, specifically. While the research explored specific qualities of public art and public spaces around the world, it did not empower members of the public to define the public art's impactful qualities for themselves, nor did it address how the public art may have changed individuals' navigation of and interactions within public spaces. The research on Springdale reviewed a specific recreational space in the community rather than the public art throughout the downtown. This qualitative study asked Northwest Arkansas residents the impact of downtown Springdale's public art. It also explored whether the current public art in downtown Springdale contributes to the development of diverse social networks for residents. Given the qualitative, exploratory nature of this research, hypotheses are not listed.

## Methodology

The stated research gaps suggest the benefit of qualitative, exploratory research on the public art impact in downtown Springdale. Personal perspectives became the construct of

interest. The demographic variables that served as influential conditions included age, race and ethnicity, income range, and Springdale affiliation status such as resident, worker, or neither.

**Study Design and Research Approach**

This study employed a semi-structured interview approach. This qualitative design centered consideration of individuals' perceived impact of Springdale public art within the context of their cultural affiliations. Insight into the possibly divergent public art experiences of cultural groups in Springdale helps understand whether diverse populations will connect through the current art downtown. Recruiting participants and interviewing at community-based events hosted by culturally diverse, local organizations served the purpose of reaching multiple pockets of the community.

Before research commenced, the project underwent assessment by the University of Arkansas' Internal Review Board (IRB). As seen in Figure 2 of the appendix, it qualified for expedited, exempt status in August of 2021. The researcher received permission to proceed with the minimally invasive interview prompts listed in Figure 3 and a brief informed consent statement regarding interview duration, recording methods, confidentiality measures, and the voluntary nature of participation. Confidentiality in this study meant not storing participants' names but instead logging their audio recordings by time and place. These precautions mitigated foreseeable participation risks, while benefits were similarly restricted to the production of new knowledge, downtown resource-sharing, and $10 gift cards for interview respondents.

**Data Collection**

Data collection took place in September and October of 2021 at purposively selected events to engage a diversity of cultures represented in, and catered to by, downtown Springdale organizations. Photographs of art that respondents were asked to reflect on all came from sites

along Emma Avenue at the heart of the defined downtown. Additionally, for recruitment purposes, local organizations based along Emma Avenue in Springdale and diverse community programs were identified. The Downtown Springdale Alliance (n.d.) hosts an interactive map on its website that individuals can filter based on need to identify relevant resources. This was used to help construct the organization-level outreach list and representatives of these organizations were contacted to explain the goals of this project and secure surveying events. The interviewing sites ultimately included a Latinx community bike ride, Marshallese cultural day celebration, Marshallese and Congolese sewing workshops, a mud run, and a block party for local teenagers and their families. Images from these public events are included in Figure 4 through Figure 8 of the appendix. Convenience sampling methods were employed within above community events. Participants were approached and assessed for their qualification to participate based on their Springdale residency or employment status and age at or above 18 years old. Seventeen interviews were conducted in English with translation assistance as needed from fellow event attendees. The interviews lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes, were recorded, and were simultaneously automatically transcribed by the recording software. The researcher then reviewed the automated transcripts for accuracy and to make transcription corrections.

**Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) enabled the researcher to probe deeply into the qualitative data generated while organizing around multi-level takeaways and themes. Data was analyzed with the goal of presenting a robust review of all insights generated rather than a limited gaze. For this reason, the analytical approach was further specified to inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), in which themes emerged during and following the researcher's reckoning with the actual data. Transcripts within each event digital file folder were

numbered where the last event left off, in an order based on the interviews' start times. All transcripts were read in full by the researcher. Then, responses were reorganized. Each transcript was assigned a color and reaggregated into a combined document arranged by question to generate overarching insights. This approach enabled the researcher to compare responses related to the same topic within the same space rather than in separate transcripts, ensuring full consideration. Maintaining the individual ID method within the combined documentation ensured the exploration of possible motivations for individual responses based on socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity. The initial themes and "ah-ha" moments as well as any disconfirming evidence were first highlighted in a personal journal. Presentation of the transcripts to a research review committee further accounted for the various possible interpretations of qualitative research and strengthened researcher accountability. The relatively small sample size made this approach feasible. From that point the data was further categorized by the researcher and assessed for semantic themes as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach prioritizes the explicit words of research participants, which are built upon with the researcher's analysis of their effects on the big picture. The generated themes were reviewed by the researcher and reorganized such that more specific themes serve as subthemes under more general, superordinate themes.

### *Research Rigor*

Thomas and Magilvy (2011) outline four strands of qualitative rigor related to accuracy, interchangeability, trustworthiness, and removal of bias. Accuracy was enhanced by reviewing insights with a research committee from the School of Social Work. Committee members received anonymized transcripts and an initial analysis, then provided feedback. Including verbatims from survey respondents also aids transparency. Interchangeability is aided by the

inclusion of census information about the community where the research took place in the final report. Trustworthiness for this thesis was also supported by clearly outlining the research objectives, sample curation, data methods, timeline, and review methods. Additionally, the disconfirming evidence asserts that the findings are not universal and conveys a trustworthiness during analysis. Further, as suggested by Thomas and Magilvy, to reduce guiding tendencies in my semi-structured interviews, open questions were used.

**Reflexivity.** The researcher's personal bias was declared by use of an auto-ethnography, photographing, and self-reflection on feelings. These are available in Figures 4 through 9 of the Supplemental Materials and a condensed description of my auto-ethnography appears below.

The researcher acknowledges their identity as a white, 26-year-old, cisgender woman who grew up outside of New York City and encountered many positive art experiences as viewer, maker, and organizer across their life course. The researcher presently even interviews artists and art world decision-makers, many of whom create in Northwest Arkansas. As a social worker, cultural humility also makes the researcher aware of infringing on the spaces of others. To decide that what's currently there is not beautiful does not feel like an outsider's decision to make. The researcher entered this project with the skeptical assumption that Springdale's decision makers do not look or live like the majority of Springdale residents. The researcher assumed that the public art installed by Springdale's decision makers to attract people to the downtown would make the locals feel less welcome, especially local people with lower incomes and local people of color. The researcher personally enjoys the Downtown Springdale public art but felt wary that their privilege and prior exposure to art shaped this liking. As an outsider to Springdale, the researcher felt themself drawn toward Springdale because of the art and

questioned what their increasing presence in the community would mean for others. The potential disconnects prompted the researcher's efforts to learn more.

## Findings

This study includes insights from 17 participants interviewed at the selected Springdale-based programs in autumn of 2021. The demographics of these participants are detailed below in Table 1. Individuals in the 18–30-year-old age bracket, ethnically Marshallese community, and $20,000 and below income range participated in greater numbers than other age and income brackets and ethnicities. The majority of participants lived in Springdale, but slightly fewer than half of the participants who responded to the employment prompt worked in Springdale. Ten out of 15 participants who responded to the Springdale events engagement prompt indicated that they attended one or more events held in Springdale in the past 6 months. These events were defined as either ticketed or free programs that were open to the public, meaning not invite-only. Fourteen out of 16 participants who responded to the Springdale public arts exposure prompt indicated that they previously saw at least one piece of public art in Springdale. This exposure was based on individual recall and included Springdale public art exposure that occurred in-person or through a photo.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

| Age Range | Frequency |
|---|---|
| 18-30 | 7 |
| 31-50 | 5 |
| 51-70 | 4 |
| 71+ | 1 |
| Total | N=17 |
| **Race/Ethnicity** | **Frequency** |
| Black | 5 |
| Hispanic | 2 |
| Marshallese | 7 |
| White | 3 |
| Other | 0 |
| Total | N=17 |
| **Income Range** | **Frequency** |
| $0-20,000 | 9 |
| $20,001-50,000 | 4 |
| $50,001+ | 4 |
| Total | N=17 |
| **Live in Springdale** | **Frequency** |
| Yes | 11 |
| No | 5 |
| Total | N=16 |
| **Work in Springdale** | **Frequency** |
| Yes | 6 |
| No | 8 |
| Total | N=14 |

*Note:* Age in years, minimum age 18. Race/ethnicity as defined by the individual, with ability to identify as multiple. Annual approximate individual income in U.S. dollars. "Live in Springdale" means whether an individual currently resides at a mailing address in Springdale. "No" respondents lived in neighboring towns of Lowell and Fayetteville but worked or studied in Springdale. "Work in Springdale" means whether individual currently works remotely or in-person for an organization with a Springdale mailing address. Three "no" respondents were students in Springdale.

Throughout the interviews three core themes emerged. These include notions that the public art's impact on an individual is driven by the individual's 1) relationship with the art's

setting, 2) self-identified commonalities with the art's content, and 3) perceptions of self. Within each theme subthemes are presented and described.

## Relationship with the Setting

Participants experienced the downtown as a backdrop rather than its own destination. For instance, as the site of cultural events or the route to an errand. The public art enhanced the downtown as its own standalone experience. Rather than visit downtown solely to meet social obligations, some people began venturing downtown for the purpose to explore and discover. Within this theme subthemes emerged related to 1) the role of public art placement in public art and space discovery and 2) the influence of a local social network on one's motivation to explore public spaces and art.

### *Role of Public Art Placement in Public Art and Space Discovery*

Many participants discovered Springdale's public art for the first time while downtown for other reasons. These reasons included passing through downtown by car or bike en route to another destination, shopping in the area, and attending faith-based services. A Hispanic participant remarked about "**driving**...(and) **biking**" (ID 2 (31-50 years old, $50,001+ annual income)) in downtown Springdale as did a Marshallese respondent who added that they were "**driving by**... **shopping**" (ID 3 (31-50 years old, $0-20,000 annual income)). Other participants reflected on "**walking** around...every time **when she needs to** come" (ID 6 (51-70 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)) and that "on our way **to church** on our way to go somewhere else **we crossed (downtown)**" (ID 7 (51-70 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)). It is important to note the timing of this research during the COVID-19 pandemic and its possible influence on how participants spent time downtown. This was addressed via a participant's comment that they "stay home now **because of COVID**…go

**straight from** church to home, **doctor's appointment to home**" (ID 4 (71+ years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)).

