

Using Photography with Adolescents in Conjunction With Art Therapy to Aid in the Visual Representation of Identity, Experience, and Emotion

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Abstract

In looking for methods of integrating art therapy and photography with adolescents, my research has given me a better sense on how utilizing different artistic techniques can help create a connection between the art therapist and a client. Focusing my research on adolescent clientele, I can understand how art therapy can be beneficial to that age group because it integrates visual narratives into a therapeutic conversation that allows that client to express emotions and ideas through imagery, rather than words. Expressing emotions visually can be less intimidating for these clients and helps them create tangible artwork that represents their stories. Photography can also be utilized by an art therapist as a tool for communication that is less intimidating and accessible due to its wide usage in everyday life.

I chose to research these topics because as an artist that primarily utilizes photography, I wanted to see if others have found it to be as successful of a tool for communication and storytelling as I have. I also chose to research the adolescent age group because, at that age, I began undergoing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and dissociation and was constantly looking for ways to express how I felt nonverbally. Through personal experience and academic research, I've found that not only can art therapy be a successful form of therapy for this age group, but photography can also help clients create visual narratives that create a metaphor and can aid clients in their therapeutic undergoing and personal explorations.

Literature Review: The Connections Between Art Therapy, Photography and Adolescents

Within the field of art therapy, there are numerous techniques and art mediums that can be utilized to help the client and art therapist create a connection and start a dialogue between the two individuals. In the realization that every client is unique and requires their own individualized approach to therapy, an art therapist must be open and willing to utilize a variety of art materials and dialect to get their client to express their inner emotions, struggles, and perceptions of self. Art therapists work with a variety of people falling under different age groups, races, socioeconomic backgrounds and psychological illnesses and traumas, therefore, there may never be a singular approach to the same problem. As humans, we strive to build connections with one another and can become lost when our sense of self becomes distorted or misplaced completely, but with the aid of an art therapist, we can start creating those connections with people once again and rebuild that sense of self and purpose in the world.

Particularly with adolescent clients struggling to express ideas of identity, experience, and emotion, art therapists can utilize different art mediums and psychotherapeutic techniques to help their client create a visual representation of their perceptions and ideas. When children start developing into their adolescent stage of life, a sense of independence grows within them and they begin to stray from their parents and other adults for guidance. They also begin striving to understand who they are and how they fit in with the world, society and with people their age. When an adolescent has experienced trauma, hardship, stress or begins falling victim to mental illness, isolation, a lost sense of self and problematic and self-destructive behavior can begin to unfold. In these instances, an art therapist can aid in the healing process by presenting their client with tools for healing and guide them on a path towards rebuilding their thought processes towards their sense of self and purpose in the world.

Photography is a powerful tool that when utilized in conjunction with art therapy, can aid adolescents in the visual representation of identity, experience, and emotion. "Adolescents, more often than not, crave more original and modernized ways to express themselves than through talk therapy" and "though art can be intimidating to many people, art therapy is not a restricted form of structure; it provides and opens up many doors of positive opportunities and experiences for a considerable variety of therapists and clients" (Forslund, 2012 p.8, 10). Photography is all around us today and can be a less intimidating art-making process because virtually everyone takes photographs on a daily basis. Art therapy can help people visualize emotions and ideas and especially for adolescents struggling to express themselves, photography can be experimented with to help them create a visual dialogue that doesn't necessarily include any verbalization of the ideas being presented.

Art Therapy and Adolescents

Adolescents can be a difficult group of clients to work with. They are too old for the typical play therapy that is effective with children but also don't have the cognitive capacity yet to participate in adult approaches to therapy (Linesch, 1998, p. 45). However, art therapy is particularly effective with adolescent clients because they are already surrounded by visual imagery in their everyday lives, so communicating nonverbally already comes naturally to them, they are seeking their own sense of identity and art therapy gives them an opportunity for self-assertion and independent thought, and they're risk-takers and are more willing to experiment with things they've never tried before (Crooks, 2007, p. 54). Riley (1999) argued that:

The form and shape of therapy must conform to the adolescent worldview. It is hopeless to attempt to approach the teen client with psychological techniques created for adults.

The only workable therapeutic technique is for the therapist to enjoy working with this

age group, be interested in their opinions, and be open to learning a fresh way of looking at society and behaviors (p. 40-41).

Adolescents are seeking validation for their feelings and have a need to express who they are and art therapists can help them visualize their emotions in ways that traditional therapeutic settings can't always do.

Art-making helps break down barriers and opens up a new type of dialogue between a client and an art therapist. Because art therapists do not interpret the art being made, "clients are free to share as much of the meaning of their art as they choose" (Riley, 2001). This gives the art-maker control and as adolescents age, they begin to think more independently and this gives them the power to start the conversation and take ownership of their emotions and of their work. Even after a client creates a piece of work, art therapy, "allows clients to distance themselves from their own dilemma and, in that manner, work with the therapist towards alternative solutions to a problem" (Riley, 2001). Art therapy can be used with adolescents to give them a sense of control and independence because they aren't being probed to share more than they are comfortable with and have the power to create work that contains metaphor and becomes a tangible representation for how they feel.

