

The Art of the True Self:

Using Art Therapy as a Means of Self-Discovery

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Acknowledgements

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Abstract

Participation in the act of creating art opens one up to a realm of possibilities for the betterment of the individual. The field of art therapy was established on this idea, the idea that the creative process has the potential to help people. The ways in which art therapy helps people is numerous—self-expression, help overcoming difficult situations, exploration and discovery of potential—are only a few examples. Of the many ways art therapy may help people, one all-encompassing idea is art therapy helps a person understand who they are, by exploring their life's journey and seeking truths. Art therapy helps a person establish and understand who they are as an individual in a world full of individuals. Through the use of art therapy, a person uses art as a tool to process their past, present, and future and embrace the journey life has taken them on to become who they are today. Art therapy allows for exploration of the self and for the discovery of the individual—of being true to oneself. I have embarked on this journey of self-discovery over the course of the last two years. I have come to a deep understanding of who I am as an individual through art therapy and now I am using art therapy to aid others in their own process of self-discovery and self-truth.

The Art of the True Self:

Using Art Therapy as a Means of Self-Discovery

Art has existed nearly as long as humankind has existed, thousands and thousands of years. Art is a part of the human experience, a part of who we are as a species. The act of creating art and participating in self-expression are important in separating human beings from all other forms of life. The ability to express oneself through art is unique to humankind. Art serves as a way for humans to move past simply existing in the world but rather explore what it means to ‘exist’. Art allows humans self-expression in an effort to understand and analyze the world around us. Often times art is created for more than the sake of creating something but for a need from deep inside a person to create, to express. Inspiration is the empowering drive to create that speaks from our souls, the voice that tells us to let go, to be free, and to express. The creation process evokes from deep within us emotions that are strong, emotions that speak to us—needing to be released and expressed onto a surface. Engaging in creative acts may often feel therapeutic for the person engaging in such acts—feelings of release, healing, satisfaction, inspiration, and motivation—among many more may be some of the feelings associated with participating in the creative process. Such feelings ultimately led to a connection between art and therapy, eventually leading to the emergence of the field of art therapy.

Art Therapy

Art therapy is a branch of mental health in which art and the creative process are recognized as a method of healing, as a means to bring about the improvement and betterment of one’s physical, mental, and emotional well-being in all people—all ages, all demographics, all levels of functioning. “Art brings people together. It inspires hope and creates a bridge of understanding between individuals regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or age,” (Burick &

McKelvey, 2004), wrote Carrie R. Burick and Jane B. Mckelvey in their article “Watercolors, pastels, paintbrushes are therapeutic tools: art therapy aids patient expression, Burick, MA, AT, is an Adult Therapeutic Services Coordinator at the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center and McKelvey, MA, AT, is an Art Therapist at The Beachwood Counseling Center in Beachwood, Ohio. Art therapy involves participation in the creative process and artistic self-expression allowing people to explore and understand elements of their lives—to help resolve conflicts and problems, to develop self-esteem and confidence by examining and improving interpersonal skills, to access one’s behavior and how to improve behaviors, to allow the reduction of stress and worry, and to achieve insight by exploring all aspects of one’s life.

Many art therapists have their own definition of art therapy, which leads to confusion while defining the term. While there is not a universal definition of art therapy, there are two components which every art therapy definition and every art therapy session should include: art and therapy. Although art and therapy consist of the main threads interwoven into every art therapy session, there are other threads which revolve around art and therapy to make a web of a complete art therapy session.

One such thread is the participant does not need to be an artist to benefit from art therapy. Art therapy sessions are less about the finished product but rather more about the involvement in the creative process—the release of emotions, thoughts, and feelings which may surface and the explorations, revelations, and discoveries that may come from an art therapy session. Furthermore, a participant in an art therapy session should never be judged on their artistic ability. Burick and McKelvey also state in their article that, “The safe and structured environment of art therapy can lessen confusion about one’s identity. In the practice of art therapy, clients are reminded that they are safe and free to be themselves without judgment or

criticism,” (Burick & McKelvey, 2004). Judgment and criticism should never be a part of an art therapy session. Art therapists should be free from judgment of their client’s lives—their experiences and backgrounds—and their artwork, as well as anything expressed in an art therapy session. Art therapists should emphasize to their clients that whatever thoughts and images surface during an art therapy session were thoughts that were meant to be there. Furthermore, art therapists should discuss the concepts that there are no forbidden images, there are no rules when it comes to art and self-expression, and there are no wrong answers. Theresa Van Lith—assistant professor of Art Therapy at Florida State University, Patricia Fenner, PHD, MA—Senior Lecturer and Course Coordinator Master of Art Therapy at La Trobe University in Australia, and Margot Schofield—Head of Counseling and Psychological Health at La Trobe University in Australia, state in their paper:

The lived experience of art making as a companion to the mental health recovery process, the importance of environment to an art therapy setting, “a safe and supportive environment which allows consumers to express and explore personal issues. Such art-based programs are understood to achieve their positive effects by promoting internal shifts through developing hope, healing, empowerment, self-esteem, and connection (Van Lith, Fenner, Schofield, 2010).

An art therapy session should be a safe environment in which the client feels comfortable to share with the art therapist and perhaps group—whatever is said should not leave the room.

Another thread making up an art therapy session is an art therapy session is not like an art class in the sense that one does not learn art skills in an art therapy session. An art therapist may instruct a person on how to use a certain material if they are unfamiliar with how to go about using something.

No artistic ability is required. Art therapy combines art activities with verbal exploration of the art product to facilitate understanding of the client's and concerns. It has the powerful advantage over verbal and written communication of visibly *showing* us how we are thinking and feeling, allowing us to acknowledge and understand what may be hidden to us and to others (Hughes, 2009).

Edward G. Hughes made the above statement in his article "Art Therapy as a Healing Tool for Sub-fertile Women". Hughes is a faculty member of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. The main focus of an art therapy session is for the client to engage by exploring the available materials in a therapeutic way while gaining insight into themselves and their situations.

Another thread woven into a successful art therapy session is art therapy is for anyone and everyone. Art therapy is not strictly for people with 'big issues', but rather anyone who wants to participate in the creative process. A person may engage in art therapy for one or more reasons—to reduce stress, to help with problems, to enrich one's life, to gain insight, etc. Anita Holford, writer and communications practitioner, states in her article "Creative opportunities for patients' wellbeing: Anita Holford describes how voluntary arts groups are an important resource for helping patients to manage long-term illnesses and improve self-esteem", that "People come from a range of very different background and have different reasons for joining. Some understand that it may help with their health issues. Others join for general wellbeing – to do something in a group and perhaps help with isolation or depression," (Holford, 2011). Art therapy is not defined by who is participating or where the art therapy is occurring but rather why the art therapy session is occurring. One main reason people participate in art therapy is to learn and share things about oneself. An art therapist is not there to tell a client how to live their

life or what to do; an art therapist's job is to show a client how to discover one's path in life and how to use creativity and imagination along their path. Art therapy is not about examining the art and diagnosing someone based on the images that surface. An art therapist may make observations about a client and their art but that is all—merely observations not statements of fact. Art therapy is less about clinical diagnoses and more about bringing art into one's life and providing a creative outlet. Art therapy allows the participant to explore their potential.

Healing and Life-affirmation through Creativity

Art therapy regards the creative process as healing and life affirming—that one can learn and grow by participating in a creative release of self-expression. The act of creativity requires varying degrees of freedom. The engagement in such acts of freedom may be hard for some people to commit to and express. However at core of the word 'create' lies the notion of bringing a being or form from nothing into existence. Therefore, with this understanding of what it means to create, anyone can be creative.

Healing through creativity. Art frees the body's ability to heal by uniting the mind, body, and spirit to change a person's attitude, emotional state, and/or perception of pain. Art invites people on a journey deep inside themselves, into their inner worlds—worlds where imagery, visions, emotions, and feelings exist. In these inner most worlds of one's self is where healing comes from. Through my experiences, I have established a definition of healing as the action of repairing and restoring a person back to the state of wholeness. To heal is to embark on an internal process of restoring balance and harmony in a person's mind, body, and spirit. Art therapy provides “women with a powerful avenue for expression, while increasing awareness in themselves, care-givers and peers, of the grief that they carry. In visualizing this grief, women

are empowered and encouraged to leave it behind,” (Hughes, 2010). To embark on such a journey takes time, patience, energy, and willpower.

According to Lissa Rankin, MD, physician, author, and founder of Dr. Lissa Rankin’s Whole Health Medicine Institute, there are many steps in the healing process. The first step is to believe that healing is possible. One important aspect of this first step is to believe in one’s ability to heal one’s self. Once a person accepts healing is necessary and begins the journey to healing with the belief that self-healing is possible, then self-healing can be possible. The importance here is to believe (Rankin, 2013).

Another step in the healing process is to listen to one’s body and mind, and then observe. In this step, one should focus on what one’s mind and body is trying to say—“Nobody knows your body better than you,” (Rankin, 2013). One should observe one’s pains and pay attention to what one’s body is trying to communicate. Understand the body and mind’s ability to speak—to let people know when something is not right, and then listen. Listen to what is wrong and then take action. Figure out what inside one needs healing and why this healing is necessary (Rankin, 2013).

Next think about what inside is asking to be healed—where is the pain or discomfort coming from? Once this question has been answered, the next question to ask in the journey of healing is what does the body need to heal? Answer this question with methods in which one can do that are self-guided, empowering oneself to make one’s own decisions when concerning the healing process. Although this step may be hard, this step forces a person to be honest with themselves and to take the steps towards healing, showing courage to venture outside comfort zones to restore one’s body, mind, and spirit (Rankin, 2013).