One younger adult Marshallese respondent reflected on the relative geographic density of downtown Springdale versus other downtowns across Northwest Arkansas while describing their experience of public art discovery. They stated that they came across Springdale's public art:

> "Just by **driving**...downtown **Springdale, it's not as packed** as it is in Fayetteville, you know or in Bentonville, so I always go to the places that are like less crowded." - ID 5 (18-30 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

This perception aligns with the experience of another participant and helps bridge the connection between Springdale's public space and public art. This white participant explained, "Yeah, I drive by it all. I look at it... you know **I don't just drive by and miss it, I look at it**" (ID 10 (51-70 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)). Such an experience might prove less feasible among a more crowded landscape of visuals competing for one's attention.

Congolese participants from a local sewing workshop specific to their cultural community shared the experience of hearing about the public art as place markers before seeing it. These respondents shared about certain public art becoming directions for them to locate their sewing workshops. One participant from the Democratic Republic of the Congo described:

> "I talked to them about the address. I tried to explain to them where I am working for now is the address… And you can see on the building... That was information for me…**the information is building address and the picture they can see**." - ID14 (31-50 years old, Black (Congolese), $20K-50,000 annual income)

Respondents from the Democratic Republic of the Congo further reflected uniquely on the potential for the public art to prompt discovery of resources inside of the affiliated buildings. A participant stated:

> "It's (the public art is) inspiration… you may have ideas you may be very **interested to ask about it and to enter inside and to have information about this thing**…he said that about this building he had information before about what he is doing inside and they

> say to him **you can go on this address and you will see this picture**." - ID 12 (18-30 years old, Black (Congolese), $0-20,000 annual income)

The idea of public art fostering awareness of and insight into public spaces matters for all residents given the downtown's ongoing changes. Another Congolese participant used an analogy to traffic lights to explain public art as a conveyor of local insights when they said:

> "Art is very important because they are a source of information. When you are traveling, you may see that lights…tell you here you have to go to right or left. Here you have to stop the light turns telling you about how to walk (and) how to drive in the city. Like the color on the wall tells you in this place they are doing… this activity in different places they are doing the same activity…This is hospital clinic…**Only the art tell(s) you about everything and every address in the city**." - ID 13 (31-50 years old, Black (Congolese), $0-20,000 annual income)

For public art in downtown Springdale to facilitate local discovery, it must first gather diverse people to the downtown. As seen in Table 2 below, only five out of 13 participants noticed an increase in their time spent in downtown Springdale following recent public art installations, while the remaining eight did not notice any change.

**Table 2**

*Participant Self-Perceptions of Change in Time Spent*

| Downtown Springdale Time Spent | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Yes – More Time | 5 |
| Yes – Less Time | 0 |
| No – Unchanged Time Spent | 8 |
| Total | N=13 |

*Note:* Self-perception of whether the respondent spends more, less, or the same amount of time in downtown Springdale now versus before this public art was installed.

A Springdale resident and participant who endorsed longstanding engagement with downtown developments shared about his time spent that it was:

> "About the same before and after the art was there because **I was already engaged in downtown**…**it just adds to the experience**…I like the fact that I can go down there and have a beer, used to there was only one or two places that I could go have a drink… I can have pizza I can go hang out with friends…And I can walk there." - ID10 (51-70 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

Another participant whose time spent did not change similarly reflected on the increased quality of their downtown experiences since the installation of new public art. They said, “Only times when she need(s) something (she) come(s), (but now) **she wants to come because of those (art) things happening**” (ID 6 (51-70 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)). The attitude shared by these participants attests to public art’s ability to grab attention and promote discovery of its surroundings.

One younger adult participant already did not spend a lot of time in Springdale and, when interviewed, had not yet noticed a change in this behavior. Still, this person spoke about a change in their interest level regarding the downtown. They said, “No, I really don't hang out here unless well, **upgrading it made me want to come** and look at it” (ID11 (18-30 years old, Marshallese, $20K-50,000 annual income)).

Other participants (n=5) were motivated by the increased quality of their downtown experiences to increase their overall time spent downtown. One shared, “Before, I like to bike (in Springdale), but **now I like more** - you can see a lot of beautiful stuff” (ID 2 (31-50 years old, Hispanic, $50,001+ annual income)). Another participant contributed:

> “**The more new things that they put in downtown Springdale, the more I got attracted to it** and having to come and like spend my time there, walk around, I felt like before it was dead, because I really didn't really see anybody at all and nobody was really around and there's really nothing to go do there except for the bars and everything…ever since they had put this (art) up I felt like **I started to go downtown even more**.” - ID 5 (18-30 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

***Influence of Local Social Network on Motivation to Explore Public Spaces and Art***

In addition to discovering Springdale’s public art for the first time while downtown running errands, participants reflected on going downtown for public events. Many Marshallese participants, for instance, commented that they gravitated specifically towards Marshallese

programs held downtown. One Marshallese respondent demonstrated that a downtown event's projected attendance served as a deciding factor for whether they would attend. The participant said, "Stroll the Atolls...she **just does what the Marshallese do because she's comfortable with the Marshallese**" (ID 4 (71+ years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)). The title of the event the participant described, Stroll the Atolls, references the labeling of the islands of the Marshall Islands as atolls and perhaps affirmed for this participant the event's majority Marshallese attendance.

Some participants' existing interests in and community built around creative practices shaped their event attendance downtown. Two participants, for example, were both motivated by music-based community. The first reflected on going downtown to see what events might be occurring and said, "**Some events I would kind of wander into** so recently...arts in the Ozarks... **dances, different bands**, things like that" (ID 10 (51-70 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)). The second similarly described stumbling upon downtown programs and said, "Yes, there was **a live band that was playing**… there's a lot of people downtown so we're just like, **let's just see what's going on**" (ID 5 (18-30 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)). A Marshallese participant also spoke to what it meant for art and fashion from their culture to be displayed in the window of a downtown organization. They said:

> "Each of these are created by a grandma, she would weave them by hand …**Go to INTERFORM downtown on Emma**… decor there and our clothes on their window display you'll see right there…**very proud of it**…**Storytelling** and make sure that we embrace that and our younger generations have that." - ID 4 (71+ years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

The public art's placement amidst these familiar, positive, creative, and social experiences matters for people's comfort and likelihood to remain downtown for long enough to engage in the visual art surrounding them.

Still, the perception of public event attendance opportunities in Springdale varied across participants. Disconfirming evidence came from participants who perceived downtown Springdale as only a pass-through space. A piece of such evidence emerged from a young, white, affluent participant whose social network was not centered on Springdale. This participant said:

> "If they built...**something to congregate** a bunch of people...I think...that would be more fun to me...it's **an event**...**as opposed to something to drive by** or...just look at and then leave." - ID 9B (18-30 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

This participant preferred the idea of consuming art with intention, in a dedicated art space like a museum, among others gathered in the space for the same reason. This participant gave a local example when they said:

> "The **art museum in Bentonville**…**more of like a social thing**...good at congregating people to go there...it's like you're going there for that purpose." - ID 9B (18-30 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

This participant presents underlying assumptions about where people should commune, like cultural institutions, and should not, like the public curb. Their assumptions perhaps reflect expectations held within their personal social network, rather than universal expectations, and diminish their willingness to explore downtown, outdoor public art.

Many participants spoke instead about past experiences with and desire to experience Springdale's public art with others. Many of the participants who saw the public art in question even spoke about the public art with others. Insights into the tally of participants who discussed the public art with others are listed below in Table 3. For some participants, this meant friends and family. Family members meant relatives living nearby and around the globe. Participants who headed downtown with the explicit purpose to explore, for instance, did so with loved ones. They reflected on visits downtown with "a couple of **my friends**" (ID 5 (18-30 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)) and that "**my wife's been** down to some (events)...we

will **walk the dogs down there**" (ID 10 (51-70 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)). Regardless of peers' relative familiarity with the downtown space, having a local network with whom to share experiences seems to matter for one's own engagement with the downtown.

**Table 3**

*Participant Self-Report of Discussing Springdale Public Art*

| Springdale Public Art Discussions | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Yes | 9 |
| No | 4 |
| Total | N=13 |

*Note:* Self-report of whether the respondent has talked with anyone about downtown Springdale's public art.

Participants of mostly marginalized ethnicities saw the art, for example, as an opportunity for inspiration that ignites the drive of the next generation. These participants shared desires for future downtown experiences with their loved ones related to the public art. One participant shared, "I want to venture out...**I want to take my kids to see it**" (ID 3 (31-50 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)). Another person reflected on their friends' and family's responses to the participant sharing about the art, saying, "They said that **they want to go see that** art" (ID 3 (31-50 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)). These insights reveal the ways that caring about others and their best interests can help individuals step outside of their comfort zones. This matters as new residents arrive in Springdale and can build bridges between their existing networks and new public art and space experiences. One participant who had family in Springdale and the Marshall Islands recounted an experience of exploring Springdale with family members in person and over video. They said:

> "I've spoken to…my **family at the Marshall Islands** and tell them…I video view them on the **video and make them look**…they say wow it's really wonderful…**my family here can look** as we are living here." - ID 7 (51-70 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

Another participant described using the public art in conversation about Springdale, for business purposes, to transform colleagues and prospective partners' perceptions of the area. This mattered for the participant given their recollection of former, unwelcoming downtown programming. They said:

> "For example, there was a guy in from Little Rock. We're doing a tour of some facilities and we're looking at some different things… I said hey **let's take a detour I want to show you this**…**Of course I took him to the monarch building** but we drove by a lot of it…Because I was talking to him about downtown development. I said hey you need to see what's going on, when's the last time you were in downtown Springdale, people say it's been awhile I say take five minutes and go look, or let's go down here and have lunch, or let me show you Turnbow Park where we're gonna have this event…**they're impressed. They see something different. It's changed their perception of Springdale**…that's why **I'm glad they got rid of Feather Fest years ago**… it was **redneck palooza**. It was bad. They had to shut down the main street and basically it was a carnival... It just so reinforced the stereotype about Springdale…and the Chamber decided not to do it one year and I think that's the best decision they did…Springdale people really didn't come to it, it really drew people out of the rural areas of Springdale. You know, it's a damn carnival." - ID10 (51-70 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

Infrequently, participants who saw the public art in question spoke about the public art with strangers co-viewing the art. The participant who spoke with strangers about the art did not experience long-term friendship formation as a result but suggested a positive outcome of exposure to new, different ideas. They said they spoke about the public art with:

> "**New (people) and with friends I already have**…there's like **people who sometimes walk around downtown** people that come from Oklahoma or Texas that I've came across, walking, you know, by this art…it's so crazy because **people actually want to talk about it**, it's just like, Oh, I've never even thought of it that way, you know, and whatever…it's amazing to kind of like exchange those, those thoughts, you know, and observations that we both see you know like, oh, I never thought of it that way…It just ends at that conversation, I'm a real people person, so I love to just interact with people talk with them meet with them." - ID 5 (18-30 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

This participant reflected throughout the interview about their friends and shared downtown experiences with them. This background perhaps positively influenced their sense of command navigating Springdale's downtown public art and their conversations with strangers about it.