In Shirley Riley's book: *Contemporary Art Therapy with Adolescents*, a deeper understanding of how art therapy works with adolescents is formulated through research and studies. She expresses that,

Adolescents want to let others know how 'screwed up' they find the world, but they do not trust enough to use words. They can more comfortably employ the silent form of communication through images. As long as they are not pressed to talk, paradoxically, they will. The art form is safe and under their control (2010, p. 57.)

The artist can express their inner emotions, feelings, and ideas by creating an outward artwork. It is vital that an art therapist builds trust with a client in order for genuine conversations and healing to occur. For an adolescent client, it is important to let them feel heard and let them feel important. If a client can feel like their feelings are valid, guilt and negative self-perceptions of who they are and how they feel can begin to fade. For clients, “making an object out of an idea is a powerful tool in the hands of the person who feels fragile and unworthy” (Dick, 2001, p. 110). Art therapist, Tricia Crooks believes that art therapists can harness creative energy and turn it into a positive exploration of self through art and help adolescents change their ways of thinking (2007, p. 18). It’s important to harness negative emotions and use them to create something constructive so that clients aren’t expressing this negativity onto themselves. Utilizing art therapy with adolescents can be a successful way to help them find a new way to communicate, express themselves and find constructive ways to release emotion.

Photography and Art Therapy

Photography is a tool that when utilized by an art therapist, can aid in communication and self-expression. Art therapist, Judy Weiser describes the power photography has to capture and express ideas in new, and symbolic ways for clients in her book, *Phototherapy Techniques: Exploring the Secrets of Personal Snapshots and Family Albums*. Weiser describes photography and self-portraiture as "self-empowerment and freedom to create ourselves" (1999, p. 19). Giving clients the power to create a visual representation of self and show themselves however they choose to gives the art-maker a sense of purpose and meaning and allows them to confront themselves. The use of photography in conjunction with a trained therapist or counselor to work through psychological dilemmas and for further understanding and exploration of communication and self is known as phototherapy. Weiser has come up with five techniques in

practice of phototherapy, which include: exploring the client's reaction to any photograph and the projective process, discussing the self portrait by a client, working with imagery of the client created by other people, understanding personal meaning within photographs that a client has created or saved and discussing the client's personal family albums and autobiographical photos (1999, p. 13). "The projective process that occurs in all five of these techniques deals with the ways and reasons that a person gets any meaning from any photograph in the first place" (Weiser, 1999, p. 13). Utilizing Weiser's techniques in phototherapy and integrating that into art therapy can help clients and art therapists create dialogue, meaning and healing through image creating and analyzing.

A client's photographs, whether created and taken by the client or found and utilized become physical objects that embody metaphor and personal discovery for the art-maker. Weiser believes that a client's photos are "tangible, symbolic self-constructs and metaphoric transitional objects, silently offering them inner 'in-sight' about things that are less consciously evident or verbally accessible" (2008, p. 2). She further states that:

During Phototherapy sessions, photos are not just passively reflected upon in silent contemplation, but also actively created, posed for, talked with, listened to, reconstructed, revised to form or illustrate new narratives, collected on assignment, re-visualized in memory or imagination, integrated into art therapy expressions, or even set into animated dialogue with other photos. This allows clients to better reach, understand, and express parts of themselves in ways that words alone cannot as fully represent or deconstruct (2008, p. 2).

Photography gives the client an accessible and non-intimidating form of art that can be used to aid in the process of self-discovery and communication. These tangible objects help the

client feel heard and helps them create a visual representation of ideas and thoughts that can be difficult to express verbally. There can also be more to photography than just taking the original photograph and going through the process. To actually develop film or edit a photograph in post-production programs can be therapeutic to the overall process and help the client feel connected with their imagery and take ownership of it, change the outcome of an art therapy session.

Focusing on the photographic aspect of this article, Thong (2007) describe the use of Adobe Photoshop and how with that tool, clients are able to create changes to an image infinitely knowing that they can always go back to the original image if they create something that they don't like (p.55). This alleviates a lot of pressure on the client creating the work because they can easily step back and begin again.

Another large concept that goes with the idea of visual imagery is empathy. Photographs and visual imagery have been used in advertising for so long because as humans we empathize with the things that we interact with and see. "The very survival of our species has and still relies on understanding how others feel, attending to the needs of those around us, and working with one another to construct a better society" (Sarinana, 2014). Not only is the client able to express something through the use of photography, but this imagery also allows the art therapist to empathize with the concepts being presented more easily. "Imagery taps into a person's earliest way of knowing and reacting to the world; therefore, it is not foreign to the experience of learning. Art as a language of therapy, combined with verbal dialogue, uses all of our capacities to find a more successful resolution to our difficulties" (Riley, 2001). When a dialogue can be formulated around a piece of imagery, not only can the client visually perceive their emotions, but art therapists can, as well and can empathize with that, allowing for connections to be made between the two people and trust to build.