One of the final steps to remember when following the road towards healing is that a positive attitude can go a long way. Positive thought can be a huge motivator and inspiration. Positive thought can allow a person to achieve goals one never thought possible. Another key to remember here is that the journey towards healing may be long and take dedication. Each person's journey towards healing may be different because we are all individuals. If one tries one's best to follow these steps in the process towards healing—one has does everything within one's power to self-heal. There is something empowering about self-healing, about taking one's true healing into one's own hands, rather than waiting for time to heal one's self. Through embarking on this journey of self-healing, one is able to create opportunities to allow healing to occur and then to allow processing of the healing steps—making a person stronger (Rankin, 2013).

The ability to self-heal is empowering. Some people may find activities that aid in the healing process. One such activity may be art. Healing through art may prove to a person that life can be better than before. In his professional experience as a Professor of Creativity Studies at the University of Georgia, Athens, as well as Founder and Editor of the *Creativity Research Journal*, past president of the American Psychological Association's Division 10, and author, Mark A. Runco found that "Artistic creativity involved emotions, imagination, and expressiveness, (Runco, 2004). Using art to heal is using art materials to let go and be free, to dare to explore what existence means and the wide range of emotions a person may feel. Art helps a person arrive at an understanding of pain and to learn from the pain on how to be whole again while allowing the pain to remain a part of who one is but not allowing one's pain to define who one is.

Life-affirmation through creativity. The creative process not only helps a person heal but also helps a person with life-affirmation. Life-affirmation is the state of having and demonstrating a positive outlook which encourages optimism in one's life. Life-affirmation means remembering life is good and will work itself out. The promotion and the celebration of life rather than the destruction of life are also aspects of life-affirmation. Life-affirmation promotes leading a healthy and prosperous life, as well as a person remembering that being alive is a gift. There is not room for negativity about bad elements in one's life in regards to life-affirmation; however a person may acknowledge the fact that there will be challenges and hard times in their life. Ultimately the fact one is alive is more powerful than these acknowledgments.

I believe art aids in creating hope and positivity by helping people cope with difficulties and obstacles in one's life, transforming a person's outlook on the world. Life-affirmation is achieved through art therapy by providing a social connection, allowing the experience of control over the social connection, and the opportunity to express and manage one's emotions. "Art making programs [...] help to develop artistic abilities, expression and belief in oneself, and foster a sense of purpose and meaning in consumer's lives," (Van Lith et al., 2010). Art offers hope by facilitating nonverbal communication and the opportunity to create meaning through life examination and review. Art therapy allows individuals to examine and understand their past and life's journey and then to ultimately embrace these elements of the self. Art therapy aids in helping individuals look forward to the future and reaching their full potential—even helping individuals understand what their full potential may consist of.

My Journey to Art Therapy

Creativity has always been a part of my life from the very beginning in one way or another. When I was very little, my mom introduced collages to my sister and I. Making collages

was one thing I soon became absorbed with. The ability to chose any images or words my heart desired, images and words that spoke to me and then piece all these images and words together creating a surface that gravitated me towards it was magical for me. I became enchanted by the worlds I could create.

As I continued to grow and go to school, visual art continued to be a part of my life. As I got older and learned to read and write more successfully, I turned to my creative attention towards writing—specifically stories and poetry. I loved learning and something about turning my creative energy towards words signified intelligence for me and a challenge. Soon, my creative outlets shifted from visual arts to the written words and literature. I loved reading, which was probably a motivator for my creative focus to shift.

In high school, I took an art class because the class qualified for a requirement for graduation. In this art class, I tried my best—like in all my schooling. I received several awards in this art class and had my work displayed in showcases, of which only few students received this honor. I was informed that I would be honored with an award at a school wide celebration of the arts night. I was embarrassed to receive an art reward. I was an athlete, I was the youngest one on the varsity volleyball team, I had all sorts of volleyball accomplishments that I was proud to be recognized for, but to be recognized for an art award? My parents allowed me to make the decision if I would attend the celebration of the arts night or not, my parents said they would be there to support me as I received the award; however I chose not to attend. I was a dedicated student but I was dedicated to the classes everyone participated in, and most specifically, English. I loved to read and write—this was where my creative focus stayed throughout my high school career. I took Honors English courses and I became a member of the school news paper. I enjoyed writing and I considered it a passion.

When I graduated high school, I went to college for something I enjoyed doing—English, but art also remained a part of me as I pursued an Art minor. Many people question English degrees, but I knew that an undergraduate degree would not be sufficient for me. I knew I would go onto graduate school but for what I was unsure.

I loved each and every English course I took as an undergraduate. I loved reading the literature selected by the professors, most of which I would not have chosen myself. I enjoyed the abstract thought and requirements of interpretation asked for by the author—delving into their creative minds to the magical worlds they created with words. One required course in the English degree requirements was Shakespeare. I had heard many English students refer to their Shakespeare courses with contempt. However, I needed to take the course, so I did. I absolutely loved each play of Shakespeare I read. Up until this Shakespeare course, I had only read *Romeo and Juliet* in high school—at that time I was unimpressed. Now as a college student, I fell in love with the great playwright. I admired his ability to create with words and the ease in which he did so. Shakespeare became my favorite author.

I graduated with honors in three and a half years. I was a graduate with an English degree and an art minor. Often times I would get questions about my choice of study but I owned those questions. By pursuing an English degree, I had done something not many people chose to do—I had chosen to follow my passion.

That last semester of my undergraduate degree, before graduation, I made a realization. I realized that no matter where my life took me and what job I was to hold in the future, this job had to be something that allowed me to be creative each and every day—I wanted to be surrounded by creativity. Whether the creativity was coming from me or I was surrounded by

creative individuals helping them to express themselves, I knew a job centered in creativity was what my soul desired.

I began to look into graduate school and came across the field of Art Therapy. I was instantly intrigued by the area of study. I researched and discovered art therapy was for me, I needed to be accepted into an art therapy program. Art therapy combined two of my passions—creativity and helping people. I applied and was accepted into an art therapy graduate program. I began to learn more about art therapy and exactly what art therapy was. My classes and internships confirmed what I was doing, everything made sense, and my soul was happy. I was in art therapy classes, surrounded by creative people and being inspired. I was learning and feeding my mind with knowledge.

In my third of four semesters as an art therapy graduate student, I enrolled in a prep-work research course for my graduate paper. I researched potential sources and topics for this paper. I settled on an idea but the problem was, I settled. I had a paper topic but I was not passionate about what I was trying to say with art therapy. Then this past summer, I came across a Shakespeare quote from his most famous play, *Hamlet*. In *Hamlet*, Polonius speaks to his son Laertes, telling him, “This above all, --to thine own self be true” (*Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3, p. 1076). Instantly, I knew that I had discovered my paper topic. The light bulb in my head went off (really the first time I had ever had such an experience) and I was excited. I was excited about my paper topic and the quote.

“To thine own self be true” (*Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3, p. 1076) **In Context of the Play, *Hamlet***

The most famous play written by William Shakespeare is *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. *Hamlet* is one of Shakespeare’s greatest tragedies, where a young man—Hamlet—is coping with

the death of his father the king, seeking vengeance, and finding the real murderer. Hamlet examines the nature of the self and the complex relationship between the self and moral action.

In act 1, scene 3, Polonius—chief counsellor to the king—is speaking with his son Laertes. Polonius is giving Laertes advice about life in general and his son’s upcoming move to Paris. Polonius is advising his son on how to behave with integrity and practicality. In the context of the play, Polonius is trying to help his son be ready for his new life in Paris. Polonius in this speech is advising his son not to borrow money, not to loan money to others, not to show attention to women with bad intentions and unreliable characters, and not to engage in any other pursuits that are ‘false’ to Laertes’s self. Polonius’s use of the word false is different from today’s meaning of the word—here Polonius means false as being detrimental to one’s image. Polonius advises his son to be ‘true’, meaning to be loyal to your own interests. The ways in which the words false and true are used in this play are different than their common meanings today.

Among the advice is this line in which Polonius tells Laertes, “This above all, --to thine own self be true” (*Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3, p. 1076). Many people understand the general meaning behind Polonius’s words, simply to be yourself. However in the original context and meaning of the play *Hamlet*, Polonius by telling his son “to thine own self be true” (*Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3, p. 1076), is telling Laertes more than to just be true to himself. This seemingly simple message of “to thine own self be true” (*Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3, p. 1076) holds more meaning. Through the delivery of these words, Polonius speaks a much deeper message to the audience.

One such deeper meaning to these simple words is the message of being honest—and not being “false to any man” (*Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3, p. 1076). Polonius advises on the importance of truth telling and honesty. By being true to one’s self, one will not be false to anyone else. By

embracing truth one can also embrace self-ownership and individuality, important characteristics in leading a successful life. The life message here is by being true to one's self and not like anyone else will allow a person to live life to the fullest versus pursuing acts for the sole reason of emulating someone else rather than happiness.

Another deeper meaning to these words of Polonius is the idea of taking care of one's self first so one can in turn take care of others. This advice is still important today. First one must fill one's own bucket in order to properly help other's fill their buckets. Often times the feeling of being burned out and exhausted is common for those who live their life helping others, thus the idea of filling one's own bucket first is essential. Filling one's own bucket helps one to avoid the feelings of being burnt out, thus allowing one to truly help others to the best of their abilities.

A last important message Polonius speaks to Laertes is to stick to one's own principles and not to assimilate. Polonius speaks of doing what one believes because nothing is more important than one's own esteem, one's own opinions of the self. Polonius encourages the idea of listening to the opinions of others, "Take each man's censure but reserve thy judgment," (*Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3, p. 1076), but then making up one's own mind, decisions, and judgments.

