

Art therapy and person centered theory



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Art therapy is a component of expressive arts therapy, which is a technique from the Person-Centered theory. This theory was founded by Carl Rogers, and his basic idea was that people are essentially trustworthy, that they have potential for understanding themselves and can resolve their own problems without intervention from the therapist (Corey, 166). Person-Centered Theory employs skills such as congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathy.

The Expressive Arts Therapy technique is based on these skills as well. This technique was created by Natalie Rogers, daughter of Carl Rogers. She believed that personal growth takes place in a safe, supportive environment created by counselors who are warm, genuine, empathic, open, honest, and congruent and caring (Corey, 181). Expressive arts therapy uses many types of arts; some of which are movement, drawing, painting, sculpting, music, writing, sound, and improvisation. These take place in a supportive setting to facilitate growth and healing (Rogers, 1). This technique also helps clients express their inner feelings by creating tangible art work. Expressive art refers to using the emotional, intuitive aspects of a person's self in various media. To use the arts expressively means having clients go to their inner world to discover feelings and to express themselves through visual art, movement, sound, writing, or drama (Rogers, 2). It is believed that many people have already discovered some aspect of expressive art as being helpful in everyday life. Some people find it relaxing as they doodle while on the telephone. Some may write a personal journal and discover that as they write, feelings and ideas change. Some people write down dreams and look for patterns and symbols. Others may paint or sculpt as a hobby and realize

the power of the experience helps them cope with everyday life. These are ways that self-expression is used through movement, sound, writing, and art to alter the client's state of being. They are ways for clients to release their feelings, clear their mind, raise their spirits, and help to bring clients to a higher state of consciousness (Rogers, 2).

Natalie Rogers created the term creative connection, which means to enhance interplay among movement, art, writing and sound. Moving with awareness can help clients discover intense feelings which can be expressed in color, line or form. When a client writes immediately after the movement and art, a free flow emerges in the process, which can turn into a poem (Rogers, 4). Every person is capable of being creative, whether it is used to relate to family or to paint a picture. The basis of creativity comes from the unconscious, feelings and intuition. The unconscious is a deep well, and many individuals have put a lid over that well. Feelings can be directed into different areas: dance, music, art, or writing. When feelings are pleasant, the art form uplifts. When feelings are fierce, people can transform them into powerful art rather than venting on others. These forms of art can help people accept the darker side of them (Rogers, 4-5).

When it comes to visual arts, images come from the unconscious to help people understand their inner world. Like another language of the body, art comes from a person's sensations and perceptions. Art media can be used as a bridge between a person's inner and outer realities by allowing the art process and images to bring messages (Rogers, 70). The visual arts can also give people the opportunity to express themselves dramatically, emotionally, and colorfully, thereby gaining insight to who they are. It can help a person

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release their feelings and express them nonverbally (Rogers, 70). Similar to other self-exploration techniques, visual arts

can help people get in touch with anger, greed, envy, jealousy, or any emotion that may be kept in the dark. It is important that an individual acknowledge this dark side and find constructive ways to use or transform that energy. Using art media is a self-motivated way for people to find themselves to become whole, integrated, constructive individuals (Rogers, 71).

Art therapy can also be used in the Gestalt approach. In this approach, the artist is asked to describe each part of art in the first person: for example, " I am a blue curving line flowing out of the page. I am dark green blobs. I am a yellow sun radiating over many dark clouds," etc. It is difficult for people to express themselves this way (Rogers, 77-78).

Art therapy, or expressive arts to be specific, can be very helpful for people recovering from a crisis such as drug addiction, physical abuse, sexual abuse or loss of a loved one. For people who are dealing with the effects of sexual abuse often find that art imagery uncovers hidden information (Rogers, 139).

Although helpful, art therapy is somewhat confusing for some people. People new to art therapy are often confused about what art therapy means. It was coined to describe the use of art expression in therapy. However, it frequently generates some unusual impressions and assumptions. Over the years, many impressions of art therapy arose. Some think art therapy is only for " sick" or " disturbed" artists, providing a special treatment for curing

their depressions, anxieties or creative blocks. Some believe that art therapy could help improve one's drawing and painting abilities (Malchiodi, 2).

In conclusion, expressive arts therapy can be very beneficial for a client. It helps clients release their feelings, clear their mind, raise their spirits, and helps to bring clients to a higher state of consciousness. The creator of this technique, Natalie Rogers believes that everyone has

a creative ability. Most people do not realize that doodling while talking on the phone is a form of art therapy. Although expressive arts therapy is rooted in the person-centered approach, it can be used in the Gestalt realm. In this realm, the client talks about the art in the first person. The client takes ownership of his/her art, and becomes the line or blobs in the art piece. Expressive arts therapy is very beneficial for people who experienced drug addiction, sexual abuse, or loss of a loved one. It helps the client uncover hidden information from the past, which is what expressive arts therapy is all about.