When an art therapist utilizes photography, they are giving the client the power to embed an image with their perceptions of self and their emotions and a means of filling their art with metaphor. Art therapist, Jennifer Newman stated in her research on utilizing photography with adolescent clients suffering from eating disorders that, "the structure and framework in photo taking offered a starting point for art creation and a window or reflection of their direct environment to reference. As a therapist this enabled me to have a pictorial understanding of each girl's world and their perspectives on it" (2004, p. 63). For Newman (2004), "photography becomes a frame in which to explore non-verbal themes, developing one's ability for self-reflection and personal growth, in turn increasing self-esteem" (p. 13). Clients are able to place an object into their work and give it a deeper meaning. More specifically,

In psychotherapy, the principal aim in using photographs is to reach a point where, in confidential interaction, photographs and photographing function as impulses to memorize and to recognizing and expressing emotions, thus promoting the self-understanding of the client...The event of viewing or taking photos evokes sensations, emotions, and memories which can be of very early, painful or surprising nature" (Halkokla, p. 21).

In deciding what to compose an image with, the tools for that creation and how much literal information to add to an image, a client is given full responsibility and independence in what they want to represent and the photographic process helps evoke different ideas and emotions and when an art therapist helps a client change their viewpoint on a situation, a client is given the ability to grow.

Photographers are able to indicate how they view the world through their own eyes and their unique personal lens by making decisions about composition, subject matter, lighting and

postproduction and when art therapists experiment with this medium, experiences that can't always be fully expressed in words are able to be validated and conceptualized in a visual manner (Natoli, 2011, p. 4). Ginicola, Smith, and Trzaska (2012) describe how counselors can view photographs "as having a window into the client's subconscious and unconscious, thereby providing both utilities in clinical assessment and treatment" (p. 311) Photography brings forth perceptions of self and helps the art therapist see who their client is. In the dialogue created through the process of discussing an image, we can see that "meaning in a photograph is not found in the visual facts, but in the emotions and feelings, the photos evoke for a client" ("Art Therapy Techniques"). These feelings and emotions are the basis for the photograph making and it's the job of the art therapist to guide the client in visualizing their creative intentions and to create a dialogue about what these images mean in relation to them.

Photography, Art Therapy, and Adolescents

Art therapy can be utilized instead of typical talk therapy for clients seeking a fulfillment that traditional therapy hasn't brought. Art therapy helps clients visually represent and create artwork that becomes a part of who they are and helps them visualize their inner ideas and emotions. Especially with adolescent clients, art therapy can be a successful tool for giving a client a sense of independence and control over their therapeutic process and gives them the freedom to share as much or as little as they are comfortable with at that given time. Adolescent clients can be difficult to work with because they're searching for their emotions to be validated and they are too old for play therapy, but too young for traditional adult therapy. For these clients, "the act of creating requires physical, emotional, and intellectual expenditure which can serve to reaffirm for them that they are still capable of being productive and expressive" (Crooks, 2007, p. 56). When clients have validation that they are still capable of thinking, feeling and

doing, they can begin to change their thought processes and perceptions of self. The process of art-making becomes a physical and emotional experience for clients and gives them the creative experience to express ideas visually.

Photography can be used as an effective tool for expressing ideas visually for clients due to its accessibility and interactive use in daily life. Photography gives the artist control over almost every aspect of making art and with photography, a client can metaphorically or literally place themselves into the image. For adolescent clients, giving them a tool to work with that isn't as intimidating as other art materials can be is important in helping them get more comfortable in the art-making process. Photography helps clients communicate their ideas of identity, emotions, and experience visually by providing them with a tool that can be easy to use that can also be used to make art that is embedded with metaphor and visual information that art therapists can empathize with and create a dialogue about. This form of art-making helps give clients control art therapy can be a natural way for adolescent clients to connect because,

Some youth may naturally turn to the arts for comfort and healing in times of crisis, and by supporting their creative intelligence for doing so, therapists not only further encourage this practice, but also affirm the value and worth of clients as self-directed individuals. More important, clients can be encouraged to continue the work of healing long after they have been discharged from treatment (Tyson & Baffour, 2004, p. 223).

Art therapy can help adolescents take a hands-on approach to healing and growth and through the use of photography, art therapists can help clients see themselves in new ways, create visual and tangible representations of their thoughts and emotions and create dialogues that help these clients feel heard. Art therapy can “function as catalysts for self-discovery, thinking about old problems in new ways, interrupting a cycle of self-defeating behaviors, and

other therapeutic and healing outcomes”(Deaver, 2002, p. 23). With every client, an art therapist must have the ability to empathize with an individual and find new ways, such as photography, to help their clients create artwork that not only validates their feelings but puts them in control of the art-making process, giving them a sense of independence that is important with adolescents.

A Case Study on the Differences and Similarities Between Phototherapy and Therapeutic Photography and Their Uses in Art Therapy

Photographer Ansel Adams once said, "a great photograph is full expression of what one feels about what is being photographed in the deepest sense, and is, thereby, a true expression of what one feels about life in its entirety." Photographs are full of expression and this expression is created and called to the scene by the image-makers themselves and with the camera as a tool, the photographer is given the ability to create an image full of metaphor and words unspoken. This tool is not only called upon by famous photographers, such as Ansel Adams but also people seeking healing and a way to express themselves that doesn't necessarily involve words. Photography can be used in a therapeutic sense in both phototherapy and therapeutic photography. Both of these therapeutic strategies are a way for people to "access thoughts and ideas that may not come to the surface in talk therapy" (Blank, 2014). Photography is a remarkable tool that can be used to help people work through their inner struggles and as a form of self-expression.