Although many participants spoke with others about downtown Springdale's public art, only two participants noticed a change in the number of people they engaged while downtown. These findings are featured in Table 4 below. The most recently quoted participant went on to share, when asked about their conversations with people from out of town and whether these conversations were a result of the art:

> "Usually it's just me and my friends that go downtown. Yeah, **it was like the result of the art being there**." - ID 5 (18-30 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

Another participant noticed that the art facilitated increased conversations among their existing network and said they experience more interactions "now, yeah… because **I ride (bike) with a lot of people**" (ID 2 (31-50 years old, Hispanic, $50,001+ annual income)).

**Table 4**

*Participant Self-Perceptions of Change in Downtown Interactions*

| Downtown Springdale Interactions | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Yes – More Interactions | 2 |
| Yes – Less Interactions | 0 |
| No – Unchanged Interactions | 9 |
| Total | N=11 |

*Note:* Self-report of whether the respondent interacts with more, less, or the same amount of people in downtown Springdale now versus before this public art was installed.

One participant considered their overall count of interactions unchanged but shared a positive experience of initiating conversation with someone new. This participant used the other person's building enhancements as a talking point to foster connection with someone the respondent had not previously been able to get to know. Here, the public art is evidenced as creating commonality among fellow residents who previously did not feel they had enough in

common to interact, despite the participant's declaration of the diversity of their existing network. While other participants were motivated by the wellbeing of their family network to engage in the public art, this participant seemed motivated by gaps in their current, local network. The participant said about their interactions:

> "About the same, but I'm a very social person anyway…I like people of all walks of life…My friends are all over the spectrum…I was talking to the guy who owns the building, **I know who he is but I don't know him very well. But I talked to him** and basically said, man, what you're doing…I want you guys to know that from the outside looking in, **you guys are doing a great job with this building**." - ID10 (51-70 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

Most participants desired for public art to result in some discussion. These findings are tallied in Table 5. Some participants discussed the importance of public art that adds beauty and creates conversation given its potential to generate Springdale-related attention and foot traffic in the forms of tourism, time, and money spent.

**Table 5**

*Participant Ides of What the Art Should Do*

| Springdale Public Art Function | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Cause Discussion | 8 |
| Look Pretty | 2 |
| Both | 2 |
| Other | 3 |
| Total | N=15 |

*Note:* Any ideas people have for what function Springdale's public art should play.

One participant shared a motivation for "**tourists** to come…and see what we have here…make the **economy**…bigger" (ID 7 (51-70 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)). They perhaps espoused a macro perspective on goal achievement related to their social network and the role of local public art. Another participant explained that "**People will want to come here** and see the creative work here...**more things to come** here" (ID 6 (51-70 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)). Their outlook reflects the influence of one's current

and perhaps desired social network on their motivation to promote public spaces and art that align with their ideals. The same participant shared:

> "You want people to **talk about it and put it in the media** that Arkansas has you know something different now **is really changing**." - ID 6 (51-70 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

Although such a desire could suggest surface-level impact, another participant understood the potential for sustained, positive, community impact through public art. They said:

> "Art causes…**meaningful community**. Many colors to explain one thing…means **unity for many people**…Many people came from different countries, came from different religions, different cultures and they live together. So always…maybe you can make and you can put together different people and different kinds of people." - ID15 (31-50 years old, Black (Congolese), $20K-50,000 annual income)

**Commonalities with the Public Art's Content**

Several respondents felt positively about encountering public art throughout their daily lives and routines. How participants responded to the public art included in this study was shaped by overlaps between their lived experiences and the works displayed. Respondents from diverse backgrounds experienced public art that grabbed their attention and instigated their critical thinking. Within this theme subthemes emerged related to 1) shared notions of home and inspiration and 2) shared definitions of quality and taste.

***Shared Notions of Home and Inspiration***

The murals proved more readily recallable, without prompting, among participants than the installations. This affirms that the impact of Springdale's public art is varied. Participants remarked most on artistic renderings of the familiar, like people, animals, and colors, which are accessible to the untrained eye and more readily resonate with any participants' lived experiences. One participant recalled "**murals with people** sitting down and eating" (ID 4 (71+

years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)). Another participant remembered a mural of a familiar pastime and vibrant color scheme:

> "It's like there's **a boy like fishing**, I'm guessing ... and the **colorful orange and yellow** ... Yes, that one is beautiful. I love that one just **the colors it just pops** you know … I think there's one another one I think it's like a flower one, … I think it's a woman, I'm not sure. I'm not sure if it's a woman's hair ... like towards Lisa Academy." - ID 5 (18-30 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

Among the seven works featured in the interviews, participants specifically appreciated the inclusion of people, nature, and emotive, specifically happy, works. An older adult Marshallese participant explained how similar elements and motivations to share inform Marshallese art. They said:

> "A lot of the artists are doing it **for their heritage**, like, specifically for my great uncle, he's displayed in the art **how Marshallese are**…as a community and family oriented…you'd see all the women in one spot…getting them food ready, while the men are bringing the fish out of the ocean." - ID 4 (71+ years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

Another Marshallese participant distinguished, though, a difference in style between public art in the Marshall Islands versus the Springdale public art presented in this study. Their remark reveals the potential for people to relate to public art and draw connections across public art given shared themes, even without shared style. This participant said:

> "**Public art in the Marshall Islands**...they draw… our atolls...**the story of our island**...Mostly it's school area, and hospitals, and...where the people are. And the airports...The difference is the picture...they are doing our like stories. And our ocean like that...**This is more abstract**." - ID 7 (51-70 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

One participant commented when shown a photo of a Springdale public artwork that:

> "I like it because when you see **flowers**… is like a treatment... If you are very stressed, and you are around the flowers you can be **relaxing**…when we see a **mother**, we think about who took **care for me**." - ID 14 (31-50 years old, Black (Congolese), $20K-50,000 annual income)

The public artwork was received positively by this individual because its embedded elements like flowers and womanhood matched positive symbols in the life of the participant. Although many people might harbor positive feelings about flowers and women, these sentiments are not universally true and attest to the influence of one's past experiences on their current relationship with a work of public art. One respondent felt, for instance, that the art should generate scandal because this was of interest to them personally. They said, when asked about what the public art should do, "I would say (be) **scandalous**… I don't know, that's **just how I am**" (ID 11 (18-30 years old, Marshallese, $20K-50,000 annual income)). Another participant again noted a woman and nature in a public artwork. For them, the piece they reflected on inspired energy instead of relaxation. They recalled:

> "One on the old monarch building I think is particularly cool...It's one of those latent **profile of the lady**, and it looks like, **rays are coming out** and sun...I forget the name of it...That to me is the best one...It's eye catching, three dimensional." - ID 10 (51-70 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

Similar qualities of nostalgia framed diverse people's experiences with current, Springdale-based public art and favorite, global public artworks encountered across their life course. One participant valued the blending of times past and present-age elements in a landscape. This white participant reflected on an advertisement turned public artwork in another region of Arkansas, saying:

> "In **Hot Springs**...an old ad called You Need a Biscuit...and it'd been there for years, now **I remember seeing it when I was a kid** ...and somebody restored that, and I just think that was so cool and it's just **stuck in my head forever**...I like **the old and the new**." - ID 10 (51-70 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

What locals considered familiar and relevant among the public art's elements varied across cultural groups even while the element of nostalgia remained. A Marshallese participant's

experience of and priorities for Springdale's public art were possibly influenced by their prior experience of art in Utah. This participant shared:

> "Murals... in...Utah...where the Marshallese are… **huge mural…of their lake out there**... reminded her of growing up back home...watch the sun set into the ocean. So that kind of stuff **brought memories back that stood out to her**… and **yearnings for her homeland**." - ID 4 (71+ years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

Respondents of color possibly considered that Springdale art should reflect the accumulated experiences of its residents whose stories extend beyond this region. The above participant's example of reimaging a mural as representing their ancestral country was repeated by a Congolese participant. When this respondent looked at a public artwork from Springdale, they remarked, "**He's a fish from across**…**Lake Tanganyika**… we saw fish many fish, and we…fish, so we like it" (ID 14 (31-50 years old, Black (Congolese), $20K-50,000 annual income)). These participants reflected that the whale and its colors made them feel happy and reminded them of their first home in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The same public mural that held significance for and was received positively by members of the local Congolese community was critiqued by a white resident. This participant juxtaposed the focal piece of one public artwork, a whale, against the focal material of another, wood. They said:

> "I think **woodworking is gonna go anywhere** you know. It's just kind of like a job that is required everywhere so I think that one (the art installation) **could relate to more people probably in our areas…than the whale in the ocean**." - ID 9B (18-30 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

The white participant perhaps defined Springdale art as necessarily based on local lands and their features without consideration of local, diverse people.

