Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness. -Desmond Tutu

Art Therapy and Eating disorders: Drawing Out Hope

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Disclaimer

The following information is about art therapy, and ways to utilize art making and creativity. Art therapy is a separate degree requiring special training and a separate license. Art can open up issues and concerns that need to be handled safely. Non art therapist should always be careful when using art and be aware of the powerful implications that art can have in or on a person’s life. If you ever get stuck with a client when using art it is useful to consult with an art therapist. For more information about becoming an art therapist contact the American Art Therapy Association.
What is Art Therapy?

“Art can be said to be and used as the externalized map of our interior self”- Peter London

Art Therapy is a rich and diverse field of psychology/art that can be used with a wide range of people in a variety range of settings.

Art Therapy in and of itself is not a separate theoretical orientation. However, it does have many of its roots in psychodynamic theory, but has been adapted using many theoretical orientations.

That the creative process is inherently healing and therapeutic (this is often referred to as art as therapy)

Art as a symbolic means of communication- i.e. the art is way to convey feelings and conflicts and issues (this is often referred to as art psychotherapy)

Most art therapy uses a combination of these approaches and looks at the art as both process and product oriented.
Meaning Making

Meaning making and the art: While there appear to be trends in the meaning making of art (i.e. birds or trees hold certain significance) it is always important to ask the person making the art about its meaning. Art is always situated in a person’s culture and understanding of their world. There are no rules that hold true for all individuals.
A few more cool things about art therapy

1) Allows people to express things in a way that words cannot.

2) Accesses different parts of the brain than verbal communication.

3) Acts as a witness to the therapeutic process.

4) Offers a way for people to separate from the problem as well as visually identify the problem.

5) Allows people to practice communication in a new way.
Media: More than Crayons!

- Art therapy can be done using a variety of media - paint, clay, found objects, collage, fabric, drawing.

- Just remember there is no limit to what can be made into art... so think outside the crayon!

- Always consider your intention and then consider the media. (see handout)

- Different Media can have different psychological effects.
So how does this relate to the Treatment of Eating Disorders?

We are now going to look at various stages of treatment and ways to integrate the art.
Pre-contemplation

Contemplation

Preparation

Action

Maintenance

Seeing

Looking Forward

Making and building

Witness and transitional objects
Can Art Therapy be used as an assessment tool?

Answer: It depends

For me- art can be an informative part of a larger psychological and medical evaluation- particular as it relates to issues of self-concept and body image.

For me most important and for you as a non-art therapy clinicians I think the question most related to assessment is how does the art show us what our clients’ SEE.

One of the best assessments is draw a picture of yourself and your eating disorder. This process is twofold- 1. you can get a clearer picture of what the client sees and 2. the client can begin to contemplate that they are not just their eating disorder.

This type of assessment- can then help you assess your own assumptions about their perceptions and what next steps to take.
Preparation: A time of Looking Forward

Now is the time where goal setting occurs. What are you hoping for? What might be scary about this?

So this may be a time for using art to help clients say what do I want my life to look like?

Great time for vision boards. (good to use collage materials or quotes)

If my ED were not in my life what might that look like?

Since this is a time of excitement and trepidation: might be good to make images of those two forces.

Also look at what challenges might sneak up- you could also make a road map of treatment, Great tool to educate clients and can become a touchstone when doubt creeps up.
Action: a time of making

- During this phase clients are digging deep, feeling excited, afraid, angry, proud... a SWIRL OF emotions.

- This is a good time to explore and define emotions. I often have clients list 6 most prevalent emotions and then draw an image for each.
More Art In Action

- During this time art can become a tool of witness- for client to really start seeing themselves.
- Also good to start to image new ways of relating to eating disorder.
- Ideas: Collage of Strengths, inside out feelings box, body image drawings/sculptures etc.
- For clients that may feel unsure of unsafe- have them draw in circles (Mandalas) or other limited media. On days of more pushing think if paint, pastels, or other loose media.
How does the facilitator handle a situation in which Patients feel traumatized by Art?

- Answer: Prevention and Containment

- Step 1. recognized that art is powerful!

- Step 2. Plan ahead, be intentional- ask yourself what does my client need today?

- Step 3. always give your client permission to say no. If any time this become to much we can stop. Talk about the Process first.- and indentify any triggers.

- Step 4. containment: for safety have clients draw a boarder or create the image in a circle.

- Step 5. What to do. Is the image too intense. Can you fold it up? Could you put it in a physical container. Can you follow up with a safe space image. What is the post session plan of recovery.
Closure and Maintenance: Transitions and Reflections

Now is the time where they may be preparing to leave treatment. So all about the continuity of care.

This a time when you want look at art a the witness to all the work the client has done.

You may also think this could be the time where client and clinician make art together. As a way of remembering the relationship.

Also a good time for clients to make transitional objects: good time for jewelry making, small sculpture, or even small picture.

You may also want to circle back to make a visual road map and or other pieces of art for client to share with new or old therapist –post treatment.
Pause for Experience...
Questions & Answers

References supporting the information in this presentation are available upon request:

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Supply List

- Good paper: I like mixed media or Bristol Paper.
- Scissors in a safe place.
- Mod Podge, Regular Glue, Glue Guns, glue Sticks.
- Magazines –pre-cut.
- Paint: water color, tempera, acrylic (plus some good brushes).
- Pastels (oil and Chalk) I love portfolios.
- Markers (fat and skinny) and Colored pencils and plain.
- Plus look for found objects or up-cycling esp. with old clothes.

Please feel free to contact Megan with resource or reference requests at meganmcswain@gmail.com.
Other Good Directives

- Always a good idea to consult with an art therapist as art left un-processed by the client can have negative outcomes.

- Self-portrait- as a way to assess client’s self concept.

- Draw a picture of yourself and your eating disorder to understand how a client relates to their ED.

- Create images of the weapons or tricks your eating disorder likes to use.

- Create a new home for your eating disorder- using a box creates a new place to keep the eating disorder.

- Inside out box or mask- draw the feelings you keep on the outside and the feelings you keep on the inside.

- Drawing or painting to your favorite song: Self soothing.

- Shied: Ask the client to create a shield and then draw symbols of their strengths.

- Create collage images of likes and dislikes.

- Create an empowerment collage- to help client be reminded of their strengths outside of therapy.

- Draw or create a map of your support network.

- Committee Cards: ask your client to create symbols of people, places, ideas, etc. that give them support. Then have them create a deck of cards (any size) with these symbols on the front. Then on the back have them write down: I am the one who____________ and I help you by_________________.

- Have client learn to understand their emotions by visually expressing them or using a body diagram to express where in their body they feel these emotions.

- *My best art ideas come from asking myself- what are my client’s goals and how might I use art to explore this issue.

- * Remember by getting the client out of their typical thought patterns and actions they can begin to uncover and explore new ways to live their life without E.D.
Other AT/ED resources


- Lisa D Hinz: Drawing from Within

- Laura Rappaport Focusing- Oriented Art Therapy: Accessing the body’s wisdom and creative intelligence

- Mury Rabin: Art Therapy and Eating Disorders

- Pat Allen: Art As a Way of Knowing, and Art As a Spiritual Pathway

- Kathy Malchiodi: The Art Therapy Source Book
Continuing Education Certificate

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