Photographs open up a dialogue about who a person is and their inner workings as a human. Because photography doesn't necessarily have to incorporate any actual verbalization, it helps alleviate any anxiety a person may have about speaking about their ideas, thoughts, and emotions and allows the conversation to be more about the images produced and less about that person directly. In this case study, I will be discussing what art therapy is, the similarities and differences between Phototherapy and Therapeutic Photography and how utilizing photography in conjunction with psychotherapy and other art therapy related techniques could be a successful tool for clients and art therapists to explore. Photography involves not only taking photos but also analyzing photographs already taken, editing and changing a photograph in post processing,

collaging, and the idea of using photography as a tool to tell a story and to express emotion is not a new concept. This tool for expression can be utilized not only by an individual but also by groups of people, therapists, and artists alike to indicate how we view the world through our own eyes and through our own personal lenses by making decisions about composition, subject matter, lighting, and postproduction. The creative process that goes into the fabrication of an image is an extremely important part of who an artist is and one of the biggest components of art therapy because it's a tangible recollection of how a client is making connections between themselves and their art and how they're processing the artwork in relation to themselves.

According to the American Art Therapy Association, "Art therapy is an integrative mental health and human services profession that enriches the lives of individuals, families, and communities through active art-making, creative process, applied psychological theory, and human experience within a psychotherapeutic relationship" ("About Art Therapy," 2018). Their website states that art therapy engages the mind and body in ways that verbal communication can't do on its own and "kinesthetic, sensory, perceptual, and symbolic opportunities invite alternative modes of receptive and expressive communication, which can circumvent the limitations of language. Visual and symbolic expression gives voice to experience and empowers individual, communal, and societal transformation" ("About Art Therapy," 2018). "Though art can be intimidating to many people, art therapy is not a restricted form of structure; it provides and opens up many doors of positive opportunities and experiences for a considerable variety of therapists and clients" (Forslund, 2012, p.8). Art therapy is different from normal talk therapy because it encompasses the entire body and soul of a client in order to create artwork that will aid in the process of healing and self-discovery. With art therapy, a new dialogue can formulate that

doesn't have to involve words and "clients are free to share as much of the meaning of their art as they choose" (Riley, 2001).

Art therapy can be used with clients with different age, race, economic and gender backgrounds. It can be beneficial for people seeking more fulfillment than regular talk therapy can give them and can give clients a sense of independence with their decision and art-making processes. The clients are in charge of their artwork, and it is up to the art therapist to direct the conversation while still letting the client speak for him or herself. The artist is able to express their inner emotions, feelings, and ideas by creating an outward artwork. It is vital that an art therapist builds trust with a client for genuine conversations and healing to occur. In describing how an art therapist can build a relationship with a client, Sheree Sams states that "as themes in the artwork emerge it is important to remain sensitive, as the artwork is just as 'alive' as the client, a connected extension of themselves" (2012). The artwork that a client creates is a part of them and holds ties to their inner workings. It is up to the art therapist to build a relationship with a client and learn the inner workings of this person so that a bond is created between the client and the art therapist.

Art therapists, "function as catalysts for self-discovery, thinking about old problems in new ways, interrupting a cycle of self-defeating behaviors, and other therapeutic and healing outcomes" (Deaver, 2002, p. 23) It is also the job of the client to actively participate in the art-making process in order to build trust, however. As a tool for making art, photography can be explored due to its simplistic nature and accessibility, but for a therapeutic undergoing to occur, the art-maker and the art therapist need to actively strive to make connections in the work between the ideas presented and the metaphor being created through an image. Concluding this overview of art therapy, "the art therapist has the potential to harness the creative energy of the

adolescent (or other) client into a positive exploration of self through the arts, tapping into the creative, physical, and mental experiences" (Crooks, 2007, p. 18). A tool that can be harnessed during this digital age for therapeutic practice by art therapists and photo therapists alike is photography.

Photography is a useful tool within art therapy because it helps clients view the world objectively, can be used as a form of self-expression, it helps the client pay more attention to what they hear, feel, think and see, and it utilizes artistic and creative skills (Gabriel, 2017). There are two kinds of photography used in therapeutic instances, though: therapeutic photography and phototherapy. Therapeutic photography is self-driven and self-conducted, while phototherapy is assisted by a therapist or social worker (Gabriel, 2017). There is no doubt that photography can be used to guide a client or individual in formulating ideas that can be difficult to verbalize and as a form of self-expression, but within the realm of actual therapy, it is important to understand the difference between self-driven and conducted therapeutic processes and those brought upon by a trained therapist, art therapist or social worker.