Further disconfirming evidence also came from young, affluent, white participants. Although these participants held some of the most negative views about the public art, they maintained that public art best serves the wealthy and tourists. These participants theorized that

pleasurable activities and lower incomes do not coexist. An example of the young, affluent participants' beliefs about the public art's suitability can be seen in the statement below:

> "I'd say **probably for tourists**. Like your first time through, you notice it and then the people who go by it every day aren't really paying attention to it much anymore. And then I would also say, probably benefits, like the **wealthy maybe more…than the lower income**…like we said earlier, it's kind of more of a pleasure thing. And whenever… **you're fighting to pay bills** and worried about you know your daily stuff, **you don't have time to go and look at the art** and enjoy that kind of stuff so yeah…I don't think it benefits the lower incomes as much as like the wealthier." - ID 9B (18-30 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

The minority of white, young adult participants (n=2) viewed the art as a waste of funds needed for more urgent situations like homelessness. One of these participants said about the public art:

> "**I don't see a lot of a use for it**, honestly...I think there's a lot of **homeless shelters and a lot of like people in need in our community that could use the money a lot more** than the art, that's just sitting there and, and is causing fixed expenses that are just ongoing. I definitely think... there's **better ways to spend** it and in the community and for people as opposed to just for people to look at. Yeah **for pleasure**." - ID 9B (18-30 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

Their negative sentiment about the works themselves included a critique of debris surrounding one of the murals. This participant stated:

> "The building looks like it's still in **pretty rough condition** like I don't know there's like rubble and stuff at the bottom **doesn't look like it's in the best part of town**, honestly." - ID 9B (18-30 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

This feedback from young, white, comparatively affluent Springdale residents who spend relatively little time downtown further emphasizes the problematic nature of non-representational input on public art. To the researcher's knowledge, this study did not include any participants currently experiencing marginalization through homelessness. Still, many of the quotes collected from participants with lower incomes and, or marginalized ethnic identities underscore the role of the public art as motivational and happiness-inducing.

Recognitions of awareness shift spanned from temporary mood changes to longer term ideological transformations. One participant's example of a temporary mood change was a statement that the public art "**brightened up my days** just driving by it" (ID11 (18-30 years old, Marshallese, $20K-50,000 annual income)). Another participant with similarly positive associations with the art remarked, "You **won't stop going around to look** it will **make you really feel good**" (ID 7 (51-70 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)). A participant who spoke to the potential for long term ideological transformation said:

> "Can think things. Those things can make people, you know, they **can inspire people and make them more excited** and, you know, **create something that didn't happen before** they can see something that is really beautiful and…people can learn and do more things like those things." - ID 6 (51-70 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

These occurrences of perspective shift suggest the potential for public art efforts in Springdale to promote the development of diverse social networks, even though this was not evidenced in the present study. Participants' storytelling during the interview process further affirms the potential for diverse social network formation around public art given its ability to spark conversation and cross-cultural exchange. A Marshallese participant, for example, recounted to the researcher the origins of a cultural day for their community. They said:

> "The king of the island was looking for a partner for his daughter. So these gods that did not want to show themselves to the people ended up getting their own god kids with the actual human king's kids. So that's, **that's the highlight of her story tonight**…**So that way our culture starts from that**. That's where the story comes from that our culture started from that which talks about our culture. Culture Day…Yes so that's where it comes from (Manit Day) and so her telling the story kind of highlights where our culture comes from. **Just like the Egyptians they talk about the god, the sun god, you know, started their lineage. So in this it talks about the culture and how it got started and spread out across the islands.** It came from that god family that the god family that god's family that hooked up with the human family…A lot of it (Manit Day tradition) is like dancing and celebrating like just getting together and honoring our special day today, like what we're doing. But on the more modern side of it." - ID 4 (71+ years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

A Congolese participant's efforts to help the researcher understand their position on Springdale's public art enabled an extended dialogue about French sayings that the participant grew up with. This participant shared:

> "As you can know every single (thing) we see here is new. **In France we say tout nouveau est beau, everything new is beautiful**." - ID 14 (31-50 years old, Black (Congolese), $20K-50,000 annual income)

The researcher also learned from this participant:

> "We don't have address in the bush. In the bush like our country…we don't live like Springdale or Fayetteville…we don't need the address because it's the same address is a 1 address only for in the bushes is like a shelter but in the city is many shelters so **we need address, we need information**." ID 14 (31-50 years old, Black (Congolese), $20K-50,000 annual income)

A white participant, because of the public art-centered interview, ended up sharing a detail about Springdale that was previously unknown to the researcher. They said:

> "Oh, **Chicken Peeling and Politicking that's another one**…That's something the chamber does about 600 people show up and they have every year and all these elected officials especially election year show up. So like all the candidates for governor…usually our senators show up. Senator Bozeman always shows up…it's just simply a welcome…they have a bar wagon there and some beer and a big boat and we have a bunch of Cajun food…**I love it because you get this one place you get Democrats, Republicans and everything in between together, and everybody's having a good time**." - ID10 (51-70 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

The ability of the public art to spur conversations about home and culture for a broad spectrum of participants suggests an important impact of the public art in fostering connections across diverse residents.

One Marshallese participant identified an opportunity for more specific cultural responses in Springdale public art. This participant acknowledged local Marshallese talent and that there were barriers to their engagement in the public art scene in Springdale. They reflected on minimal requests to the Marshallese community to be involved in the current public art projects.

> "There **needs to be Marshallese artists**, there's a lot of them… in our culture like our people are very shy people…they're so used to their comfort zone that they have limitations…that's what stops them from…thinking outside of the box that their artwork can be done and be put up there too…**if you were to ask them. I think they would say yes**…the great thing about our people is they're very humble about, you know, about their work, about having not to be too prideful about what they give or you know what they want to do…they'd like to keep it in secret, but still keep their artwork out put their artwork out there." - ID 5 (18-30 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

This insight speaks to the potential for public art making itself to increase cultural exchange as people from different backgrounds relate to work by artists of varying identities. One participant shared about their desire for Springdale public art and discussed what the inclusion of art from specific cultural groups would mean for the public art landscape of Springdale:

> "Definitely (want to) see **more of it but she wants to see it of our people, Marshallese arts downtown**…And we can even bring like **our decoration** they're not just for wearing but we would put them on our walls and display our talents." - ID 4 (71+ years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

Another participant identified the chance for artists from different cultures to react to each other's worlds through their own public art. In this way, fellow resident artists are prompted toward higher-level cultural information synthesis and empathetic listening as they react to art from around the world and community, and community members react to their art. They said:

> "I like them (non-Marshallese artists) and I like the Marshall Islands too...I know **when they learn from our history, they can create their own ideas**, how to draw." - ID 7 (51-70 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

Community members' possible reactions to public artworks and engagement with co-viewers were modeled by a participant who shared their approach to fostering conversation in front of the public artworks in Springdale. They said:

> "Well, the first question that I ask is What do you see in this, like what kind of message do you get from this, this artist, you know, is the first question that I ask them…I just bring up a conversation like what do you guys think about this…**there's different observations from everybody** when they see a painting or a sculpture or an art, you know." - ID 5 (18-30 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

### *Shared Definitions of Quality and Taste*

Among the seven works featured in these interviews, participants also specifically appreciated what they perceived as skillful works based on their own familiarity with the materials and themes used. A participant who reflected negatively on most of the public artwork showcased in the study had a distinct, positive impression of a wood-based artwork installed in a window display downtown. The participant, who endorsed minimal engagement with what they considered the world of art, held a comparative breadth of experience with woodworking. For this individual appreciation of the time spent and skillset required to achieve the work enabled their positive sentiment about the public artwork overall. They said:

> "I think I like them because we actually run like a little side business or we used to where… **we did woodworking**… they (the art installation) look like they're made out of wood which is interesting to me. **I know…the craftsmanship and the work that goes into something like that**, yeah, it just looks like it would be very challenging so I kind of like that about it." - ID 9B (18-30 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

Another participant similarly made a connection between Springdale's current public art and the art of their Marshallese community members based on a shared perception of talent. This sense of overlapping quality and taste perhaps enabled the participant to appreciate and want more public art in Springdale, while also advocating for specific insertions of public art from their culture. The participant said, "We should **bring our talented**. We have **great artists that can do the same thing** that we can display downtown" (ID 4 (71+ years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)). Another participant affirmed this opinion, saying, "In Springdale (there are)… hidden (Marshallese) talent, I'm like **they could do something like this**" (ID 5 (18-30 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)). One participant acknowledged the positive impact of exposure to public art by local artists in general and awareness of the talent that exists in one's

neighborhood. This observation speaks to the participant's existing skill to recognize talent and the impact of that skill on their perception of enhancements to the downtown. They said:

> "**We got so many talented people** that, you know, now they've had a chance to display the work, **now you're aware of these artists that you weren't aware of**…the way they use the space and **the way they use the buildings to bring out things**…that's talent." - ID10 (51-70 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

Another participant reflected on what being involved in local artmaking, through sewing workshops, meant for their ability to appreciate the broader scope of local art.