Through Polonius, Shakespeare delivers his own ideals of life rules. Much of the advice on life rules that Shakespeare delivers discreetly through his characters in *Hamlet* and all his other plays are life rules that still hold value in today's world and society. Shakespeare had great ideas on the meaning of life, which he relayed in his profound works of literature.

Art Therapy in Relation to "To thine own self be true" (*Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3, p. 1076)

The messages Shakespeare spoke through Polonius in the advice to Laertes is relatable to art therapy. Both art therapy and the quote have several themes in common. First, art therapy is used to help individuals get to know and understand themselves better through deep self-

exploration. Art therapy allows individuals to get in touch with their true selves—who they really are, by examining their self on several different levels. This is relatable in the play as Polonius advises his son to be true to himself, to discover himself first and his own interests before doing anything else on his arrival into Paris.

Another commonality between art therapy and the quote is the importance of honesty and truth. In art therapy, the therapeutic relationship is established on truth and honesty. If an art therapy relationship is not established on such values of truth and honesty, the possibilities of what may be achieved through art therapy suffer as the relationship is in itself false. Polonius speaks to Laertes about the importance of being truthful and honest. Polonius advises that by being true to one's self, one will not be false to anyone else. Furthermore, both art therapy and the quote accept the idea that by being truthful, one may then embrace self-ownership and individuality—both of which are considered good qualities in leading a successful life in art therapy and the play. A key message true to both art therapy and the Shakespearian quote is being truthful to one's self will allow a person to live life to the fullest rather than trying to be someone one is not and pursuing acts for the sole reason of emulating another individual rather than one's own needs and desires.

Both art therapy and the words from Polonius value the idea of self-care. Self-care is when a person actively takes care of themselves and provides for their needs before helping and caring for other people.

Being involved in creative activity can have a powerful effect on people's physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. For people affected by long term conditions, creative activities could form just as important a part of self-management as exercise or other pursuits. [...] Perhaps most importantly for health practitioners, creative activities -

particularly groups activities – can contribute to personalized care and self-management (Holford, 2011).

The idea of taking care of one's self first is important. For example, in airplanes, passengers are told to first put on their own oxygen mask before putting on those of their children or other people. The airlines say this because if a person put on their child's mask first but then passed out before they were able to put on their own, now the person is of no help to their children. This is the same central idea for people in art therapy—first take care of themselves and the problems they are facing in their life so then one can better take care of the important individuals in their lives. Polonius was speaking the same message—self-care is important.

A last commonality between art therapy and the messages of Polonius is the importance of individuality. Art therapy values the individual—the importance of the role of the individual in the path towards healing. Art therapy is based on the initiation of the individual for the need of healing in their lives and then allowing the individuals to help guide and design their path to healing and recovery. Polonius touches on the importance of the individual by advising Laertes to stick to his own principles and not to assimilate right away into Parisian society. He encourages Laertes to listen to what others have to say, but for Laertes to make his own decisions and judgments. Polonius speaks to the importance of one's own beliefs and following these beliefs in one's actions. Furthermore, Polonius speaks to the importance of having self-esteem. Art therapy also values making one's own judgments and the importance of self-integrity—having one's own belief system and ideals, and lastly, the importance of self-esteem for an individual.

After examining and interpreting the meaning behind Polonius's message to his son and then comparing his ideas with those of art therapy, it is evident that art therapy has many of the

same values Polonius spoke to in the play *Hamlet*. Above all, Polonius and art therapy hold in high regard the idea of “to thine own self be true” (*Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3, p. 1076).

Art Therapy and the Explanation of Components of the True Self

As explained that with art therapy comes many variations of definitions, each as unique as the individual art therapist the definition belongs to, so are the many variations of what may be achieved with art therapy. Through my two year journey as a graduate student in art therapy, I have established my own beliefs of the results of participating in art therapy. The all-encompassing personal achievement I believe is attained through participation in art therapy sessions is art therapy allows one to establish a deep understanding of one’s self, one’s true identity, “to thine own self be true” (*Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3, p. 1076).

This belief I hold poses the question—what is meant by one’s true identity? I mean being true to one’s self, to who you are. Of course the meaning is not that simple, the meaning is actually quite deep, with several different components. The components I consider to be at the core of being true to oneself are: self-integrity, honesty, individuality, and autonomy. Each of these components can be broken down themselves to better understand the idea of being true to one’s self.

Self-integrity may take a while for a person to grasp and embrace the essence of the word. To have self-integrity one must possess being honest and having a strong sense of moral principles.

Honesty is another important quality to consider when examining how to be true to one’s self. To be honest, one must be sincere and truthful without any forms of deceit or trickery. Honesty is achieved when a person says what they genuinely feel or believe while not allowing deceitful or hypocritical statements to come forth.

Individuality is accepting and embracing the unique aspects about one's self and owning these aspects. Individuality is about understanding each person is different and using this individual differences to enrich the lives of others.

Autonomy means one must be independent—a key component to being true to one's self. To be considered independent a person does not rely on others for support or care and is able to provide for themselves. Being independent also means a person is not influenced by the pressures of others around them—being able to think for themselves and make their own actions based on their own decisions.

Each of these components—self-integrity, honesty, individuality, and autonomy—come together as important elements when creating and defining a person's true self. Each component plays an important role in the discovery and examination of one's true self. With the use of art therapy, and these components—self-integrity, honesty, individuality, and autonomy—a person is able to understand the definition of one's true self and discover their own true self. After this discovery of one's true self through art therapy, the possibilities for growth and self-learning are endless.

Emergence of the True Self through Art Therapy

Art therapy has potential to be a valuable practice in many different settings—from hospitals to schools, from nursing homes to recovery centers—and for many different reasons—for recovery, reduction of stress, addition of a hobby, etc. Art therapy allows an alternative form of self-expression besides the common verbal form of self-expression, allowing the participant to express themselves visually through artistic means. “Line and color provide a surprisingly safe and effective alternative to words, which may dry up in the face of deep pain and grief. [...] The creation and use of visual art provides a valuable healing tool for women,” (Hughes, 2010).

Often times, words are not enough to articulate certain situations, feelings, and emotions. In times like these, articulation of situations, feelings, and emotions may be better achieved through artistic means.

It is difficult for some individuals [...] to verbally express issues such as stress, anxiety, fear, relief, and hope. Art therapy bridges the gap between thought and feeling. It brings the two together in a nonthreatening way for the client to show individual experiences without primarily using verbal expression (Burick & McKelvey, 2004).

For example, perhaps one cannot find words to describe feelings associated with a specific moment in their lives, here artistic expression may be helpful in expressing feelings using colors associated with feelings or line movement and mark-making associated with a feeling. Often times red is associated with feelings like anger, while sharp quick movements of mark-making across a surface can detail anger and stress. There are many ways in which artistic self-expression may be easier than verbal self-expression, varying from individual to individual.

The idea of artistic self-expression may be daunting to some as many people have not participated in any form of artistic-self expression since their schooling. Art therapy can work around this as the art therapist shapes art therapy sessions around the clients participating in the session and their particular needs from each session. Art therapy can be a very specific and individualized practice. Art therapists understand an individual's needs for each session and cater to these needs by planning specific art therapy directives to meet these needs, changing sessions to address new needs that may come up in the course of the art therapy sessions.

Art therapy may be used to achieve many different outcomes. Sally Makin—of Old Age Psychiatry, Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust, at the Manchester Royal Infirmary in Manchester, United Kingdom and Linda Gask—Primary Care Psychiatry, Health Services

Research Group, Manchester Academic Health Sciences Centre, University of Manchester in Manchester, United Kingdom discovered the importance of art in their article “‘Getting back to normal’: the added value of an art-based programme in promoting ‘recovery’ from common but chronic mental health problems”.

The role of arts in enhancing self-esteem has been recognized in many areas of mental healthcare by creating something individuals can boost their own self-esteem, which may in turn help to improve their mood. Additionally, being able to express one’s state of feeling in paintings may not only be calming and relaxing but also help an individual to understand themselves and their state of mind (Makin & Gask, 2012).

Over the course of my schooling as a graduate student in art therapy, I have discovered what I believe is a very important outcome to participating in art therapy sessions—that through participation a person is able to become better connected with who they are, ultimately leading a person to the discovery of their true self. This discovery of one’s true self is not a discovery that may be done overnight but rather the discovery of one’s true self is uncovered through multiple art therapy sessions and self-reflection over time. The achievement of revealing and understanding one’s true self can be accomplished through art therapy but first a person must grasp what the term ‘one’s true self’ means. I define one’s true self as gaining valuable self-insight in four aspects of a person, these four aspects I have touched on briefly include: self-integrity, honesty, individuality, and autonomy.

Self-Integrity

Self-integrity is the establishment of one’s own beliefs and values which may be done over the lifetime of an individual. A person who has self-integrity has an adherence to their own moral principles, remaining unimpaired by the opinions of others. Furthermore, self-integrity

requires that an individual follows what they believe over what people may pressure one to believe. In order to have self-integrity, one must be uncompromising on one's values, principles, and beliefs—following one's own heart even when something may seem illogical. Self-integrity more often than not effects an individual's behavior and choices. A person with a sense of self-integrity stands for what they believe, they are confident in who they are as an individual, willing to make tough or unpopular decisions, has courage to follow their beliefs, and does what they say they are going to do.

A person with self-integrity is a whole person, one with a complete sense of self. Such a person may live in a principled way based on their true self. As a person ages, their value system may change, evolve, and grow over time based on a person's life and world experiences.

