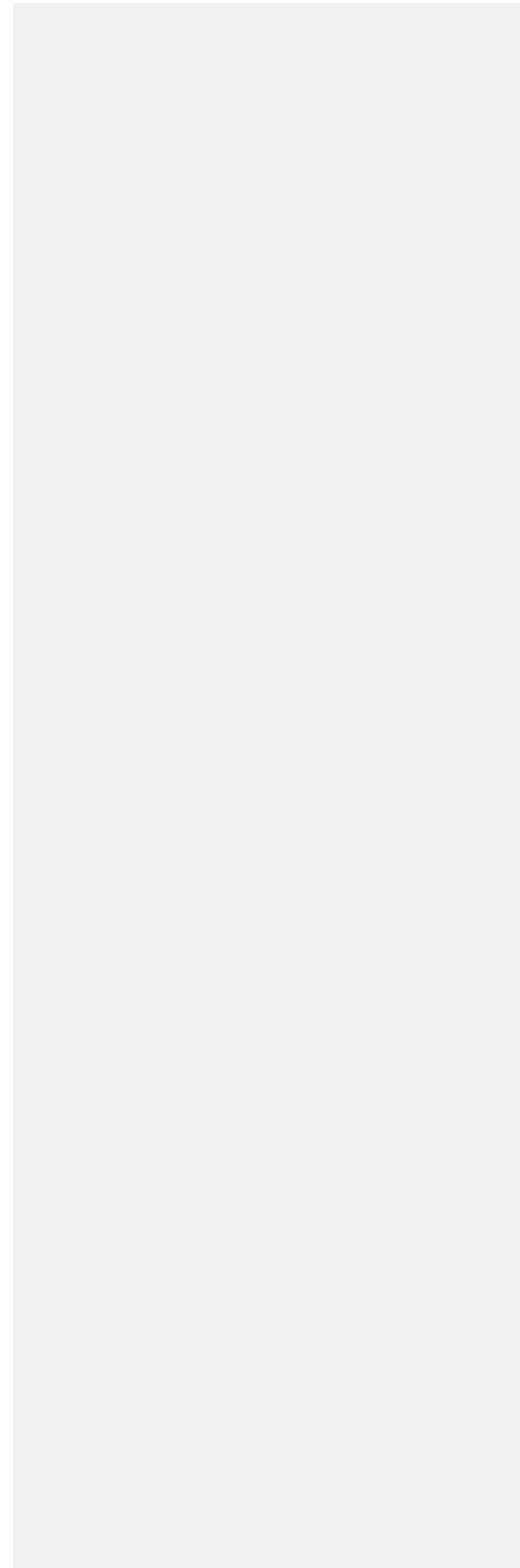


Creative Synthesis Project Assignment

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Abstract

The creative and expressive arts have afforded many the opportunity of enhancing the experience and process within the therapeutic setting. Tailoring strategies and techniques to the uniqueness of the individual helps facilitate therapeutic engagement and outcome, enhance and increase self-esteem, deepen one's understanding and perspective of personal challenges and conditions, and more. Therefore, counselors consistently look for unique and innovative methods to compliment therapeutic work. The following paper will consider the benefits of integrating the expressive arts into counseling practice, introduce counselors to and highlight a specific person-centered creative and expressive visual art activity which will include a video-based demonstration, as well as providing a synthesis of the author's experience, biblical integration, and meaningful takeaways from his Creative and Expressive Arts in Counseling course that can carry over into his professional counseling and future pedagogical career. Additional research and scholarship should be encouraged in this area to help enhance therapeutic alignment, process, and outcomes.

Commented [SLS(FC&FS1): Nicely presented abstract

Keywords: Creative and expressive arts, counseling, self-esteem, therapeutic process, creative synthesis

Creative Synthesis Project Assignment

Creative and expressive arts have been identified as a valuable tool that can be implemented within the counseling and therapeutic process (Gladding, 2021). Although counseling is already by nature a creative endeavor, the use and addition of creative and expressive art techniques within one's repertoire can better afford clients the opportunity of becoming more sensitive and attuned to themselves through encouraging and empowering them to give a greater sense of attention to their thoughts, behaviors, and feelings (Kennedy, 2008; Gladding, 2021). Additionally, Kennedy et al. (2014) note that the implementation of creative arts can benefit one's patients and clients by increasing their self-esteem, improving their physical and mental health, provide relaxation, decrease acting-out behaviors, teach/reinforce healthy coping skills, as well as develop an awareness of emotions and/or underlying challenges. Further advantages include assisting individuals in becoming more integrated and connected with themselves, increasing one's commitment and energy to engage within the therapeutic process, enhancing and sustaining one's focus, developing a greater sense of creativity, establishing a new and improved self-awareness and esteem, enriching one's perspective and insight of their internal or external conditions, promoting a stronger therapeutic rapport, as well as helping one relate to clients across diverse cultures and contexts (Gladding, 2021).