Self-driven and self-conducted therapeutic photography can be easily mistaken for phototherapy because of its similar process, but it lacks an important component of therapy: the trained professional guiding the art-making. Though lacking the expertise of a trained professional, therapeutic photography still has the power to help people visualize ideas, express their inner emotions, tell stories and so much more. A photographic image creates a connection between the viewer and the photography and this connection lays the groundwork for empathy. Imagery, no matter what the emotional context it holds, has the power to make people connect with it and feel something. "The very survival of our species has and still relies on understanding how others feel, attending to the needs of those around us, and working with one another to

construct a better society" (Sarinana, 2014). Sarinana describes how our brain's neuron system uses its capacity to imitate, or empathize with others stating:

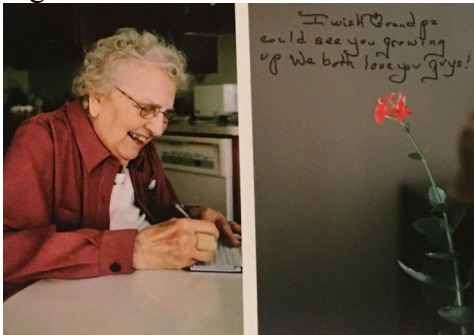
With a simple photograph, our brain will unconsciously process biological motion, attend to where emotions are being directed, activate muscles of those we are observing, and transmits this information to language processing centers where we can consciously express our own emotional reaction (2014).

When photography is used as a form of personal therapy, not only is the artist able to express their inner thoughts and ideas, but also others are able to empathize with the imagery. As humans, we are built to form connections with people and our surroundings and photography helps us see what others see and gives the artist a voice in which to speak with and tell their story.

Therapeutic photography not only helps individuals make connections with one another and the artwork, but it also gives people a new means of communicating. Psychologist, Adam Natoli (2011) states that "while verbal language is still the most common way in which we communicate our inner thoughts and feelings to others and sometimes to ourselves, words are simply representations of reality. Not all experiences or feelings are capable of being translated and accurately expressed" (p. 4). Being a photographer, much of my work is extremely personal and in one body of work titled Family Values, I explored therapeutic photography by

photographing the decaying health of both my paternal and maternal grandmothers and the death of my paternal grandfather and used the creation of this series as a means of coping with the fact that the death of my grandparents was approaching sooner rather than later.

Figure 1:



Not until after the creation of this work did I realize how much easier it was for me to express my own sadness and frustration within my images than it was for me to speak about my feelings out loud beforehand. Figure 1, *Our Last Connection* and Figure 2, *Same Chair, Different Composure* are diptychs from this series that incorporate text (*Our Last Connection*) or imagery taken by my mother during a time of health and prosperity juxtaposed with an image taken by me during the decline of my grandmother's health (*Same Chair, Different Composure*) that helped me make

Figure 2:



connections with how I felt and helped me express my feelings of fear, sadness, and frailty without having to talk to anyone about them unless I chose to. Because photographers are in control over their image and what they want to convey, they can communicate with others visually, rather than by word of mouth. This process was extremely therapeutic for me and was a source of relief during a time of emotional confusion and frustration. Therapeutic photography can be used as a tool for coping with difficult situations.

Much like therapeutic photography, phototherapy helps give the art-maker a voice and it can help the art-maker process their surroundings in a new way, however, with the addition of a trained therapist, phototherapy can open new doors for clients in self-discovery. Photography, among other tools, is a way to create what art therapist, Judy Weiser calls, "visual footprints." The "meaning in a photograph is not found in the visual facts, but in the emotions and feelings, the photos evoke for a client" ("Art Therapy Techniques"). It is important for the art therapist to let the client talk about how the photograph makes them feel and what their intention with their visual imagery was because that allows them to see what their client sees. These visual footprints

help guide the client and art therapist on their journey towards healing and gives tangible evidence to the idea that was trying to be conveyed. Not only can photographic imagery be used on its own, but these images can also be used to create collages and tell stories about the clients and what they find important within their own imagery and in the imagery of others. Seeing what items a person photographs with or collages with gives the art therapist insight into the ideas that a client finds important and the way that the client views themselves in relation to their photographs.

Though this sounds similar to therapeutic art therapy, and rightly so, without the inclusion of a therapist or a trained counselor, understanding the metaphor and artistic process used in the creation of the artwork cannot be done and this is an important and crucial step towards understanding a client and how they really feel. In phototherapy, it is important for a client to share what their artwork means to them and for the therapist not to assume anything; it is the job of the therapist to listen and understand what their client is trying to convey by listening to what they have to say about their work.

A means of communication between a client and therapist can be photography. "Photography can bring awareness of self and the environment, providing an opportunity to gain insight and opening doors to healing" (Blank, 2012). Photography can be non-intimidating due to its high consumption and usage in today's society and its accessibility through the use of smartphones and when used by an art therapist in a therapeutic setting with a client, it is just as feasible as utilizing painting and drawing. A client in an art therapy session needs no previous skills because art therapy isn't necessarily about the product created, but the creative process that goes into that. Being with a therapist and creating photographs under their supervision and instruction helps clients become more aware of their own decisions in the art-making process and

the therapists can provoke these ideas and this awareness by asking questions and starting a dialogue about the photographs presented to them and seeing what connections their clients are making to the same photographs. Researchers, Ginicola, Smith, and Trzaska (2012) describe how counselors can view photographs "as having a window into the client's subconscious and unconscious, thereby providing both utilities in clinical assessment and treatment" (p. 311). These photographs become tangible evidence of how these clients may feel and think and "making an object out of an idea is a powerful tool in the hands of the person who feels fragile and unworthy" (Dick, 2001, p. 110). Therapists can help be the catalysts for this creation and help a client make the work and see the world differently.