Self-integrity is important in regards to art therapy for all these reasons. An individual with a sense of self-integrity will likely be a more clear minded and realistic individual, able to make better decisions and accept their role in their own healing process. Art therapy may have “many benefits, including stress reduction, validation of feelings, fostering self-awareness, improving self-esteem encouraging problem-solving and decision making,” (Hughes, 2010). While a person's self-integrity is something that is developed over time with experiences, art therapy can assist an individual in uncovering their beliefs and values and provide the motivation to stick to these beliefs and values even in tough times and through challenges an individual may face.

Honesty

Honesty is another aspect an individual should embrace and possess in order to find their true self. Honesty is a condition of being truthful and sincere. A person who is honest is fair. A person who possesses honesty will be honest about their feelings. An honest individual will not

try to separate one's self from being the best version of themselves possible. When a person is not honest and truthful with themselves, a larger problem may occur and the individual may find themselves in more trouble by lying to themselves rather than if they would have been deliberately dishonest with others and the world.

Some other elements of an honest person include: introspective, open-minded, and fair. Introspection is when a person is able to have a clear understanding of themselves—their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. A person who is honest has a clear understanding of reality—being able to embrace both positive and negative aspects of themselves as a whole and the world with truthfulness. When an individual is open-minded, they are receptive to the possibilities of new ideas, thoughts, and methods. An open-minded individual most likely will have life more experience and a more positive outlook on life than a close-minded individual. Another element of an honest person is that of being fair. Fairness is when someone is able to make decisions and judgments free from outside influences of discrimination or biased thoughts. Each of these elements—introspection, open-mindedness, and fairness—are important when defining an honest individual. Furthermore, honesty involves an individual realizing their potential and being the best version of themselves possible. “Recovery is a difficult process of personal growth through which one develops purpose [...] Recovery is a journey rather than an end destination, a transformative process in which the old self is gradually relinquished and a new sense of self emerges,” (Van Lith et al., 2010). Art allows an individual to discover possibilities by aiding in the recovery process.

Honesty is important in art therapy as the individuals present and the art therapist are trying to establish a relationship. Honesty should be at the foundation of any relationship. If a client holds back facts, information, feelings, and/or opinions in an art therapy session, this could

cause for an unsatisfactory feeling and an unsuccessful path to healing and recovery. Honesty is not only important for a client in an art therapy session but also for an art therapist. An art therapist being honest with a client may allow a client to feel more comfortable, to be able to relax, to be honest and to ultimately begin on a healthy path towards healing and recovery.

Individuality

Individuality is another important aspect of being true to one's self. An individual is someone who recognizes, appreciates, and develops themselves as a unique person. An individual embraces who they are, they embrace their individuality and uniqueness, allowing these elements to shine through. A person who embraces their individuality does not pretend to be something or someone else for the sake of being accepted by others. Rather, a person who has embraced their individuality will listen to and respect the opinions of others while not conforming to the stereotype or expectations of others.

A person who accepts their individuality is someone who knows that being different is a gift. A person may use their gift of individuality to enrich the lives of others by simply being themselves. Individuality means a person is happy with who they are and recognizes they are unique—and no one else is like them. Embracing individuality means not being afraid of labels or words like weird, unique, and strange, etc. Often times, people who are successful in life have dared to creatively express themselves and as a result have broadened their experiences and perspectives of those around them as well as the world as a whole.

In regards to art therapy, individuality is important because art therapy is about a person's path to recovery and healing—which cannot be done without an understanding one's self as a single being, looking deep into one's self for answers. "Creativity is tied to individualism and originality," (Runco, 2004). Art therapy aids in a person accepting who they are as an individual

and allowing for self-discoveries to be made along the path to healing and recovery. Van Lith et al. describes the importance of creating and “art making as a vehicle to take control, empowered consumers, resulted in them feeling stronger, more confident and more capable of driving their journey of recovery,” (Van Lith et al., 2010).

Autonomy

Autonomy is another major aspect about being true to one’s self. An autonomous individual is a person who is free from the influence of others, actions, and events surrounding them. Autonomy refers to a person who is independent from outside controls. A person who is autonomous is self-serving. An autonomous individual is someone who does what they want to do and acts as they want without worrying about what others may think of them. Courage is required for an individual to be autonomous. Confidence is another trait of an autonomous person as being independent can be hard with the many different types of influences in the world today. An autonomous person allows their own self-respect from their fundamental nature to be a part of their everyday life. Lastly, as a similar characteristic of self-integrity and individuality, an autonomous person must be able to listen to the advice of others but ultimately make up their own mind.

Autonomy is important in art therapy sessions because autonomy requires a person to be free from the influence of others and ultimately rely on themselves alone, which is beneficial when establishing a relationship with the art therapist and when participating in art therapy directives. With autonomy comes a sense of self-empowerment.

Releasing tensions through the art making process leads to a sense of becoming empowered. [...] Art making also enabled a process of developing self-knowledge and feeling control over one’s life. [...] Experiencing challenges and rewards in art making

creates a will to achieve and keep developing. Experimenting through art was seen as enabling one to grow and move forward. [...] challenging themselves through experimenting formed the basis for trying new things in life, (Van Lith et al., 2010).

Van Lith et al., goes on to note that art provides “a mean by which one could continuously grow and develop one’s own terms, promoting autonomy,” (Van Lith et al., 2010). An autonomous individual is interested in knowing themselves on a deeper level through close examination on many aspects that make up the self, which may be achieved through art therapy.

My Art Therapy Journey

How Art Therapy Helped Me

As I began my schooling as an art therapy graduate student, I had a passion for creativity but did not think I possessed much artistic skill. I enjoyed engaging in the creative process and making art, but I did not feel confidence in my artistic abilities. I preferred to make art by myself so that no one was there to watch me. This changed immediately when one of my first classes as an art therapy graduate student consisted of at least half the class period of working on our own art. The professor thought the idea of many people engaging in the creative process and making art together was a healthy practice for an artist. Throughout the course I became more and more comfortable creating art while being surrounded by other artists; however I continued to work on the art at home as well as in class. By the end of that semester, my views of art making being a private act for me had changed. Starting in my first semester and carrying throughout the rest of my schooling, I began to understand the value of engaging in the creative process with others. The art my classmates produced were wonderful—each so different and reflective of the artist who created the work. Every class period I was intrigued by the creative minds around me. I began to open up my own creative mind to new ideas—new ways to engage in the creative

process, new ways to use materials, new ways to understand art. I was inspired by my classmates—what a wonderful place I was in.

Soon I became more confident in my artistic ability. I gained insight into what being artistic actually meant. I began to understand the value of being an artist—a creative mind. I embraced my artistic skills like never before, happy to bring my art to class and share with the other creatively minded people. I was proud of what I created; proud the art was my art. I began to sign my works, something I had never done until graduate school. I began to live for artistic self-expression. Any way I could use my creativity interested me. After having this creative-awakening, I understood what art could offer for people. I believed with my art in the power of art.

Art is more important than people give any amount of credit. Art is more than a developed picture in a frame or a paint-stained canvas hanging on the wall. Art is a celebration of the artist, the ultimate form of self-expression. When a person creates art, they are taking a piece of them and putting this piece into the art, bringing this piece of them into solid form and making it last forever in their work of art. Art is powerful. Creativity is essential to our souls. Engaging in the act of making—of creating anything, allows a person to speak from the deepest part of them, freeing and releasing a person into bringing their creative endeavors to life.

Through art, I found a way to help myself but more importantly, through art I found a way to help myself help others. I have always had a passion for helping others, in any way possible to embrace the life they live and be grateful for their life. Art therapy combines two of my passions, my passion to help others and my passion for art. I found my niche in the world; I found what I was meant to do with art therapy. My art therapy internships have proven this to me

again and again. My art therapy internship sites have given me the opportunity to witness art therapy at work and the benefits associated with art therapy and engaging in the creative process.

Art Therapy Internships

As a graduate student in art therapy, I had the opportunity to have hours upon hours of contact experience with art therapy and clients. Over my work as a graduate art therapy student, I have worked with many different populations: elderly, intellectually and physically disabled adults, and women recovering from chemical dependency and other traumatic experiences. Through my internships experiences I have gained insight into the lives of my clients. My clients have welcomed me into their worlds—sharing with me their ups and downs both over the course of their lifetimes as well as their daily ups and downs. I quickly learned that although I was there at my internships to inspire my clients, I was not the only one experiencing inspiration. My clients inspired me every session, whether they knew it or not. The inspiration I received in return was not only artistic inspiration but also inspiration of the motivational sort—inspiration that helped me to realize the work I was doing was what I was meant to be doing—I am meant to be an art therapist. I am meant to help others find their paths to self-expression. I received inspiration that is priceless through my internships, inspiration that challenges me to be the best version of me possible. I have gained so much from my clients in ways I will never be able to express verbally, which is why art therapy is so fitting for me as a way to help others. Sometimes words simply are not enough. In a world where the ability to express one's self will propel you forward, art therapy is a capable form of self-expression. Art therapy may allow people to share with others things they are unable to share with words. Art therapy is the powerful vehicle that allows a person to express and share their life journey, because no matter who you are and where you have been—you life journey is important.