> "It was **very important and very interesting for us to learn about art and that make us to like art** very, very much. Yeah, we like art, because we understand what art is very important for… I can say that **before teaching other people. I was a student. And I am still student** because what I learn from the nature and from the art I teach also some of the same is like transmitters in direct mode, direct transmission of information about art from one to another." - ID14 (31-50 years old, Black (Congolese), $20K-50,000 annual income)

Negative sentiment about the works focused on designs that were perceived as chaotic or haphazard and perhaps reflected the participants' lack of familiarity with the artistic approach or how to engage the work. This disadvantage was not positively related with participants' identities and their relative marginalization. A young Marshallese participant in the lowest income bracket of the study masterfully explained their reckoning with one of the window installations of public artwork downtown. They explained:

> "Yes, actually, this one (public artwork)…the first thing that I saw was a man and a woman…It's what caught my attention, you know, I saw a big picture with this and I saw the…deeper meaning behind it, too…**I'm gonna stop here real quick because I feel like this is really deep right there**… I felt like this is how a man's brain works…And then on this side, the women's brain I felt like there's so much… more in the women's brain that's going on than there is in the man's like it's just all free and like, you know, like just simple but when a woman's brain I felt like there was so many things that were going on in her brain like there's like the maze and everything like that, you know, so, yeah." - ID 5 (18-30 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

A young, white participant in the highest income bracket of the study instead shared about a public artwork:

> "There's just **too much going on** for me to figure out what, what it is, **takes too long for me to figure it out**." - ID 9A (18-30 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

Participants were divided on whether viewing downtown Springdale's public art prompted a shift in their awareness or perspectives, and these findings are listed in Table 6. The young Marshallese participant from above who used critical thinking to engage with the public art remarked regarding any perspective shift, "**Not really**, because my brain works, as if like okay, **what's the message** that's always the first question in an artwork" (ID 5 (18-30 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)). This existing skill maintained by the participant enabled their rich interaction with public artwork downtown. The respondent who found one work too chaotic to distill its meaning still endorsed looking at the downtown differently following this interview experience. They said, "I'll probably be **a little bit more observant now. But no**, it didn't really change anything" (ID 9A (18-30 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)).

**Table 6**

*Participant Self-Report of Awareness and/or Perspective Shift*

| Art-Instigated Awareness/Perspective Shift | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Yes | 8 |
| No | 6 |
| Total | N=14 |

*Note:* Self-report of whether, since viewing any of the featured Springdale public art, the respondent's awareness or perspectives about anything changed.

This suggests possible disconnect regarding the definition and, or scope of possible awareness and perspective shift. It also speaks to the differing possibility of public art impact based on existing art and place preferences and engagement skills. One participant's personal taste dictated their advice that:

> "You **don't want it** (public art) **to be everywhere or it loses its specialness**... In some **appropriate places** it would be really good...and then **things you can change and move**

> to me those are the best things" - ID 10 (51-70 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

Their distinction of suitable places for public art is subjective and possibly derived from personal experience although framed as a universal truth without much qualification.

**Perceptions of Self**

How participants responded to the public art included in this study was shaped finally by participants perceptions of self. Within this theme subthemes emerged related to 1) who constitutes everyone and 2) perceived qualification for public art decision-making.

***Who Constitutes Everyone?***

The participants perceived that the public art projects presented were welcoming to everyone. Findings related to perceptions of who the art is for are included below in Table 7.

**Table 7**

*Participant Ideas of Who the Art is For*

| Springdale Public Art Audience | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Everyone | 10 |
| Residents | 2 |
| Tourists | 2 |
| Caucasian People | 1 |
| Total | N=15 |

*Note:* Any ideas people have regarding who Springdale's public artworks were created for.

Within the designation of everyone qualifiers emerged organically. One qualification pertained to sight-related ability as a participant said, "Every art is made **for everybody who can see it**" (ID 14 (31-50 years old, Black (Congolese), $20K-50,000 annual income)). Another distinction was made based on one's capability and predisposition to engage in art education, adding, "I think it is for…**everybody who can like to learn** about any art" (ID 12 (18-30 years old, Black (Congolese), $0-20,000 annual income)). These parameters help view another participant's feedback in a new light. This participant said, "Well, everything is good. **When I**

**saw everything is new in downtown is good. Good for me, good for people too**" (ID 8 (51-70 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)). The findings illuminate that when we celebrate public art for everyone, we risk overlooking universal accessibility considerations that will shape the public art's individual impact.

One participant, a white, older adult, in the highest of the three income brackets, warned about the possibility of politically-charged public art. This respondent preferred that public art not convey any individual's potentially polarizing opinions or unshared experiences. They said:

> "I think the art in Springdale is for everybody…And I think it's a good thing **as long as it doesn't get political**, you know that's where I've got a big problem with some public art…It's like when you look at a piece. And you think gee that's beautiful, but then you see **something's inserted into it, it really makes you mad**, it's like that didn't need to really …be there…I'm a devout Methodist, I go to church…if someone has snuck in some overtly religious overtones that's okay in a church…it's okay on a building owned by a church…but if it's a public building and is public art… if you're going to represent one religion in it, you need to **represent all of them or none of them**." - ID 10 (51-70 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

The same participant suggested a universal barometer for what constitutes appropriate public art when they said:

> "Public art should be…meaningful. It should be reflective of, you know, what the artist wants to put there but it ought to complement what's around it. So, you know, **it's got to maintain some good taste** and, and it should, should create some kind of emotion." - ID 10 (51-70 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

The above comments suggest the broader societal tendency to normalize and compare against white, upper-class ideals. They also reflect the dangers of basing public art suitability on intangible standards.

Another participant actually perceived that most public artworks included in this study catered to white members of the community and said, "This one (public artwork) speaks (to) Hispanic people and **the rest are Caucasian**" (ID 4 (71+ years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)). This observation perhaps helped the same participant recognize there was room

for additional forms of representation in Springdale's public art. Their quotes exemplifying this stance are found throughout this study. Another already quoted participant distinguished that the public art "probably benefits, like the **wealthy maybe more…than the lower income**" (ID 9B (18-30 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)). This quote is reintroduced here in an abbreviated form to demonstrate its contrasting qualities with the previous one. Both quotes associate current public art in Springdale with privileged identities based on race or income. The first quote is congruent with the participant's overall perceptions and desire for future downtown Springdale public art. The second quote contradicts that participant's overall experience of Springdale. Although the participant is in the highest income bracket of the study and resides in Springdale, they want less public art in the downtown area. The comment reflects the participant's possible disassociation of self from Springdale's population at-large and leads the participant to dangerously presume a bird's-eye view of life for Springdale residents of all financial circumstances.

***Perceived Qualification for Public Art Decision-Making***

Seven of the 16 responses voiced preference for a combined approach to public art decision-making with collaboration across government, residents, and artists. These findings are listed below in Table 8.

**Table 8**

*Participant Ideas of Who Should Decide*

| Springdale Public Art Decisions | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Combination | 7 |
| Resident/Community | 3 |
| City of Springdale | 3 |
| Artists | 2 |
| Don't Know | 1 |
| Total | N=16 |

*Note:* Any ideas people have for who should make decisions about Springdale public art.

Based on some of the responses, ideas about public art decision-making in Springdale perpetuated existing decision-making standards of the U.S. that stem from capitalist and democratic ideals. Although interview participants face the same legal and political systems in the U.S., individual circumstances vary and resulted in each person navigating these systems differently in their response. Responses suggested whether individual participants perceived they were qualified to make public art decisions or needed someone else to make those decisions for them. A Marshallese respondent, for instance, suggested that the Marshallese consulate general act as their advocate and representative for public art interests when they said:

> "Ourselves for the Marshallese community should **go to the Marshallese consulate general's office and have them work with the city** to integrate our different arts with the city of Springdale." - ID 4 (71+ years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

Another participant who promoted a joint effort still underscored the need for contribution from people with intel into best practices around public art placement. They said:

> "The **leaders or communities** or, you know, **those artists** they know where they can... the **people who can see where we can put things** like...for example, when this building is built. So, we need someone to organize inside so they can see where to put this thing." - ID 7 (51-70 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

Even though a younger Marshallese participant had questions about the art that has been excluded from public display by decision-makers, this participant did not directly advocate for their own insertion into public art decision-making. They spoke vaguely of a community role and shared:

> "**The community**...I honestly don't know who is the one that's like you know having to make those decisions...I mean they're making great decisions I'm not saying they're bad, I'm just saying like **what other artworks are there that, you know, haven't been displayed**...I honestly don't know." - ID 5 (18-30 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)

White, comparatively affluent respondents conversely emphasized the roles of voting, property owners, and whoever pays for a project in its decision-making. One participant

identified that public art decision-making should be reserved for "**Residents**... **a voting issue** maybe" (ID 9b (18-30 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)). This participant readily offered their opinion and stated:

> "I do think that if we have art, **it should be purposeful**, I think it should be like **commemorative or thought provoking**… **some kind of memorial** and something like that." - ID 9B (18-30 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

This recommendation for intentional public art was defined in context by the participant as art that exists to meet an objective, like honoring something from the past. This definition of intentional public art did not seem to value emotion-evocation or network-building. It also did not account for the thought provocation that other participants experienced amidst the current public art. One such example stated, "She say any art…is **for people to see and to have inspiration**…and **to learn** how to do it" (ID 13 (31-50 years old, Black (Congolese), $0-20,000 annual income)). This discord calls attention to the risks of some feeling enabled to speak up, and consequently speaking up, while others do not.

Another participant who spoke of financial clout assigned decision-making to:

> "**The property owner**...then **who's paying for it**...if the public's involved in it, then I think you probably need to have **members of the public that would sign up for a committee**... it's being paid for by private money...meet **standards of good taste in the community**...**if tax dollars are paying for it, different thing.** If it's… **private money through a foundation**... **they should be considerate of that**...have a **good cross section of people**...**the same people shouldn't stay on that committee**. Or else…come start reflecting is totally their values... **rotate people on and off in waves**...That way there's some continuity." - ID 10 (51-70 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

This framework extends power based on money and eligibility for property ownership while minimizing quality of life considerations and say for public arts' majority viewership. This participant demonstrated disqualification from decision-making with the comment:

> "One lady called the mural on the monarch building wokeism art…and I thought, You know…I thought to myself, you know, you're just not too happy about much of anything,

> are you, **that's not your building**… you know, **you didn't pay for it, so**." - ID 10 (51-70 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

When asked for general comments and offered an opportunity to share about local needs, several Hispanic and Marshallese participants instead shared positive sentiments about the public art efforts by community decision makers and artists. One participant remarked, "All I say is **I like it** and they (should) **keep doing it**" (ID 2 (31-50 years old, Hispanic, $50,001+ annual income)). Another said, "I want to see more… **More of this** (public art)" (ID 3 (31-50 years old, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)). This instigated a feeling of hopefulness for the enduring, positive impact of public art in downtown Springdale. Still, it necessitates further reflection on who feels they must only be appreciative for any public investments versus who feels entitled to give more pointed feedback that shapes the future of Springdale. Although one participant spoke at earlier points in their interview about cultural exchange across artists, when asked explicitly for feedback for the town the participant simply shared, "For the artists, keep on. Keep on the good… **Keep up the good work**" (ID 7 (51-70, Marshallese, $0-20,000 annual income)).