In the case study done by Ginicola (shown as MMG), photographs help clients and therapists analyze content and visualize memories, experiences, and emotions through a photograph's intention and subject matter. In this text, art therapist, Ginicola describes her use of photography with a client struggling with feelings of guilt towards her childhood abuse and her role in promoting a change in the client's overall view of the situation:

In a case of an adult female client struggling with familial conflict, the client revealed a history of parental abuse and neglect. However, the client had a distorted view of her family; she saw herself to blame for the abuse and felt guilty for her inability to fix her family's issues. The counselor (MMG) asked the client to explore family photographs as a way to identify specific issues the family faced throughout time. Because the client had often compared her fiancé's family to her own, I (MMG) asked if she, with the permission of her partner, felt comfortable bringing in one of their photo albums as well. As the counselor (MMG) and the client reviewed the photographs, the client was able to identify specific times in her life when the abuse occurred, starting with her first memory at 3

years of age. Exploring these events, the counselor (MMG) was able to assist the client in identifying that this abuse could not possibly be her fault. The client was able to objectively see herself as a child who should have never been physically harmed. Additionally, in comparing her photo album with her fiancé's photo album, she commented on how much happier his family seemed with each other. The counselor (MMG) asked her to make a list of the positive attributes she identified in each set of parents; after finding numerous positive attributes in her fiancé's family, she identified very few in her own. When asked by the counselor (MMG) how the lack of those attributes could possibly be her fault, she sat in the session, looking shocked. For the first time, she was able to truly confront the abusive family system and her lack of control, as a child, to influence her parents. The client was then able to move on to healing from the abuse, ultimately forgiving her parents and identifying her role in her family as an adult (Ginicola, Smith and Trzaska, 2012, p. 320-321).

Without Ginicola's guidance, this particular client would not have been able to change her view on her childhood abuse. This is an example of a situation where therapeutic photography could have been used as a tool to help a client cope with their traumas, but without the therapist guiding the conversation and provoking new thought for their client, a change in viewpoint could not have occurred and phototherapy would not have been conducted, leaving the client in the same emotional state as before.

There are benefits to both phototherapy and therapeutic photography, but if photography can be utilized by an art therapist, an accessible, less intimidating, but still just as validating form of artistic expression that when explored by a client, "a deeper understanding of the self is attainable" (Natoli, 2011, p. 3). In a phototherapy study conducted by Jennifer Newman, a client

of hers growth through the art therapy process in conjunction with photography is described and "although Tess (the client) was unable to verbalize her struggles and experiences, her artwork held powerful messages that spoke for her" (2004, p. 50). When art therapists utilize photography to create a verbal or nonverbal dialogue between them and the client, a new bond is formed and an art therapist can use that imagery to guide a client into further self-exploration, healing, and growth. Newman describes another one of the girls' final results after the ten-week period saying:

Not only was the photography a physical reflection of her but also became a tool to reflect and articulate her feelings toward herself. The natural camera distortion and alternate perspective of her physical image lead to insight regarding her own body distortions. Although using the camera and photographing her immediate environment, relationships and herself was a challenging, vulnerable experience for Nada, it enabled creative and deeper insight into her own thoughts and feelings from a safer distance (2004, p. 57).

For Newman's clients, photography became a tool for expressing who they are, what they like, how they view themselves and so much more. Newman concludes her research on these girls stating, "The structure and framework in photo taking offered a starting point for art creation and a window or reflection of their direct environment to reference. As a therapist this enabled me to have a pictorial understanding of each girl's world and their perspectives on it" (2004, p. 63).

Photography was used in this context as a means of starting the creation process and helping the clients find their voice amongst the madness that is being an adolescent. When art therapists incorporate photography as a medium in the creative process, they are enabling their clients to see the world around them in a new way and help them communicate in new ways. For clients,

"the act of creating requires physical, emotional, and intellectual expenditure which can serve to reaffirm for them that they are still capable of being productive and expressive" (Crooks, 2007, p. 56). By giving clients the tools to create artwork, art therapists are giving these people a sense of independence and when mediums familiar to them, including photography, are utilized, their artistic voices can be expressed in ways that help clients feel heard and less alone.

Photography can be a challenging medium to incorporate during any form of therapy due to the fact that confidentiality can become an issue, space for creating artwork can be difficult if sets, darkrooms or other photographic areas are needed and since photography can be expensive in the sense that printing images costs money and so do different cameras, gear and storage devices for the images. Confidentiality can be a major issue "likely due to the fact that people are so accustomed to viewing art everywhere they go that the sensitive quality of the art generated in therapy is overlooked" (Crooks, 2007, p. 70). If a client wants to explore film versus digital photography or postproduction services, such as Adobe Photoshop, additional time and financial sources must be accounted for. However, materials for art-making can be found or created inexpensively if need be and the use of photo collage of images already taken or the use of Polaroid cameras and the idea that one image is produced and it is up to the therapist or artist to store that singular image can be incorporated to provoke the same thought processes and self-expression that conventional digital photography can.