UDAC- United Day Activity Center, Art Junction. An internship I had the opportunity to practice art therapy was with intellectually and physically disabled adults at a vocational facility called UDAC. UDAC offers their clients employment services through their vocational programming or life enrichment services through life skills programming. UDAC has various levels of functioning clients, all with whom I was able to work with throughout my three semesters as an intern. UDAC centers on the belief that all individuals should be offered choices and the ability to make a decision, helping individuals to realize their potential and assist with living each day to the fullest. Inside UDAC, I worked in the Art Junction department. Art Junction is a place for individuals at UDAC to embrace their inner artist and let their creativity shine. Art Junction provides clients with opportunities to create many different types of art including: photography, jewelry design, ceramics, painting, meditation, drawing, and poetry, among others. The Art Junction program personalizes art activities to meet individual client's interests and skill levels. The artists at Art Junction have had many opportunities in the artistic realm, realizing what it means to be an artist and realizing one's potential through making one's own choices and decisions, (UDAC.org, 2012).

The clients who participated in Art Junction are truly artists in every sense of the word. They choose to be a part of art activities that interest them; they choose to participate—making the atmosphere a positive and creative one as soon as you set foot inside the Art Junction room. The artists are willing, and more importantly—excited—to participate in nearly any artistic activity they can. The artists are open to new ideas, any ideas and love the moment after listening to the explanation of the activity that they may begin working. The levels of functioning at UDAC are so widespread, making the necessity of shaping an activity for the specific population participating necessary. Some sessions, the clients seem to grasp the activity in its entirety, while

other activity explanations leave them with confused looks on their faces. This internship site was a great place for me to experience how I might think the directive I have planned is ready to go, when in fact it is not. Art Junction pushed me to think on my feet and be flexible—needing to adjust my activities whenever there was a sense of confusion that could not be cured. I was always needing to think on my feet and never take an activity I created too seriously or hold an activity in high esteem—because sometimes an activity was simply not going to work and a new one would need to be created instantly. When a situation like this occurred, I would invite the artists to help me think up an activity while providing them with suggestions and listening to their own suggestions—we would come up with an idea they could understand and enjoy being a part of. The artist at UDAC taught me so much, things that helped to make me the art therapist I am today, as well as things that will stick with me, guiding me in the future.

Pioneer Recovery Center. The Pioneer Recovery Center is an inpatient residential chemical dependency treatment facility. Chemical dependency according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) is,

When an individual persists in use of alcohol or other drugs despite problems related to use of the substance, substance dependence may be diagnosed. Compulsive and repetitive use may result in tolerance to the effect of the drug and withdrawal symptoms when use is reduced or stopped (*Behavenet*, 2012).

Pioneer Recovery Center helps women with chemical dependency issues by acknowledging that there are underlying issues besides chemical dependency resulting in the need to be in treatment. The recovery center aims at aiding the women in identifying these underlying issues in a supportive environment.

The Pioneer Recovery Center embraces the idea of female independence and power—the center is owned and operated by females. The Pioneer Recovery Center believes in empowering clients to be self-sufficient and make their own healthy decisions. Pioneer Recovery Center understands some patients may have co-occurring disorders, such as mental illness along with substance abuse. Furthermore, there is the understanding that while such co-occurring disorders may be present, each is in need of being addressed and treated separately—that effective treatment requires all conditions to be taken into consideration. The recovery center combines both chemical dependency services as well as mental health services to have a successful outcome in the recovery process of the women. The goal of the recovery center is to challenge and inspire women to be the best possible versions of themselves they can be, acknowledging this dedication to the commitment of change will help clients begin the journey of self-recovery. The environment created is supportive, calm, quiet, and homelike while being located in a woods-like natural setting. The path to recovery is paved with honoring the individual rights and life experiences of each woman in the center—acknowledging the importance of one’s journey traveled thus far and the unexplored journey ahead in the future, (Pioneerrecoverycenter.com, 2013).

My role as an art therapy intern at the Pioneer Recovery Center is to help the women realize their journey is important. Each and every twist and turn, speed bump and pot hole along their life’s path has meaning and allows for understanding and ultimately, growth. I introduce art therapy as a way for us to use art to share things about ourselves. I inform the clients I am not there to tell them what to do with their lives or how to live their lives but rather I am there to help them discover their path in life and how creativity and imagination can be used along the way in their journey. The women at the recovery center are high functioning, smart, and talented

individuals. I find that while I am challenging them to participate in artistic expression (many of whom have not engaged in artistic activities since schooling) the women challenge me as well. I am challenged in several ways—my authority and my art activities—are among some of the ways I am challenged by the women at the recovery center. I have found that my internship at the recovery center pushes me to be strong while remaining compassionate. The internship tests my role as a leader and has allowed me to develop into a less fearful leader. I have learned that leading is not always about making everyone happy or bending completely but leading is about being confident and compromise. Leading is about sticking to your ideals while allowing the ideas of others to co-occur. I continue to learn about myself as I intern at the recovery center. I feel the recovery center was a great opportunity for me at the end of my journey as an art therapy graduate student because the clients at the recovery center are fine-tuning the skills I have, the ways in which I operate and run an art therapy session. The women test me constantly but I have come to realize this will be a part of my internship at the recovery center and could quite possibly be a part of any future art therapy job I have.

Using Art Therapy to Help Others

Among the many benefits of art therapy, I believe the most important benefit of participating in art therapy is the emergence of the true self. Art therapy allows people to gain insight into whom they are as a person, an individual. Art therapy helps people to come to terms with their life experiences, accept who they are, and embrace themselves and their future.

Throughout my schooling, the message I relayed to all my clients is the power of being an individual and embracing who a person is. Each person in this world is different and has different ways to better the environment and people around them. I believe that by using art therapy, one may discover their true self. Furthermore, with art therapy and the discovery of

one's true self, one can continue to develop and understand who they are as a person—their wants and needs, ultimately establishing the potential to create a better life for themselves.

Through various art therapy directives I have lead at my internships sites, I have witnessed individuals gaining a deeper understanding of themselves. I have witnessed self-discoveries and self-acceptance. I have helped clients embrace who they are and understand who they are. I have provided my clients the opportunities to uncover their true selves and the possibilities that wait for them. Several different art therapy directives have accomplished these wonderful goals by using the directives as a means to explore and examine one's self-integrity, honesty, individuality, and autonomy.

Art therapy and self-integrity- Message to the World. An art therapy directive that helps a person establish their self-integrity was a directive I called 'Message to the World'. In this directive, I asked clients to think if they could share anything with the world, what would they say? After asking the clients to think about this for a moment and when they felt ready, I invited them to begin to draw and/or write their message on a piece of paper. This activity is a fun activity for clients to show what they are passionate about, to show their ideals and opinions about what the world needs to know and realize. I would like to note that all art therapy directives are subject to interpretation by each individual. However each example I provide in this paper uses the directives as a starting point to produce their works—while embracing each person's individuality.

This art therapy directive allows for the expression of one's self-integrity as the clients are asked to reflect on what is important to them and then share these passions. This directive requires clients to think deeper, searching for messages that speak to them and excite them, messages worth sharing and fighting for. Through this directive, clients are able to gain insight

into the causes that are important to them, helping clients discover some of their beliefs and values if they were not already aware of them.

Message to the world. I held this art therapy session at UDAC's Art Junction. The clients were eager to begin. In one client's message to the world, she chose to express not one message but many different messages. Some of her messages were goals while other messages were ideas she wanted to remind the world of.

C, a woman in her late twenties, expressed many ideas that reflect her self-integrity in the sense that her ideas show her beliefs and values. The picture below shows C's work. C expressed her belief in the importance of the environment with messages such as "I love to clean up trash on the ground", "H2O keep clean too", "Keep Earth clean". While many of her other messages reflect other themes of nature and the environment—the sun, nice weather, animals, and hiking. From her work, C shows her beliefs of the importance of the environment. When asked about her message to the world, C explained the importance of our planet, as there is only one Earth. C further explained it is necessary to take good care of our planet and discussed ways in which she herself cares for the planet.

who she is and she accepts them as an important part of herself. Of course M has many other qualities, shown in her image below. M displays self-integrity by showing she is confident in who she is as an individual, displays courage by sharing tough facts about herself, and she has accepted the healing process.



Image Two: 'Message to the World' made by M.

J is a woman in her thirties recovering from chemical dependency. J stated her message was to her young daughter. Her message was "Let your light shine through" (see image at top of next page). J looked through magazines to find the words for her message, but when she was unable to find specific words, she found letters to spell out the words, showing the importance of the message to J. J expresses with her message she values when individuals pursue their joys in life and follow what makes their heart happy. She wanted to share her belief with her daughter in hopes that her daughter would embrace her message. J surrounded her message with images of

items that make her daughter happy—images important to her young daughter. J hoped the images would help her daughter to better understand the message she was trying to share with her. Through this image of J's, the value of her daughter's happiness and joy in life are evident. J shows she values her daughter and spoke about the importance of her family and the motivation she receives from them. J is in treatment to own up to her past, using courage to heal and become a better person and mother.



Image Three: ‘Message to the World’ made by J.

Word definition collage. Another art therapy directive that shows attention to a person's self-integrity is titled the ‘Word Definition Collage.’ In this directive, I asked the clients at Pioneer Recovery Center to select a word that meant something to them from pre-cut words. I tried to select words that were positive in nature from magazines. After the women had selected their words, I delivered the rest of the directive, which was to create a word definition collage.

Using their selected word, I asked clients to define what their word meant to them. By observing the words selected by each individual, I was able to gauge what words held personal meanings to the women—what words and qualities they valued. Furthermore, observing their finished collages, I was able to learn more about each woman’s self-integrity and the qualities they valued. The collages allowed me to get a deeper understanding of what the words meant to them and even other values they held associated with the words.



Image Four: ‘Word Definition Collage’ picture of pre-cut words.