The variation across perceived qualification for public art input instigates a desire to affirm for all residents that their voice in public spaces and public art matters. A white respondent over 51 years old, in the study's highest income bracket, who lived and owned businesses in and around Springdale for several decades, was the only participant to mention the downtown's newsletter and regularly read it to discover downtown programs and developments. This participant also followed announcements from the Walton family's organizations and participated in government leadership programs. They shared:

> "I'm very aware of what goes on downtown... I'm heavily involved in planning and infrastructure…I was in a Springfield Chamber of Commerce leadership group for a year…that really opened my eyes to the way a lot of things are done… I still read a

> newspaper…I try to get information from different sources and you know **I subscribe to the downtown Springdale newsletter**… **if people will just read those things** you can see what's going on every week in Springdale…Or if the Walton's make an announcement or someone makes an announcement. **Usually, there's a link in those things you can go check it out** …downtown revitalization has always been something near and dear to my heart, I own two properties in downtown Springdale…so I have a vested interest in the downtown doing well…because when it does well I do well… **I worked here since 1998**…when I had a choice to live in Springdale, I chose to live in the downtown area. - ID10 (51-70 years old, White, $50,001+ annual income)

The comment suggested the participant's relative privilege accessing local power and information compared to other respondents with different histories in Springdale. Other respondents may be engaged in different formal and informal information hubs that may not be equally regarded or leveraged by public officials at present although they should be.

## Discussion

Among the participants of this study, the findings suggest that Springdale's public art enhances the downtown as a standalone experience. The responses conveyed variation across the impact of each public artwork by design, implementation, and viewer ideology. Potential for more specific, cultural responses through public art and what this would mean for the art's impact were discussed in multiple interviews. A final theme related to Springdale's public art impact addressed its means of perpetuating U.S. decision-making standards based in capitalistic and democratic frameworks. The public art did not increase many participants' time spent downtown or the diversity of their social networks. For some respondents it increased their frequency of discussing the downtown. Almost half of the participants affirmed that the public art in Springdale prompted changes in their awareness and perspectives. This suggests the possibility that continued public art investment could facilitate passive outcomes, like positive emotions, and diverse network-building goals if the art and surrounding decision-making processes are inclusive.

These findings add to existing literature on public art and placemaking while addressing identified gaps. The discussion is organized around public art decision-making and impact, each of which relate to the research questions explored with Springdale-area residents. The theory of constructed emotions by Barrett (2017) offers additional perspective to these findings. It suggests that the brain assigns emotions to experiences based on subconsciously recalled encounters with similar, past circumstances and their results.

**Public Art Decision-Making**

The literature found, and this study affirmed, the value of thoughtfulness about the public art showcased, its cohabitation with the existing landscape, and how awareness can intentionally spread. Thomas et al. (2015) remarked about pro-social intentions for hybrid spaces in Memphis' Crosstown Arts endeavor, for example, as well as the detriment of dismissive, assumptive media. The present study affirmed that many participating Springdale residents gravitate toward programs that share something in common with their identity, like Marshallese events downtown. This asserts the need for intentional public art that presents all cultures as equally valuable and important. The insights shared also suggest the possible benefit of inserting elements of specific cultural significance to different groups into the downtown Springdale arts scene to increase engagement. Respondents shared about favorite works across their lives that carry sentimental associations with family and home. The theory of constructed emotions (Barrett, 2017) supports the idea that art that recalls positive memories will evoke positive emotions as one feels a physical sensation of butterflies, for example, inside. Fredrickson's (2001) Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions supports the idea that the positive emotions instigated by the public art may position people for greater network-related and general well-being related outcomes, and this could prove a useful topic for future quantitative research.

The counterevidence of this study is likewise explainable by Barrett's (2017) theory of constructed emotions. Two of the Springdale resident participants spoke against the potential of public art to bring people together. Like the reporters discussed by Thomas et al. (2015), these residents feel that the public art is a frivolous expense. Their feedback makes more sense through the lens of constructed emotions, which accounts for their prior encounters with the area. When prompted to reflect on individual public art elements, these respondents instead remarked about the local infrastructure quality itself, like buildings that seemed unfinished, and their concerns about the neighborhood. Chebat and Morrin (2007) found that even colors utilized can alter ideas of quality associated with a space. Just as they saw distinctions between French- and Anglo-Canadian color scheme preferences, many marginalized ethnicity Springdale respondents saw value in the local arts' vibrant colors and recognizable features while white respondents more readily labeled the same works as chaotic.

The participants who hold negative opinions about downtown Springdale's public art had not seen any of the art prior to our discussion. This raises questions about the findings of Hausmann and Poellmann (2013), who emphasized social media's ability to drive awareness. Further assessment of Downtown Springdale Alliance's online presence is necessary to discern how well the organization aligns to Hausmann and Poellmann's identified best practices. Still, something can be said about who this content may be reaching. The only research participant who mentioned subscribing to downtown newsletters was an older adult, white person with an annual income above $50,000, who lives and owns businesses in downtown Springdale. This respondent mentioned walking downtown with their dogs often. While the newsletters could frame their experience, they did not necessarily generate their Springdale public art exposure. The two younger adult, white respondents who never saw the art remarked about spending most

of their time with friends in Bentonville and Fayetteville and did not suggest any awareness of Downtown Springdale Alliance's presence online. Finally, the many respondents who did stumble upon the public art did not know much or any context about the arts' makers or how the works came to be, despite this information living on the Downtown Springdale Alliance (n.d.) interactive map. Ongoing assessment of the public art endeavors downtown, as suggested by Thomas et al. (2015), seems prudent, as well as more social media outreach (Hausmann & Poellmann, 2013). Still, the exposure and awareness insights generated by this research affirm possible disparity regarding who would join the evaluation process and how. This point is furthered by respondents' own perceptions of who should decide local public art installations and locations. The respondents inadvertently align with established, unequal U.S. experiences of democracy and capitalism. They reference the Marshallese consulate general, resident voting, city leaders, property owners, artists, and whoever finances the art as potential stakeholders. When decision-making involvement is opt-in, ensuring all community members know about the work, their means to further connect, and their explicit invitation to do so, prove essential although perhaps not yet fully realized.

The findings suggest the value of familiar elements within public art. The theory of constructed emotions by Barrett (2017) poses alternative explanations of this phenomena. For participants who speak English as a second language, an interview-style conversation may generate physical sensations associated with nervousness. These participants may subconsciously recall feeling better physically and, as a result, more confident, when the people they speak with understand right away. To increase the odds of the same happening in this interview, participants may opt for more familiar public art elements to review like bright colors, animals, and people rather than any abstract ideas evoked. The favorite mural among the participants is markedly

futuristic and offers credence to this alternative interpretation of what matters versus what can be pronounced about the art.

**Public Art's Public Impact**

Zebracki's (2013) participants shared more positive sentiment regarding traditional versus modern art, while Springdale's public art is mostly modern rather than literal. Barrett's (2017) theory of constructed emotions suggests that any recognizable elements can resurface associated feelings and memories for onlookers. One participant in the present study remarked about an antique advertisement with such an impact for them. Another participant felt moved by the non-literal whale mural that reminded them of a big lake in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Rather than traditional or modern public art be better positioned to generate engagement, the city might consider whether proposed public art features relatable elements. Identifiable elements in art may also instigate negative memories to be wary of. One respondent shared context of Springdale's less progressive past that could prove detrimental to materialize in the art without appropriate framing.

Zebracki (2013) found that established public spaces aid people's memory-making and positivity related to those places' public art. Conversely, Kim et al. (2018) saw the positive impact achieved by public art that instigates discovery of, and sense of ownership related to, unchartered or changing places. Many respondents to the current study interfaced with downtown Springdale art inadvertently along their route to, or as the backdrop of, their church, work, and community programs. If the art occurred in more stressful contexts, it might not inspire the same associations as currently. The two white participants who never saw the art may harbor more negative feelings about it because of their more negative ideas of the town. Their

connection with a woodworking sculpture, because of their own experience with the craft, led to further dialogue about Springdale and affirmed Kim et al.'s research.

Tanguy and Kumar (2019) found that daily proximity to the art and parental status drive motivation for public art investment, and this aligns with the experiences of Springdale residents. The present study reveals that participants want local public art to share with their children. The respondent who lived downtown specifically wanted rotating installations that maintain intrigue, an idea also supported by Tanguy and Kumar. Tanguy and Kumar added further insights about people's overall pursuit of art as shaping their public art desire. Eight participants in this study were recruited at arts-informed programs, which may suggest their existing arts interests. An alternative explanation for the positive impact conveyed may be participants' bias towards the organizations behind the arts and culture-informed programs in Springdale. Participants maybe assumed that surveying at these programs was in some way affiliated with the host organizations. The theory of constructed emotions (Barrett, 2017) suggests that cultural groups' utilization of the downtown area perhaps contributes to their positive sentiment about the town and its other initiatives, like public art.

## Strengths and Limitations

### Strengths

The data for this study was captured through audio recording with automatic and later proofread transcription rather than solely note-taking, which enabled the incorporation of direct quotation to increase accuracy when depicting participant sentiment. The sample was collected on-site, in the community, at programs attended by distinctive groups within the overall demographic makeup of Springdale. The findings have been deliberated by peer review with members of the University of Arkansas' School of Social Work to lessen the effect of personal biases held by the researcher.

### Limitations

The data was collected by use of several direct questions about the impact of the public art on the individual. This poses limitations related to the difficulty to articulate intangible impact and the potential for respondents to want to impress or appeal to the surveyor. The small sample size collected by convenience further diminishes the applicability of the findings to the broader community. The sample's over indexing on Marshallese and Congolese participants versus any other ethnicity represented in Springdale has the same impact. The findings offer depth, but given their qualitative nature, are not readily comparable with each other or summarized.