Moreover, several evidence-based approaches of creative and expressive arts have been identified as efficacious throughout the years including music, dance and movement, imagery, visual arts, writing and literature, drama, humor, play, animal-assisted, green/natural therapy, and more (Gladding, 2021). However, the following paper and accompanying demonstration will further examine a person-centered and cognitive-behavioral creative and expressive visual art approach one may incorporate within the counseling process. Additionally, a course synthesis

Commented [SLS(FC&FS2)]: Per APA, only the title for the heading of the opening of the paper.

Deleted: Introduction

Commented [SLS(FC&FS3)]: Yes! So many benefits!

will be added to this paper in order for the author to process and reflect on his unique experience within this Creative and Expressive arts course, integrate it to his biblical worldview, and share takeaways that he will carry with him from this course into his professional counseling and potentially pedagogical career.

Brief Description of Activity

According to Luke (2018), although several hundred different theoretical approaches exist within counseling and psychology, person-centered therapy has continually been identified as one of the strongest and most common major theoretical systems (Wedding & Corsini, 2014). Many have believed that Carl Rogers's person-centered approach has lasted due to its emphasis on the constructive, positive aspects of human nature (Corey, 2013). At the core of this approach is the belief that people are inherently trustworthy, contain a vast potential for self-understanding, and possess a self-directed capability to resolve their difficulties if they have an accepting, genuine, and empathic environment (Rogers, 1977). Further, the core tenants of person-centered approaches emphasize creating this environment of acceptance and authenticity through providing empathy which Watson (2002) has noted is not only the strongest predictor of client progress, but there has also not been a single study where empathy has correlated with a negative outcome.

Further, the accompanying video demonstration, will depict a segment of a counseling session with a pseudo-client where the counselor will be utilizing Altvater's (2018) person-centered creative visual arts intervention titled, "Love your selfie: A self-reflection and affirmation activity." This activity focuses on fostering an environment of warmth, authenticity, empathy, and compassion often suggested for clients who are suffering from self-esteem difficulties including but not limited to depression, trauma, eating disorders, and other body

Commented [SLS(FC&FS4)]: Excellent synthesis of relevant scholarship in this section Zach.

image issues (Altvater, 2018). Additionally, this activity also has a strong cognitive-behavioral approach as it emphasizes the importance of capturing one's thoughts and self-talk to strengthen and enhance one's ability to cultivate effective and recurrent self-affirmative messages that will positively influence one's self-image and self-esteem (Altvater, 2018). The activity will begin with the client forming/writing the message "I (heart) ME" across the handle/exterior of a mirror, in order to extend a greater level of grace, compassion, acceptance, and affirmation toward self (Altvater, 2018). Additionally, the client will take ten slips of paper and write out ten affirmative statements about him/herself, where they will then toss those into a glass jar. Following that step the client will then take out three of those self-affirming statements and read them out loud while looking in the mirror to resemble the importance of positive and loving self-talk (Altvater, 2018).

Commented [SLS(FC&FS5)]: Such a neat activity Zach! Yes, the more we do something the more we do something :)

The reason I chose this specific creative and expressive art activity to demonstrate within this assignment is because I often find myself doing similar activities with my clients as I focus on creating an empathic and accepting person-centered environment where we can embrace cognitive-behavioral approaches such as helping them identify and arrest their negative, maladaptive thoughts and self-talk while exploring and creating with them affirming, truth-filled thoughts and self-talk to insert in their place. Further, while I appreciate Rogers's person-centered approach which focuses on providing safety, security, and empathy attuned to the individuality of the client seeing the inherent good in every person, as a faith-based counselor I also consider the words of Jeremiah 17:9 which remind us that, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick" (English Standard Version). Although a positive outlook on life is crucial and can be impactful, it is also necessary that one realizes his/her brokenness and dire and desperate need for a Savior. Therefore, working in a Christian, faith-based environment where clients confirm their desire of wanting faith prioritized in the therapeutic process, I typically

Commented [SLS(FC&FS6)]: Right!

invite clients to not just write down personal affirmative statements about themselves, but also promises of God that bring them comfort and peace in the midst of challenge and adversity to remind them that even when they are struggling personally or come up against challenging circumstances that God's promises remain the same and that they are deeply loved by and can find their comfort and solace in Him.