One woman, who is in her mid-twenties, chose the word creativity. She said she has always been a creative person but lately she has not put much time into her creative self-expression. To her, being creative is a part of who she is. She defined creativity as something that is cultivated over the lifetime of a person. She compared her creativity to a flower—saying her ideas were like a seed, taking shape and growing. Then as her flower continues to grow and bud, so do her ideas until finally her ideas are formed and expressed through art—similar to a flower blooming. From her explanation, I gathered that creativity used to be an important part of her life, of her identity. Her collage clearly shows she values self-expression through art, as the collage is a very complete work. The word wellness was placed on the collage because one day,

when she is well—recovered—and whole again, she hopes to get back in touch with her creativity and have self-expression in her life once again.



Image Five: ‘Word Definition Collage’ made by a young female.

This word definition collage directive was very insightful for not only myself, but for the women. They were able to look at their chosen word and bring their own definition of the word to life. The words the women chose were words that meant something to them, something they valued in their lives. Their own definitions of the words were deeply personal, requiring them to reach deep inside and truly define their word in connection to their beliefs, rather than the commonly accepted definition of the world—putting outside influences aside and making personal statements.

Art Therapy and Honesty. I have worked with several directives associated with a theme of honesty. Honesty is an important part of a therapeutic relationship. Honesty is also important in art therapy because honesty is an important part of the path to healing and recovery.

In order to heal, one must be honest with themselves, lying and deceit—especially to the self, will not get a person on a healthy road to healing and recovery.

A collage about me. One such directive that had a theme of honesty was the very first session I ever had at the Pioneer Recovery Center. The directive was titled ‘A Collage about Me’ asking clients to create an introduction collage. This directive is set up as a get to know one another project. An important part of this directive was for the clients to share with me who they were, laying the foundations of our therapeutic relationships. Honesty, then, was an important part of this first directive.

D, a woman in her upper-thirties recovering from chemical dependency, created the introduction collage below. D’s collage is very expressive, using bright colors that attract the eye. D placed the words ‘Yes, I’m starving,’ on her collage, explaining that before she used to purposely starve herself. D also explained the words had a hopeful meaning behind them as well, stating that now she feels as if she is starving for sobriety—something she yearns for in her life. D also stated that she was an addict, placing the word addiction on her collage. D explained that addiction will always be a part of who she is, but now addiction will be a part of her past and not her future. D was honest in sharing these parts of herself, perhaps parts of her that are hard to share. She also shared feelings of being sexy, a desire to spread happiness, and the fact that she would soon be a healthier person. D was truthful and sincere when sharing the positive and negative parts of her collage. D explained she realizes mistakes in her past and is ready for the new, healthier and better D.



Image Six: 'A Collage about Me' made by D.

Another woman at the recovery center, K, a recovering chemical dependant woman in her upper-twenties created the collage below. K explained she was a mother and she loved her children very much, however they were taken away from her. K shared her pain with me but then also her hope, that she was in recovery for her children and would one day be with them again. K shared how much she cared for her children and that she was dedicated to her recovery. She also shared her dream of visiting Norway, where her grandfather was from. Lastly, K shared how one day she hopes to find a higher power in her life to give her direction. K is open-minded and excited for what her future will have in store for her. She is ready to move on from her past and have new experiences. She was honest about who she was and where she was and now where she hopes to be.

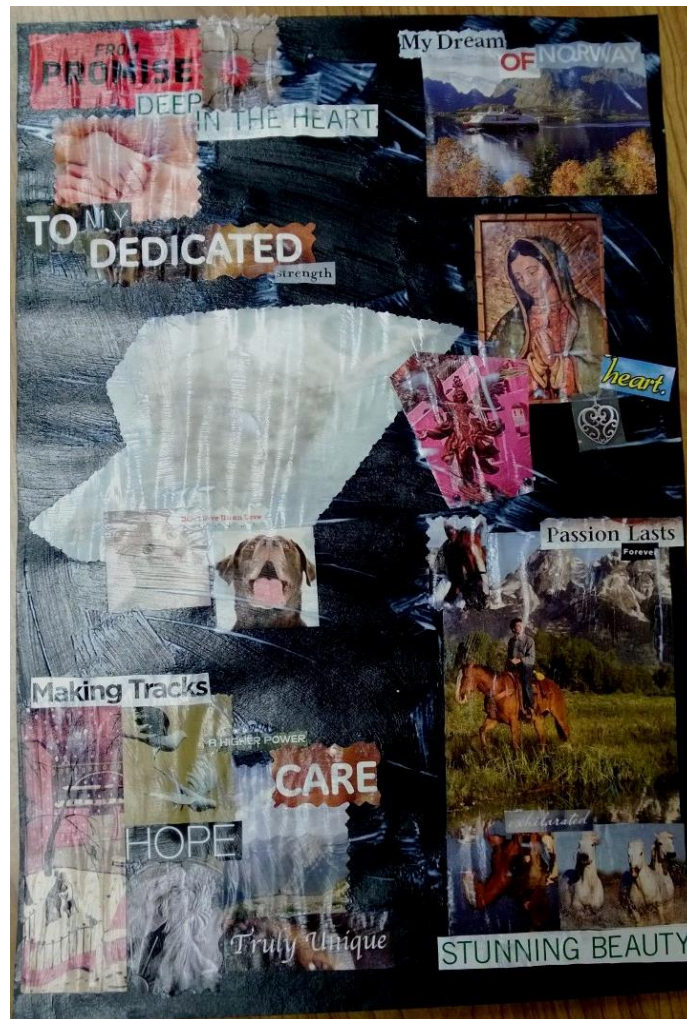


Image Seven: ‘A Collage about Me’ made by K.

The information the clients shared in their introduction collages were very personal thoughts and desires. The women were honest and upfront with me. They did not seem to hold back, but rather to accept their situation in life and their new realities. The women knew their lives were not perfect—that they themselves were not perfect. They knew there were both positive and negative elements of their lives but as part of their recovery they were choosing to embrace both the positive and the negative elements in their lives. I felt the women were sincere with what they depicted and shared with their introduction collages—their intentions good. Both D and K are making attempts to be the best versions of themselves they can be now by making

huge changes in their life styles. Although both women seem to have a clear understanding of who they are, I know throughout their recovery journey they began to have an even clearer understanding of who they have become and what their new possibilities are.

Encouragement cards. Another directive which required individuals to display honesty was a directive titled ‘Encouragement cards’. For this directive, I asked the women at the Pioneer Recovery Center to create a card with words of encouragement in order to give away to someone in their lives that needed a little bit of encouraging. I asked the women to think about a specific person in their lives before they began creating their cards, thus the encouragement cards could be more personal. This directive requires the women be honest with people in their lives, giving them the encouraging advice—the little bit of motivation they need. The messages were truthful and insightful as well.

B, a woman in her twenties recovering from chemical dependency created the encouragement card below for another woman in the recovery center. This other woman was a positive part of her daily life in the center, offering advice and encouragement, almost acting as a motherly figure to her while B was in recovery. B found images and words that reminded her of this woman, placing them on the encouragement card she created. B also wrote this very personal, honest message: “Your so very inspirational you can always lift peoples spirits with your great wisdom and put smiles on faces with your kindness.” B was also honest in another way, she was honest with the woman she gave the encouragement card to. B shared with this woman her honest thoughts and opinions of her. When B gave the encouragement card to this woman, the woman instantly lit up—a huge smile spread across her face. She appreciated knowing her actions and advice were helping and making a difference. She also appreciated that B appreciated her as a person.



Image Eight: 'Encouragement Card' made by B.

The woman, K, participated in this session as well. K created the encouragement card below for her roommate at the recovery center. K shared that her roommate helped inspire her and remind her of why she was receiving recovery. K wrote a quote she liked for her roommate reading: "Don't be afraid to stand for what you believe in even if that means standing alone." K also found words and phrases that she felt her roommate needed to hear, that would help give her motivation in her journey towards sobriety. These words and phrases are honest in their own way while being able to still provide motivation. K's roommate appreciated receiving the encouragement card and laughed as she read the card.



Image Nine: 'Encouragement Card' made by K.

This encouragement card directive worked well with the women at the recovery center. This activity encouraged and relied on the clients to be completely honest with the person they were making the encouragement card for. The clients were asked to give an individual in their lives an encouraging message that was fairly personal. The clients were honest when thinking about the people in their lives and what they needed help with—the encouraging messages they offered may have given deeper insight into what they needed a bit of encouragement to achieve in their lives.

Show your pain. Another directive working with honesty was one I called 'Show your Pain' in which I invited the women at the Pioneer Recovery Center to participate. For this directive, I provided the women with a pre-printed body template and asked them to illustrate any pains they were feeling. I explained different types of pains including physical and

emotional pains. After illustrating their pain, I asked the women to make positive statements from their pains. When the women had worked on this directive for over an hour, I asked the women to share the pain they were experiencing with the group.