As Ansel Adams said, photographs and photography can be explored to help people understand the world around them and the camera can be used as a tool for an artist to express their view of the world. Art therapy is a form of therapy that stimulates physical and mental sensors to help clients work through psychological dilemmas and allows from them to create artwork that reflects their views on themselves, the world, mental illness and so much more and

gives people who feel voiceless a means of communicating. The artwork can be cathartic for clients and art therapists can help guide conversations around the work to deeper understand the metaphors presented and the artistic process undergone in order to create a particular piece. Photography is a powerful tool in a therapeutic setting to promote healing and coping with trauma and difficulties in everyday life. Therapeutic photography is a self-driven use of photography as a means of personal therapy. I've personally witnessed and used this to cope with emotional dilemmas and as a means of expression during a time where I couldn't fabricate my emotions into words. Phototherapy is a therapist guided use of photography to help clients express themselves, communicate visually and work through dilemmas but with the guidance of a therapist to help them on a path towards further self-discovery. If an art therapist chooses to utilize photography with their clients, they are exposing them to a medium that virtually everyone already has experience with that can help them tell stories and create imagery that expresses their inner struggles, perceptions of self and ideas on the world.

When photography is used in conjunction with an art therapist, clients are able to examine their internalized perceptions from an external viewpoint (Newman, 2004, p. 11). Because photographs hold so much metaphorical meaning and have so many literal connections that can be made by looking at a physical image, participants can metaphorically and, or, literally place themselves within an image to share a narrative (Newman, 2004, p. 11). Photography allows clients to place an object into context and give it a deeper meaning. The images that people make have the power to save lives and art therapy can be used in conjunction with this to help give a world full of humans, who feel voiceless, powerless and vulnerable, the strength to express who they are and how they feel in a way that is non-self-destructing and promotes empathy and healing.

Data Analysis

Through the reading of numerous case studies and articles about this subject matter, I can conclude that art therapy can be an extremely useful tool for adolescents to explore when looking for a different and more immersive form of therapy. For adolescents, talk therapy isn't always the most successful tool to be utilized because adolescents don't always want to talk and don't necessarily feel comfortable sharing. With art therapy, the art therapist and adolescent can create a bond and the client is able to take charge of and create artwork that is full of metaphor and emotion but doesn't necessarily share more than the client is willing to reveal at that given time. Art therapy allows the client to nonverbally express inner struggles, emotions, ideas, and perceptions by giving the client an outlet for expressing these ideas through artwork and art-making. This art-making gives the client control and it is up to the art therapist to direct conversations around the art and let the artist speak for what it is that that piece may mean to them. It is extremely important for the art therapist to let the work speak for itself and to create a bond between the art therapist and the client so that trust can be built. It is vital that the client is comfortable within this vulnerable situation where in order to heal, they must share their thoughts and emotions with an art therapist that they trust.

For some, photography could be utilized as a tool for sharing these thoughts and emotions visually. Photography not only is all around us today but also is something that has been easily picked up by the social media outlets, making it a less intimidating form of art-making. Photography can be utilized by people looking for self-guided therapy (therapeutic photography) or by an art therapist or trained counselor to help clients express an idea visually (phototherapy). Photography creates a visual representation of an idea or emotion that can be easily empathized with and used to create a metaphor. A photograph's intention and subject

matter can help display ideas of emotion, identity, memories, and experiences. These photographs also don't necessarily have to be taken by the client, but by others, which can also help the client and art therapist visualize a concept in a new way. Art therapists can use photography to help clients tell their story and to create artwork using a medium that can be less intimidating for many people and is more easily accessible than other art materials. Especially with adolescents, it's important for an art therapist to understand where their client is coming from and having them utilize a medium of art that they are already familiar with within their everyday lives can help the client feel less insecure and can create a more positive environment for healing and learning.

From research on both art therapy and phototherapy, I've found that connections can easily be made between both and the utilization of photography by an art therapist can be seen as a powerful tool for clients to utilize to tell their story and communicate visually. With my original research question being: *How can art therapists use photography with adolescents to help them express ideas of identity, experience, and emotions visually?* I can now see how photography can be utilized by a client to create personal narratives about who they are and how they feel. Photography gives the maker the power to create a scene that displays an image of their inner emotions, struggles and ideas. Photographers can literally and metaphorically place themselves in an image and photography gives the creator the power to share as much or as little as they so choose. Visual imagery is all around us today and utilizing something that we are already so familiar with can make clients feel more empowered and less intimidated by the art-making and can help them express their ideas in new ways. Art therapists can utilize photography to help clients create stories and visual narratives about who they are. Research shows that these images can become tangible evidence for a client's thoughts and feelings and

can help them tell their story in a way that allows for empathy and metaphor to flourish and help that client grow.

