

How adlerian art therapy can impact sexual abuse and assault

[Psychology](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Most people who experience trauma deal with a change in their life. Whether this trauma is from a car accident, being shot, being abused or being assaulted. “ Trauma is understood...as an experienced event in which a person is not prepared for the psychological and physical results” (Saltzman, Matic, Marsden, 2013). In order for most individuals to process and get over a traumatic experience they see a therapist. This is especially true in cases of sexual abuse and assault. There are different types of therapy and therapists that exist that individuals go to. Art therapy is a form of therapy that is neither highly respected nor regarded. However, even though it is not commonly thought of when discussing therapy, it is an effective process.

The effect of Adlerian Art Therapy (a subgroup of art therapy) on sexual abuse and assault is thoroughly discussed in the article Adlerian Art Therapy with Sexual Abuse and Assault Survivors written by Marni Saltzman, Monique Matic and Emily Marsden in 2013 (Saltzman, 2013). This article discusses three cases of individuals who have been sexually assaulted, abused or both and how art therapy has been both therapeutic and insightful in their recovery processes (Saltzman, et al. 2013). Before diving into different possibilities of art therapy treatment, the article thoroughly explains the difference between sexual assault and abuse. It also talks about how they can affect an individual in childhood and/or adulthood (Saltzman et al. 2013). The article then goes on to discuss Adlerian Art Therapy, a therapist’s interpretation and the benefit that it can have on a survivor (Saltzman, et al. 2013).

This article strongly supports the benefits that exist from the therapeutic standpoint of art therapy. For people who do not understand what this form <https://assignbuster.com/how-adlerian-art-therapy-can-impact-sexual-abuse-and-assault/>

of therapy is, the article can be educational and expresses how patients have been changed for the better. Not only is it beneficial for the survivor, but also for the therapist. Adlerian Art Therapy helps both the therapist and the patient understand more about the patient (survivor). “ Adlerian art therapy is a multimodal approach to treatment because it entails visual, linguistic, symbolic, sensory and kinesthetic expression” (Saltzman, et al. 2013). When processing trauma, there are two subgroups of treatment that exist. The first is desensitization of biological systems, building coping skills and support systems, and cognitive restructuring of the trauma narrative (Saltzman, et al. 2013). The second deals with a victim and client centered feminist approach (Saltzman, et al. 2013). This second subgroup incorporates the following: advocacy, empowerment and relational components (Saltzman, et al. 2013). Both of these subgroupings are involved in Adlerian Art Therapy and this incorporation of both is what makes it a multimodal approach (Saltzman, et al. 2013). This multimodal approach is beneficial in more than one way. One of the largest ways is through nonverbal communication.

Adlerian Art Therapy with Sexual Abuse and Assault Survivors strongly supports how beneficial art therapy can be to sexual assault or abuse victims. This is especially true when “ the gravity and terror of the trauma... silences the survivor, which can make therapies that rely exclusively on verbal communication too demanding and challenging” (Saltzman, et al. 2013). Art therapy can provide a nonthreatening entry into an individual’s traumatic memory, particularly those memories that are unable to be accessed after a person goes through a traumatic experience (Saltzman, et al. 2013). <https://assignbuster.com/how-adlerian-art-therapy-can-impact-sexual-abuse-and-assault/>

al. 2013). This is an interesting concept and approach to trauma because most individuals who experience trauma as severe as sexual assault or abuse have a difficult time talking about it.

The Adlerian psychological perspective largely emphasizes feelings of inferiority (Adlerian Psychology). This article focuses and argues how Adlerian Art Therapy helps identify feelings of inferiority without necessarily having the individual directly admit to or address it (Saltzman, et al. 2013). Art therapy is a voice for the people who cannot verbally express themselves. This form of therapy can be beneficial even if it does not seem to be doing anything. Patients are not always fully aware that this process is happening when they are participating in a session. Sometimes the therapist guides the session in a particular direction and in different ways is able to learn information about the patient without being direct (Saltzman, et al. 2013). There are three elements that exist in a therapeutic art making experience: the observer, the official process and the product (Saltzman, et al. 2013). Most people solidly think of the product because it is the most recognizable – the artwork itself. However, art therapists are actively involved in the making. If they are not actively participating with the survivor, they are the observer who is constantly interpreting the meaning of the work being done (Saltzman, et al. 2013). Even when they are participating this interpreting and observing is constantly being done (Saltzman, et al. 2013). It is important that the therapist understands the different meanings behind the patient's artwork and knows how to direct a session yet let the survivor be in charge to a point.

The making of the artwork can be “ a holistic snapshot of the survivor for the therapist... and a ... therapeutic moment for the survivor to experience” (Saltzman, et al. 2013). As a survivor works through a session and their traumatic memory is elicited through the artwork and their body is reacting. The amygdala is activated in response to the fear associated with the sexual assault or abuse that is being remembered (Saltzman, et al. 2013). The prefrontal cortex is activated in order to regulate these feelings that are being felt (Saltzman, et al. 2013). Engaging the memory through the artwork in this manner causes different systems in the body to be activated and desensitization of the memory begins to occur (Saltzman et al. 2013). For any trauma patient this is extremely important.