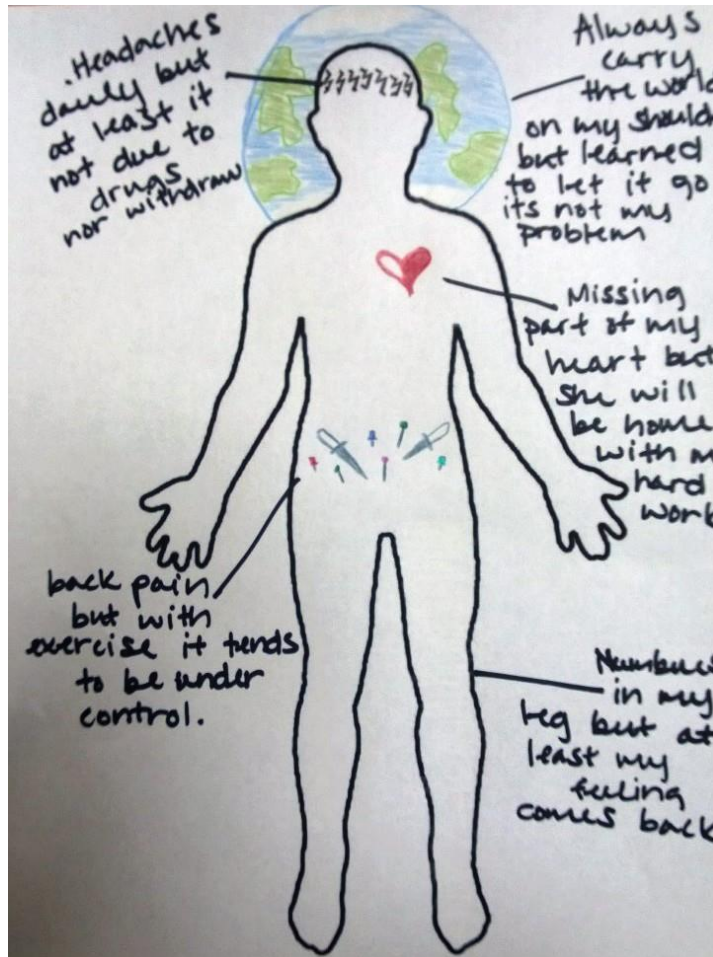


Image Ten: ‘Show your Pain’ made by K.

K participated in this directive as well. K’s work is shown in the image above. K displayed and explained her physical pains, turning them around and eliminating the negative connotations associated with them—“back pain but with exercise it tends to be under control,” “headaches daily but at least it not due to drugs nor withdraw,” “nerve loss in my leg but at least my feeling comes back.” K also displayed and explained emotional pain—“missing part of my heart but she will be home with my hard work.” Finally, K displayed and explained a

metaphorical pain—“always carry the world on my shoulders but learned to let it go it’s not my problem.” K portrayed her pains honestly, she examined herself and what she was feeling and allowed the feelings to flow onto the paper. Furthermore, K was truthful with her positive reasoning statements, refusing to look at her pains as negative but rather verbalizing her pains and making positive and realistic statements.



Image Eleven: ‘Show your Pain’ made by CH

In the image above, CH, a woman in her mid-twenties recovering from chemical dependency showed her pain. CH’s pain she felt was an emotional pain. CH was realistic at the cause of her pain, stating “my heart is broken because I hurt my family. But they accept my apology.” To state that CH is in pain because she hurt her family was something that required

bravery as well as honesty. CH chose to look at the real reason she was experiencing problems with her family and admitted to herself that she was the cause of the problems and all the pain she felt stemmed back to herself. In this activity, CH owned up to her own reality and was truthful with herself.

This directive asked the clients to talk about their pain without holding back—which required truthfulness and honesty. This directive also involved trusting others with one’s pain and recognizing sharing one’s pain was a healthy step in the road to healing and recovery. Furthermore, this directive required clients to take normally negative aspects of their lives—pain—and turn these negative aspects into positive statement, ultimately embracing both positive and negative aspects of one’s life. The clients listened to the pain of other women and realized they shared similar feelings of pain. The women were able to accept the information they were hearing from other women and bonded during this deeply personal directive.

Art Therapy and Individuality. Through the participation in art therapy sessions, in most cases a person gains greater self-awareness and insight, allowing them to accept who they are as an individual. Art therapy helps people to embrace who they are by participating in directives that encourage and foster self-discovery.

Make a statement pin. A directive I introduced in an art therapy session at Art Junction that centered in embracing one’s self and individuality was titled ‘Make a Statement Pin’, to create a pin, with a positive statement about themselves. I gave the clients some starting ideas for their statements: “I am...” “I can...” or “I feel...”. After deciding on their statement beginning and then deciding how to fill in the end of the statement, the next step in the directive was to create a collage of images that represented the statement the individual was making. After creating the collage, the next step was to put the positive statement over the collage and then

assemble the pin. After assembly, the clients put on their pins and expressed how they felt making the pins and then how they felt wearing the pins. I hoped this activity would be empowering and confidence-boosting by creating such strong statements for this population.

S, an elderly gentleman, created the pin shown below. S's pin is a personal statement of something he can do and loves to do, "I can fish." S's world revolves around fishing and his art, not only his statement pin, reflects this. S enjoys being outside—something just about everyone at UDAC knows about him. S's positive statement is also a personal one that identifies who he is as an individual. S is accepting of who he is and his situation in life. S is very content with who he is and embraces who he is. Being an artist is a prominent part of S's identity, something he is very proud of. S is also proud of where he lives, in Duluth and he lets this show as well.



Image Twelve: 'Make a Statement Pin' made by S.

Another positive statement pin created in this session was this pin pictured below. The individual who created this pin chose the statement, "I am happy." This pin is full of individuality reflecting the individual who created it. An individual is someone who has accepted

and embraced who they are—such acts would allow a person to feel great joy and happiness, as the individual who created this pin feels. The images the individual used to depict their happiness are images of things that make them happy—things that are very specific to this individual person. This person has been able to recognize they are an individual and be happy with who they are.



Image Thirteen: ‘Make a Statement Pin’ made by a consumer at Art Junction

This directive using the pins allowed the other group members and myself to gain valuable insight into the lives of others and show what they embraced and liked about themselves. An individual is someone who understands who they are and that they are unique in this world, and then embrace this individuality and uniqueness. The positive statement pins show how the clients participating in this group have embraced the qualities they like about themselves.

I am me, we are we. Another directive with a theme of individuality was a session held at Art Junction, titled ‘I am Me, We are We’, in which the clients created a group mandala. For this

session, I gave each client a piece of the mandala I had sketched and cut out. I asked each group member to illustrate who they are; sharing any information about themselves they wanted to share. After, the group members shared their individual mandala piece they had created. The last step was to form a new mandala, showing that although each person is unique and an individual, the group can come together and bond as a whole—while still embracing their individuality and sharing their uniqueness with the group. The message for this session is being an individual and being different from one another is okay and that as humans we are in some ways all alike at the same time while being different and who we are.

BR is a male in his fifties, BR created the mandala piece shown below. On his piece of the mandala, BR shared words and images that were important to him, giving group members insight into who he was. BR shared his love for cats, or ‘pussycats’ as he calls them. BR also shared that he liked balloons, flowers, the sun, and smiles. BR’s mandala piece with his chosen words and images is representational to the person he is. BR is very comfortable in his own skin and has completely embraced his uniqueness and identity. BR is not worried about being accepted by others, which can be demonstrated in the things about him he chose to share with the group on his mandala piece—BR was honest about what his interests were, not hiding his love for cats, flowers, or balloons.

Before the session began, I cut words out of magazines and placed them in a box. When SG came, I explained the directive to her. I asked SG to tell me when to pick up a word out of the box. As I shuffled the words around, I watched SG waiting for her to blink. As soon as SG blinked, I picked up a word, read the word out loud, and asked SG if she wanted to use that word in her poetry. After we had gone through this selection process of words, I read the words in order we had drawn them to SG. I asked SG if she wanted to keep the words in the order the words were selected or if she wanted to rearrange the words—SG chose to rearrange the words. So together, we rearranged the words into poems we liked, reading each complete poem out loud. After the poems were created, SG picked a background image as the base of the artwork. I helped SG glue the words onto the background image, and then showed SG. We discussed how we could complete the art work—what we could do to enhance the poems. We decided to use paints, glitter, and beaded garland. After the artwork was completed, I held the artwork up to show SG and see if she was satisfied. Together, we created two word poem pieces of art.

SG has created a niche in the art world with her word poetry and artwork. She has had poetry readings and art exhibits. SG has developed her own individual artistic style—of which many people know her for. This directive is a perfect example of what people can create and achieve when they have accepted who they are and begin to embrace their individuality and uniqueness. SG's individuality and uniqueness shine through in her artwork. The poems serve as a wonderful method for SG to communicate. SG has accepted her life is a gift and she tries to live each day as a happy person. SG engages in the creative process as a means to expand her life experiences in a positive manner.



Image Sixteen: ‘Random Word Poetry’ poems and art created by SG.

Art Therapy and Autonomy. An autonomous person is a person who is independent in their actions and in their thoughts. Autonomy is important in art therapy because a person who is autonomous will not be concerned how others may be interpreting a directive, instead an autonomous person will be concerned only with their own work and letting their ideas flow out from their mind.

Reminder boards. A directive for an art therapy session at Art Junction which had themes of autonomy was when I invited the clients to create ‘Reminder Boards’. I explained the idea of reminder boards as being a way to remind oneself of things that a person needs to do or wants to do. I gave the clients the option of using days of the week, almost using the reminder board as a planner or not to use the days of the week and make a general reminder board. I asked

the clients to look for images that reminded them of the things they needed or wanted to do in their lives.



Image Seventeen: ‘Reminder Boards’ made by C.

Pictured above is a reminder board made by the client C. C also participated in the message to the world directive. C chose to use the days of the week and map out what each day consisted of for her. Then C found images that reminded her of the things she needed to do each day. Among some of the reminders C listed were: going to the YMCA, going to the library, going to church, and doing chores. C commented she enjoyed the activity and felt like her reminder board would help her each day. C’s reminder board will allow her to be more self-sufficient in remembering what exactly she needs to do each day versus having her mother remind her. C likes to be as independent as possible since she lives at home, thus this directive

was perfect for her. The directive allowed C to feel like she was in control of her days and what she does each day.