Reflection

Since learning about art therapy, I've been fascinated by the integration with art in therapeutic settings because I've personally found art extremely therapeutic and necessary for my survival. This research has given me a better sense of how I could utilize photography in the future with clients to help them create self-portraits, visual narratives, and stories, tangible and visual representations of emotions and thoughts and dialogues stemming from nonverbal resources. In this reflection, I will share a handful of sketchbook entries and artworks whose creation stemmed from this research and the stories I heard and knowledge I was exposed to. This extensive research gave me a better sense of who art therapists are and how they help people grow in different ways with different techniques and art mediums. For some of the clients that I learned about, photography and art therapy became an integral part of their healing process.

Art therapists have the difficult job of having to bear the weight of the knowledge that human struggle exists and listening to stories that are heartbreaking can take a toll on the art therapist. Just as a researcher, some of the stories I encountered really hit me hard in the sense that I wasn't even the one helping these clients but their stories stuck with me days after reading about them. One, in particular, was found in a case study done by Jennifer Newman with her describing one of her clients saying, "Dara seemed to have become very attached to her relationships at the hospital, possibly becoming resistant to her condition improving" (2004, p. 51). Newman is describing a patient whose home life was so difficult for her to be in, that she began finding her culture and sense of identity with the hospital and its other residents and staff, which in turn became detrimental to her recovery from an eating disorder. This idea that a client would rather be at the hospital than at home really made me realize just how difficult of a

struggle some clients have to go through. In Figure 3, *Fragile Spines*, I revisited an image I had taken previously and thought about it in a new way in my sketchbook. We all really are just fragile spines walking through this earth trying to find our place in it and where we belong and each endeavor we face takes a toll on our bodies and minds. Art therapists need to be able to hear these stories and though they will always carry them, they have to be able to let go of that burden or it will ultimately affect their effectiveness as an art therapist.

Figure 3, *Fragile Spines*



For adolescents searching to find their own sense of identity, art therapy can be explored to help them visually represent their emotions. Thinking back to when I was at the peak of struggle with my own mental illnesses and grappling with my sense of identity, I created a

Figure 4, *Who Are You?*



sketchbook entry, *Who Are You?* found in Figure 4 where I took an image taken of myself and painted over my face. Without that key part of my exterior identity, it's hard to visualize who I am. Being diagnosed with depression and anxiety and dealing with the aftermath of being sexually abused, at 15 I was left feeling as though I'd lost who I was and I didn't feel like I had an identity. Even now, I struggle with dissociation and this sketchbook entry for me, is a palpable, visual object that represents how I've felt in the past and feel now at times. Being able to create a visual

representation of my emotions helped me not only remember what I felt like back when I was in

high school and how I've grown since then but also gave me a way to talk about how I felt without having to literally speak about it. Being able to create artwork that contains metaphor and symbolism is a key part of art therapy and letting the work become a visual representation of an idea or concept can be cathartic for a client and create a dialogue that doesn't necessarily contain spoken words.

Figure 5, *It Never Leaves*



Sketchbook entries helped me process the information that I was researching about and also helped me cope with some of the stories that I heard. This entire research process left me to create multiple sketchbook entries and artworks that correlate with my findings and new insight on the information I was able to take in. In Figure 5, *It Never Leaves*, I created an image that for me, creates a visual representation of my depression. This shadowed figure isn't human but its shadow was created by me. Looking down this

hallway I can see this form waiting to snatch up its prey and even though at times its existence seems to vanish, it's only a matter of time before the symptoms associated with my chemical imbalance come back out of hiding. The fact that I created this shadowy form by contorting my own body, I was able to create a scenario where not only is that figure looming in the darkness somewhere beyond me, but it is also coming from me. My depression is a part of who I am and I can either fight it or run from it until it leaves for a while or I can work with it to get better at coping with these struggles. Creating this artwork helped me create a visual representation of

something that can't be seen and helped me view my mental illness from a new perspective, which is the goal of art therapy for some clients.

Another artwork that came from this research is *Conversations With Myself*, in Figure 6. This image represents the client and art therapist relationship and the inevitable struggle that may occur with building trust with someone and creating an environment where they feel safe and able to share within. It's hard to open up to people and as humans, we strive for someone to make our feelings feel valid, but it's not always easy to share those ideas. In this image, the black mirror represents the idea that when we can't share our feelings and stories with others, they begin to fill us up to a point where they can become detrimental to our health and healing. If the only person a client can share with is themselves, self-

destructive behavior can begin to unfold. As humans, we want to empathize with others and we don't want to feel alone in our struggles, but when we can't find people to share our stories with, they can become too big of a burden for us to carry alone, causing us to feel isolated and distant.

Through the research I was able to conduct on photography and art therapy, I was able to look deeper into what being an art therapist really looks like and also how I've used photography in the past and now to visually embody my own story and my own thoughts and emotions. It's a hard task to hear and bare the stories of others, but art therapy is important and can help so many people work through their struggles in a new way. My own artwork and sketchbook entries helped me cope with and interpret the information that I was researching and helped me see art therapy from an art therapist's point of view, but also the client. We, as humans, go through our

Figure 6, *Conversations With Myself*



own struggles on a daily basis and being able to tell our stories through art and metaphor can help bring people together and helps us better see who we are and where we fit into this world.

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