## Implications

### Direct Practice Implications

The findings reiterate the importance of exploring the systems within which people operate beyond their family unit and friendship circle. This enables the social worker to identify protective and risk factors in how people they work with experience the institutions and landscapes of their communities. The site of direct practice may contribute to a person's perceptions of the care that will be provided and its goodness of fit with their lives even before entering an actual session. Social workers should consider the visual cues of a facility and surrounding community and what impact these will have on the population they want to work with. Social workers should then find ways to counter any negative influences within their own space and work.

### Policy Practice Implications

This study suggests an advocacy need for expansive eligibility to create public art and removal of irrelevant qualifications for the sake of art that explicitly engages multiple cultures.

An additional opportunity stems from the revelations within this research about who makes decisions for and funds investments in the downtown. This advocacy opportunity means sharing with community members the roles of corporations that are minimized in the public eye but identifiable within lengthy reports.

### Future Research Implications

This research asserts the value of public art to induce pride in where one works and lives as well as inspiration. It suggests the need for quantification of this impact that helps convey to naysayers why public art matters amidst complex social and welfare-related problems. Future research may consider how public inclusion in public art decision-making can amplify the voices of residents who experience marginalization in American democratic and capitalistic systems. This may generate ideas for other means by which all people can contribute to shaping their circumstances. Future quantitative research should also test the influence of involvement in public events in Springdale and exposure to, desire for, and self-perceived purpose of public art on residents' assessments of the public art's impact. The public spaces and public art of Northwest Arkansas are not static but instead constantly changing. The Walton Family Foundation's announcement of increased focus on public space equity and accessibility marks a recent example of sustained, evolving attention to local development (Bergstrom, 2021). Future research should continue to explore how specific initiatives mold definitions of, attention extended to, and the impact of public art.

## Conclusion

Downtown Springdale and its community organizations continued to evolve and take steps to engage residents in the months following data collection for this research. Their methods and outcomes continue to raise questions about whose inputs are missing. The first social media

post about updates to the 2015 Downtown Springdale (2022c) Master Plan appeared on January 13 of 2022. It welcomed community members to submit input via brief English, Spanish, and Marshallese electronic-only surveys. The Instagram post tagged only the Arkansas Coalition of Marshallese, the Springdale Planning Department, and CACHE, and the equivalent Facebook post did not tag any fellow organizations (Downtown Springdale, 2022d). Another post (Downtown Springdale, 2022a) later on celebrated 1,000 survey completions.

Low interactions with the social media posts themselves and a lack of survey advertisement by diverse downtown Springdale organizations prompt questions about the demographic scope of awareness regarding the Downtown Springdale (2022a, 2022c, 2022d) master plan. Community conversations about the plan occurred at the end of March 2022 (Downtown Springdale, 2022b). Although the Downtown Springdale (n.d.) master plan website was translated into each of the three dominant languages in Springdale, it is not clear whether these meetings included interpretation or any variety of accessibility options. Wording on the contemporary website, from the 2015 master plan by H3 Studio (2015), sets a vision for Springdale's cleanliness and curb appeal. This resembles troubling signage at the Jones Center that underscored the expectation of civil behavior and suggested racial undertones (Arredondo & Bustamante 2020). Downtown Springdale, on the cusp of unprecedented growth and opportunity, must ensure the voices in planning conversations represent a breadth of local perspectives to avoid inflicting marginalization-related harm.

The experiences of research participants from INTERFORM's local sewing workshops speak to the meaningfulness of engaging residents of all lived experiences in creative practice in Northwest Arkansas (NWA). INTERFORM's 2022 NWA Fashion Week set important precedents for equity, inclusion, and partnership by featuring gender diverse models sporting

looks from The Transition Closet in the neighboring city of Fayetteville (Bond, 2022). This research will be shared with the diverse Springdale organization leaders who were engaged at the start of the study, each of whom will help determine means of further distributing the research to diverse community members.

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**Figure 1**

*Map of Northwest Arkansas by Y Illustrations (n.d.) for Finding NWA*

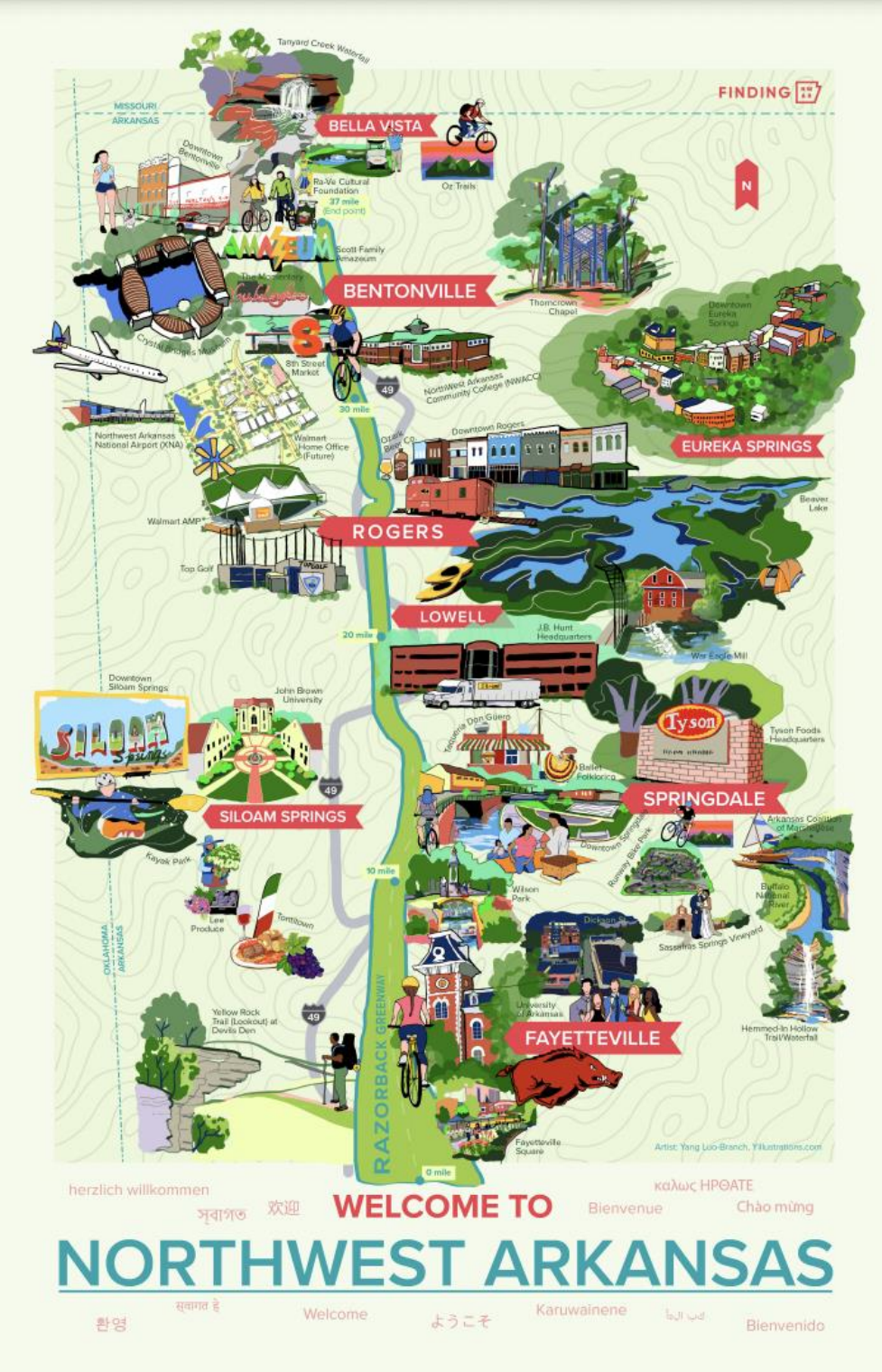
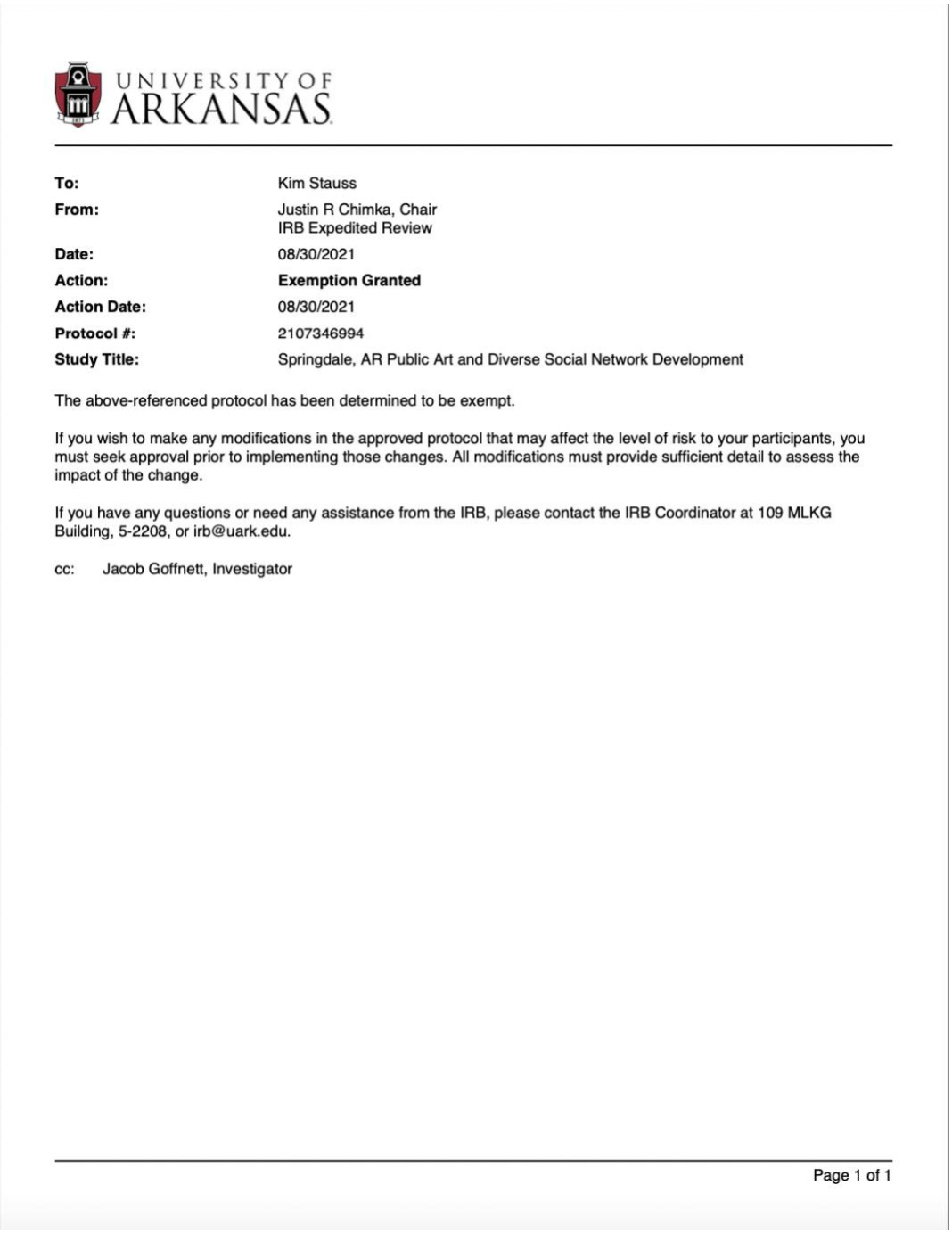