Link to Video Presentation: https://watch.liberty.edu/media/t/1_ev1mxgno

Three Paragraph Synthesis

Learning Across the Term

I have truly learned and gained so much throughout the duration of this creative and expressive arts in counseling course. I had initially enrolled in the course because of the incredibly positive feedback I had heard and received from several of my classmates about it, and now I most definitely know why. Throughout the semester, I have been reminded of the beauty and value creative and expressive art exercises and activities can bring to the therapeutic process, pushed and challenged to try new things in my work with clients, as well as encouraged to begin implementing some of these activities within my own life and quiet time to prioritize self-care and become more attuned to my own personal thoughts, emotions, and feelings. This class has really equipped me with a fresh perspective of new practices to better help and aid the clients I have the opportunity of walking alongside of to further express themselves and identify as well as unpack their personal feelings and emotions as well. Moreover, I also appreciated the experiential learning environment that Dr. Sosin created during our bi-weekly class meetings where we got to experience specific creative exercises in order to understand the value they possess which only fueled my desire to learn more and implement these activities with those I work with. Lastly, I was grateful for the Gladding (2021) and Degges-White and Davis (2018)

Commented [SLS(fC&FS7)]: Nice integration of the biblical worldview Zach.

Commented [SLS(fC&FS8)]: Wonderful! What a privilege to see you working with your mom on this meaningful activity!

And, I am so glad you are using the activities for self care and continuing with art journaling Zach!

texts which provided their readers with opportunities to see how differing types of creative and expressive arts such as how incorporating music, drama, writing and literature, dance and movement, imagery, and more could be implemented with different ages and populations. This added resources to my counseling toolbox, especially when working with youth and adolescents, to help them more effectively express themselves beyond simply having the typical conversational style session.

Commented [SLS(FC&FS9)]: Delighted to read this!

Application to Biblical Worldview

One of the greatest takeaways I am walking away with from this class is the continued understanding that there are countless ways we as counselors can attune ourselves to the uniqueness of every individual we get to serve. I am reminded of David's prayer in Psalm 139:14 which says, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." I believe that creativity would be impossible apart from God. Ultimately, God is the creator and sustainer of all things, who uniquely created each of us in the likeness of His own image. Therefore, the affirmation, love, or reach of God is extremely significant in the lives of individuals. While we are depraved and sinful human beings who are naturally estranged from God, Zephaniah 3:17 reminds us that His banner over us is love. So, in the context of what it means to be able to know and abide in a relationship with God, this pathway is truly transformational, powerful, and beautiful. Further, I believe that helping individuals, marriages, families, and more creatively and expressively understand the love and reach of God in their everyday lives is a joy beyond comprehension, because it is from His love that we can ultimately renew our minds and begin seeing ourselves the way God sees us.

Commented [SLS(FC&FS10)]: Well said!

Meaningful Learning Throughout the Term

I believe the most meaningful learning that occurred for me throughout the term came from our virtual bi-weekly classes. During these classes, Dr. Sosin led us in a meaningful and creative grounding activity that allowed us the opportunity to really attune ourselves to our soul and what was going on in the innermost depths of hearts and lives. I truly utilized that time to slow down and capture what I was thinking and/or feeling in that present moment. Often, I find myself so busy and distracted with the constant pace of life that I forget to check-in with my own personal level of self-care and wellness. Thankfully, this class reminded me of the importance of those things as well as equipped me with several exercises and opportunities to strengthen my relationship with God, others, and myself. That being said, a lot of the learning for me in this term also took place during my personal quiet time with the Lord and through creatively expressing myself in my creativity journal. I am so thankful this class sparked this rhythm within my life and I look forward to carrying it on from here as well.

Commented [SLS(FC&FS11)]: Yes! Please keep it up Zach!

Conclusion

There is no question that creative and expressive arts can add value to the therapeutic setting and process (Gladding, 2021). With countless unique approaches, creative and expressive arts and activities only enrich and deepen the opportunity clients have to grow in their self-awareness and attune themselves to their personal thoughts, feelings, and emotions (Gladding, 2021). Ongoing research and scholarship in this area will enhance our competency as we seek to understand the uniqueness of individuals and more effectively engage them in the therapeutic process with enhanced therapeutic outcomes.

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[A joy to read and watch Zach! ☺](#)

[I know you will continue flourishing as you integrate the creative and expressive arts into your daily life with the Lord and in your counseling and counselor education. May you enjoy](#)

CREATIVE SYNTHESIS PROJECT ASSIGNMENT

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