How a traumatic experience influences a person socially is vital. This article discusses the different effects that sexual assault and abuse can have on a persons “ social interest – the investment in something beyond oneself” (Saltzman, et al. 2013). It states that a survivor can respond to the world and to others after experiencing sexual assault or abuse in two different ways: safe guarding stance – social isolation, numbness – or a superior stance – indiscriminate sexual behavior, interpersonal aggression (Saltzman, et al. 2013). These stances can have a significant impact on the survivor’s interpersonal relationships (Saltzman, et al. 2013). A person’s social interest and interaction is highly influenced throughout childhood. If a person experiences sexual assault or abuse during childhood, it is more than likely going to have a developmental set back. There are differences in regards to what happens to an individual when they go through a traumatic experience. Many of these differences result in the age that the assault or abuse occurs.

<https://assignbuster.com/how-adlerian-art-therapy-can-impact-sexual-abuse-and-assault/>

The mental effect that this type of trauma has on an adult is entirely different than that of a childhood. A child will have the possibility of impairment to their personality development and their creative self (Saltzman, et al. 2013). An adult on the other hand already has a developed lifestyle. Because of this already developed lifestyle, the information will not influence their development; rather they will have to incorporate the trauma into their already existent lifestyle (Saltzman, et al. 2013).

The article shows the benefits of Adlerian Art Therapy through three different cases. The first case is a 14-year-old boy, Darrel, who was separated from his mother from experiencing physical and emotional neglect and after being sexually abused by his older brother (Saltzman, et al. 2013). Darrel went through art therapy treatment with his foster mother as well as treatments alone (Saltzman, et al. 2013). His foster mother passed away while he lived with her and he was removed (Saltzman, et al. 2013). All of these experiences took a toll on him and his life. Art therapy helped Darrel express his internal feelings, specifically in a nonverbal way when he could not bring himself to verbalize how he was feeling (Saltzman, et al. 2013). The art therapy process “mimicked the interpersonal dynamics of [Darrel’s] everyday conversation and interaction,” and “contained both therapeutic benefit and psychological insight for Darrel” (Saltzman, et al. 2013). The use of art therapy on Darrel helped him tremendously and helped his therapist gain a deeper insight.

The second case involved a 23-year-old woman named Lisa. She moved to America with her father. He struggled when he moved here, causing him to

abuse her emotionally and physically (Saltzman, et al. 2013). When she moved out on her own, she had a female acquaintance from her church sleep over one night and woke up to her sexually assaulting her (Saltzman, et al. 2013). Lisa attended both individual art therapy and group. The most beneficial art experiential for her was mask making. She felt that she was a person who wore a mask. “[People] hide feeling like sadness and fear because they reveal [their] vulnerability’ [and] for sexual assault survivors” these feeling can cause them to feel out of control (Saltzman, et al. 2013). Doing this particular experiential, Lisa was able to see the potential of her life without avoidance and without pretense (Saltzman, et al. 2013).

The third case involved a 13-year-old girl named Maya (Saltzman, et al. 2013). Maya endured sexual abuse from ages 5-11 by her stepfather. She was also sexually assaulted at knifepoint, as well as kidnapped and assaulted for the period of a week (Saltzman, et al. 2013). Of all three of these cases Maya was the most isolated and setback. She attended both individual art therapy sessions as well as group (Saltzman, et al. 2013). Maya had internalized that what had happened was her fault (Saltzman, et al. 2013). Art therapy helped her express her feelings nonverbally. The most beneficial was a heart that had a jagged split down the center (Saltzman, et al. 2013). This heart symbolized hurt and isolation from her past experiences (Saltzman, et al. 2013). By attending the art therapy groups, she was able to open up and form a connection with others. Her participation in-group helped “ shift her focus from self to others, to change her beliefs and to encourage social interest” (Saltzman, et al. 2013).

All three of these cases exhibit the different ways that Adlerian Art Therapy has helped individual's process their trauma and helped them move on with their life. There were no flaws in how it was done and each case presented a different way to use art therapy. Making the art had a positive effect on the survivors and helped to enlighten the therapist so that they could enhance the therapeutic relationship between themselves and their patient. These cases and the entire article shows that, " Adlerian art therapy assists the survivor to speak volumes without words while simultaneously providing the therapeutic benefits of a cognitive, sensory, and relationally-based trauma therapy" (Saltzman, et al. 2013). This article was thorough and did not pose any real issues, controversies or questions in regards to how it works and the benefiting from it.

These three cases each used a different form of art experiential to help the survivors. The experiential that was created personally to go along with this assignment is a puzzle. However, this is not just any puzzle. The experiential has an overall design when the puzzle is pieced together. The job of the survivor would be to make a puzzle with the idea of everything happens to create them as an individual. Each piece of the puzzle fits together nicely to form an image in the end, even though at the beginning of the puzzle you may not know the overall outcome. The survivor is to come up with different things in their life such as the assault and different experiences and outcomes due to what they went through and write a different thing that contributes to their life as a whole and makes them who they are. The survivor should also leave some of the puzzle pieces blank and then cut them out to make individual pieces that can be put together. When the

<https://assignbuster.com/how-adlerian-art-therapy-can-impact-sexual-abuse-and-assault/>

puzzle is apart it looks challenging, difficult and like a mess. Without looking at specific things it does not look like it fits together. However, when placing the puzzle together, all the pieces fit and come together, showing that every piece exists for a reason. The pieces are to represent the individual's life experiences and relations surrounding the assault or any other traumatic event. The puzzle as a whole represents the individual's life. As the survivor pieces the puzzle together, they begin to realize that all pieces need to exist for the puzzle to work. Everything has a reason and everything that has occurred in their life has made them the unique and special individual that they are. Without these experiences, just like a puzzle, without all the pieces, there would be no whole. The survivor would be a different person.