Empowerment stones. The directive I presented in an art therapy session at the Pioneer Recovery Center that had themes of autonomy was a directive titled ‘Empowerment Stones’. For this particular directive I wanted to focus on strength and empowerment. I began by asking the clients to think about stones—what came to mind? Then we had a discussion on how stones symbolize strength, power, and stability. Next, I asked the clients to think about what gave them strength, what empowered them? I invited the women to take these thoughts and answers to these questions and create empowerment stones—using magazine and collage materials to collage a rock with words and/or images that empower oneself, that give one strength. I added perhaps the words and/or images could be motivational in nature as well. At the end of the session, the clients shared their stones with the group. Before the session ended, I mentioned to the women these stones should be placed somewhere they could see it each day to give them strength and motivation—that the stones could be a good reminder for when they feel defeated or in need of a little motivation.

SP is a woman in her upper-twenties recovering from chemical dependency. SP created the empowerment stone pictured below. SP’s empowerment stone has the words “You Can!” on it in large print. These words show that SP believes in her ability to accomplish goals—in her ability to do. The use of the statement “You Can,” perhaps reflects that SP is an autonomous person because the idea of these stones is to provide encouragement—further suggesting that SP receives strength knowing she is able to do things for herself. Other signs of independence on the encouragement stone created by SP are the words strong, energy, and inspiration. SP explained

these are all words that encourage and motivate her to be a better person. She also said these words have important meaning for her in her path towards healing and recovery.

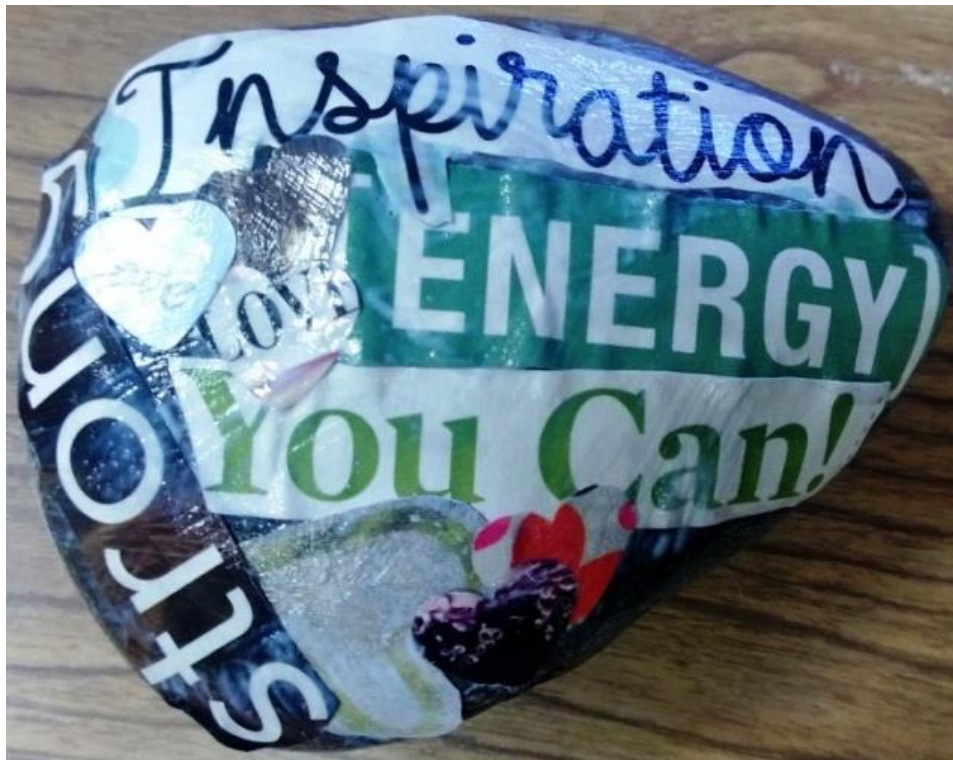


Image Eighteen: ‘Empowerment Stones’ created by SP.

CH, who also participated in the ‘Show your Pain’ directive, created the empowerment stone pictured below. CH’s empowerment stone was neat and orderly—each word had its place and did not overlap with any other word. CH chose words such as: change, motivate, ‘roll with it’, strong, acceptance, and fight. Looking at the words CH chose to use—all these words demonstrate a sense of independence and self-sufficiency. The words show that CH has had to be strong in her life and deal with hard circumstances resulting from the decisions and actions she has made. CH explained she owns up to her actions and her past but recognizes she may have hurt her loved ones along the way. CH went on to say she is in recovery to fix herself and by fixing herself first she will be able to fix the relationships she has.

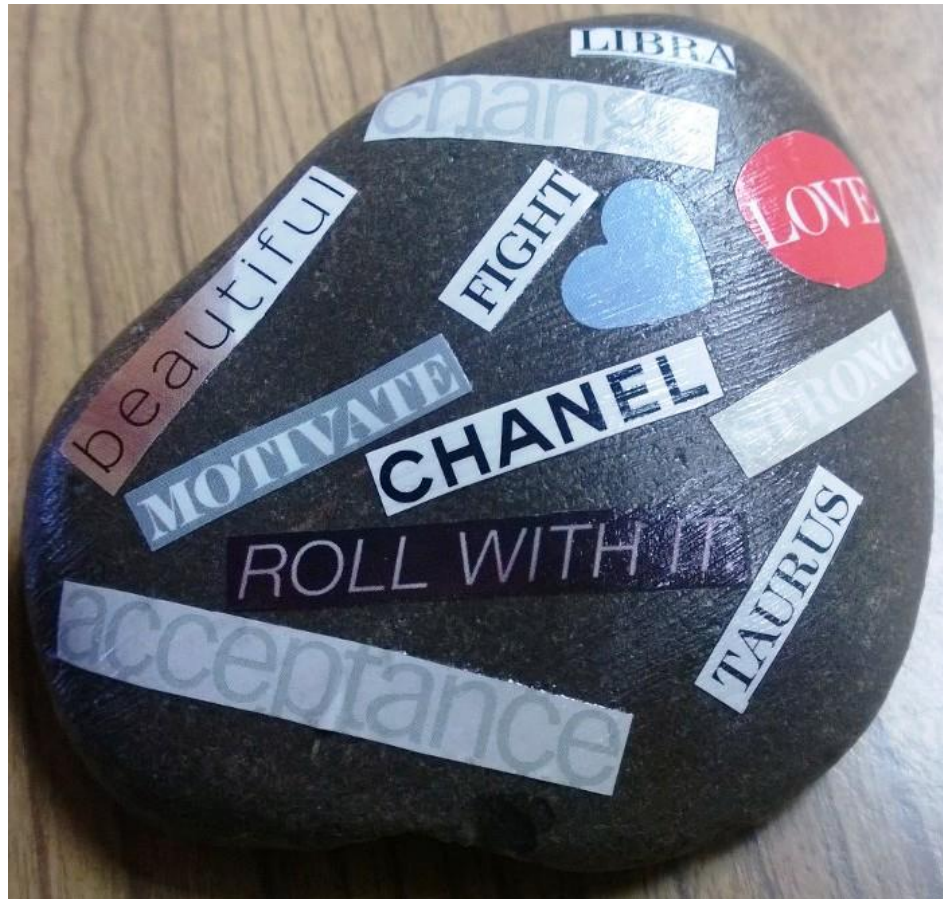


Image Nineteen: ‘Empowerment Stones’ created by CH.

In one way or another, all of the several art therapy directives I have shared help the participants gain deeper insights into who they are. By establishing goals to accomplish with each directive, I was able to help my clients understand how themes such as self-integrity, honesty, individuality, and autonomy are important in their everyday lives—are important parts of who they are. I have helped my clients understand themselves on a deeper level by placing them in touch with the deepest parts of who they are, who their true selves are. With each directive I help my clients form a deeper connection with themselves, asking them to dig deeper and think about things they may not have thought about before. Through these directives I have explained, I am able to see the value of art therapy. I am able to see that art therapy provides a connection with our souls that we may not know we can have. I am able to see the power of art.

Conclusion

Art is a powerful tool in which people can utilize the process of art making for a variety of different reasons. For decades, some people have witnessed and experienced the benefits of creating and now with art therapy a wider audience of people are witnessing and experiencing the benefits of art making. Art making allows for healing and recovery among so much more. Art making allows a person to journey deep within themselves to their deepest and most private emotions, feelings, and thoughts—providing opportunities for self-understanding and acceptance. Art can provide a release from the everyday world to a world created by the self, a vast world, waiting to be explored.

Through art, one can explore their inner worlds, learning about oneself as an individual. Art helps people to understand themselves better. Art allows a person to become aware of and embrace one's true self. A person's true self as I discussed in this paper consist of understanding oneself on many different levels including self-integrity, honesty, individuality, and autonomy. Each of these levels are aspects of a person that define and make up who a person is. Knowing and understanding oneself on a deep level will allow a person to be a more whole person. Art may allow a person to find the true meaning to who they are and why they are, allowing for powerful insight into one's life meaning.

Art means something different to each person. One commonality many people discover though the art making process is who they are as a person. Art therapy aids in this discovery, inviting people who participate in art therapy sessions to journey deep within themselves to find who they are—their true selves. Discovery could not be done without examining and understanding one's characteristics of self-integrity, honesty, individuality, and autonomy. Each of these characteristics is important in establishing who a person is and why a person is. Many

people long for such self-discovery, such self-discovery as may be achieved through art therapy sessions. So if you are having trouble with who you are and why you are, maybe consider embarking on a journey of personal discovery to get back in touch with the deepest, truest you possible by participating in art therapy sessions and letting go creatively to ultimately hold on to yourself.

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