**Figure 2**

*IRB Approval Letter*



UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

| | |
|---|---|
| **To:** | Kim Stauss |
| **From:** | Justin R Chimka, Chair<br>IRB Expedited Review |
| **Date:** | 08/30/2021 |
| **Action:** | **Exemption Granted** |
| **Action Date:** | 08/30/2021 |
| **Protocol #:** | 2107346994 |
| **Study Title:** | Springdale, AR Public Art and Diverse Social Network Development |

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

cc: Jacob Goffnett, Investigator

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**Figure 3**

*Interview Guide*

**Questions for Interviews**

*The goal of this project is to explore 1) What do Springdale residents participating in this research project perceive as the current impact of downtown Springdale's public art? 2) Is the current public art in downtown Springdale contributing to the development of diverse social networks for Springdale residents participating in this research project?*

*The interview will take about 10 to 15 minutes. I also would like to audio record the interview if you are comfortable. Your name will not be connected to any of the data collected. Your participation is completely voluntary.*

Survey to be administered verbally, 1-on-1, and offered in English, Spanish, and Marshallese.

1. Are you over 18?
    - Yes
    - No

   Age range
    - 18-30
    - 31-50
    - 51-70
    - 71+
2. Race / ethnicity (select all that apply)
    - Black
    - Hispanic
    - Marshallese
    - White
    - Other _____
3. Income range
    - $0 – 20,000
    - $20,001 – 50,000
    - $50,001+
    - Additional context, if any: _____
4. Have you seen any public art in Springdale near Emma Avenue, for example, murals or sculptures?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I'm not sure
    - Additional context, if any: _____
5. Have you participated in any public events in Springdale in the last 6 months, like any events, festivals, or live music at Turnbow Park?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I'm not sure
    - N/A- I do not live in Springdale

- Additional context, if any: _____

6. Do you live in Springdale?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Additional context, if any: _____
7. Do you work in Springdale?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Additional context, if any: _____

(photos to be numbered and printed on laminated sheets) (Show printouts at this point)

8. What is the purpose of this kind of art? Please explain.

9. Who is this kind of art for? Please explain.

10. Have you seen this art? If so, which ones? What do you think of them? Please explain.

11. Of the art you have seen, how did you first discover it? For example, word of mouth, on your way to run an errand, etc. Please explain.

12. Have you talked with anyone about this art? Please explain.

13. Do you spend more or less time in downtown Springdale now than you did before the this art installed? Please explain.

14. Do you interact with more or less people in downtown Springdale now than you did before this art was installed? Please explain.

15. Since viewing any of this art, did your awareness or perspectives about anything change? Please explain.

16. Is this art part of your everyday life and routine? Please explain.

17. Would you like to see more or less public art in your everyday life and routine? Please explain.

18. If you have seen other murals or public art, what was your favorite work and why?

19. Should public art cause discussion or look pretty? Please explain.

20. Who do you think should decide which public art objects to put on display in Springdale and where to put them? Please explain.

21. Do you have any other comments or ideas to share? These could be about your neighborhood or what you think is needed. Please explain.

(Questions adapted and added to from the Public Utteraton project by Rebecca Hackemann.)

**Figure 4**

*Interviewing at Arkansas Latinas en Bici Shiloh Square Ride September 15, 2021, Photos by Author*

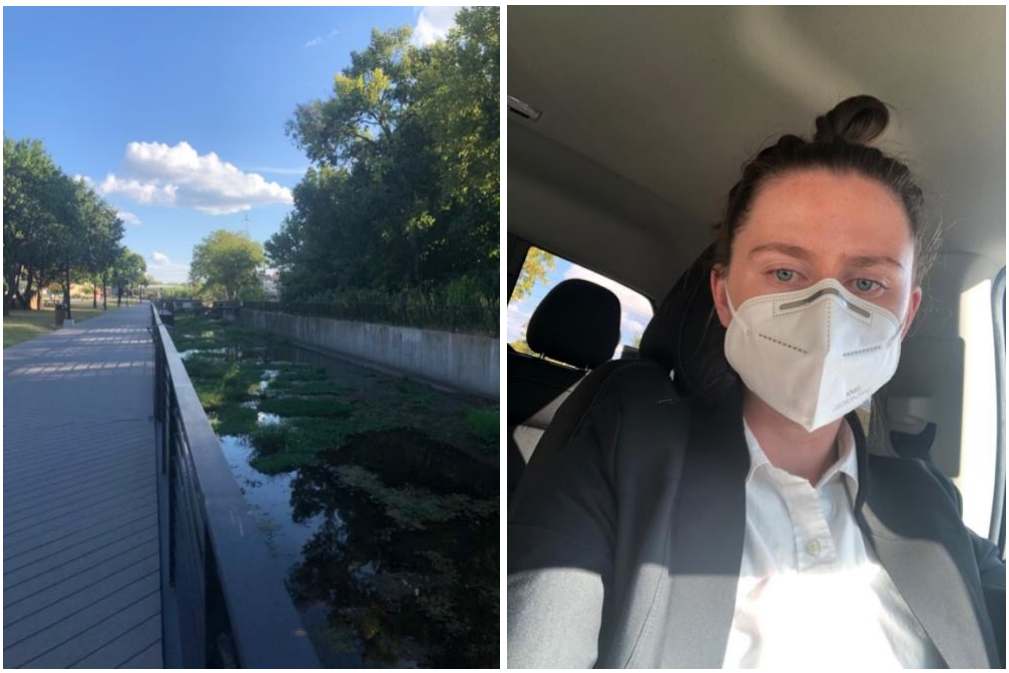

**Figure 5**

*Interviewing at Arkansas Coalition of Marshallese Manit Day Party September 25, 2021, Photos by Author*


**Figure 6**

*Interviewing at INTERFORM Marshallese and Congolese Sewing Workshops September 28, 2021 and October 9, 2021, Photos by Author*

**Figure 7**

*Interviewing at Springdale Rotary Pig Trail Mud Run October 2, 2021, Photos by Author*



**Figure 8**

*Interviewing at Teen Action Support Center Block Party October 8, 2021, Photos by Author*

## Figure 9

*Auto-Ethnography*

I am a white, 26 year old woman. I grew up outside of New York City. For my high school after-prom, I organized a late night tour of street art across the five boroughs. As a toddler, my mom brought me to art museums. We bought visitor's guide books and she would read to me about the pieces. I resisted and did not like the feeling of more school, but the influence seeped in nonetheless.

As a high school student in Queens, New York, I remember the word gentrification. Although not explicitly linked, I saw connections between underfunded cities and high price public art. I made an implicit association between contemporary art, abstract art, and whiteness. My logic, maybe, was that thinking about qualities of life from a perspective other than the literal is an act of privilege, for those who have the time.

In college I treated the art world as a backdrop for my life story. I placed myself in historic hotel lobbies, Gold Coast mansions, and museum common areas to write, study, and consume inspiration from the others who lingered. The art, for me, was part of my aesthetic, but I did not learn about it, per se, or think about it directly, more so as a prop.

I lived in Chicago for work for six months and a neighbor took me on a gallery walk. It was a freezing day in January, so the walk became a private tour. With no intent to buy, gallery workers invested more time than was warranted teaching us about the artists. Suddenly these works and their systems felt like they mattered more.

I like art that makes me think. I like when the artist speaks in symbolism and prompts the viewer to explore both the artist's and the viewer's own soul. If I see a piece and cannot access more information about it, I am frustrated. I now interview artists and art world decision-makers to fill that gap, many of whom create in Northwest Arkansas.

As a social worker, cultural humility makes me aware of infringing on the spaces of others. To decide that what's currently there is not beautiful does not feel like an outsider's decision to make. I entered this project with the skeptical assumption that Springdale's decision makers do not look or live like the majority of Springdale residents. I assumed that the public art installed by Springdale's decision makers to attract people to the downtown would make the locals feel less welcome, especially local people with lower incomes and local people of color. I personally enjoy the Downtown Springdale public art, but I felt wary that my privilege and exposure shaped this liking. As an outsider to Springdale, I felt myself drawn toward Springdale because of the art, and questioned what my increasing presence in the community would mean for others. The potential disconnects prompted my research to learn more.