

Art Therapy with Incarcerated Women Who Have Experienced the Death of a Loved One

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Abstract

Although the number of women entering prison has continued to soar over the last 2 decades, little attention has been paid to them in health care research. Research with incarcerated women who are grieving has received even less attention. This pilot study was based on the results of previous studies as well as the authors' combined clinical experience in the prison setting and with art therapy. Individual 1-hour art therapy sessions were offered to 8 incarcerated bereaved women for a period of 8 weeks. A variety of materials were used with a specific purpose. The women were interviewed before and after the art therapy was implemented. Seven of the women described positive outcomes following the art therapy intervention and recommended that the program be continued and increased in length.

Introduction

Women in prison who experience the death of a significant person during their incarceration face unique problems in being able to deal with their grief. They have limited opportunity to have their grief validated, openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported. Grieving in prison is often suspended, felt in isolation, and decontextualized (Ferszt, 2000, 2002). In light of the numerous adjustments that these women have to make upon release from prison, unresolved grief can have a serious impact on their ability to successfully adapt to the multiple challenges that confront them.

Following the death of a family member, women in prison are usually permitted to go to the funeral home outside of scheduled visiting hours accompanied by two cor-

rectional officers. Because they are dressed in prison attire, handcuffed, and in shackles, many women describe this as a demeaning and humiliating experience (Ferszt, 2000). Unlike other mourners at the funeral home, these women lack the opportunity to be with family members or a community of support that can share their grief.

Women in prison often feel the need to hide their feelings. If they allow themselves to show their sadness, they may be seen as weak and may experience ridicule rather than support and empathy (Ferszt, 2000, 2002; Gussak, 1997). Since correctional officers may perceive anger as a threat, the women may be chastised or placed in solitary confinement (Ferszt, 2000).

Unlike people on the "outside," women in prison are unable to access resources that are helpful to the bereaved. The opportunities to be with people who are nurturing and to find creative outlets for dealing with painful feelings, such as exercise, art, music, distraction, or even groups, are limited at best. Small gestures such as receiving flowers are not possible. An additional complicating factor is the lack of privacy. There is no place for the women to be alone with their thoughts and with their tears. Journaling, an important vehicle for dealing with painful emotions, is usually not utilized because of the fear of raids that occur on the wings. A private place to cry, or even the freedom to rest quietly, is unavailable.

Prior to this study, a grief group was facilitated by one of the authors and cofacilitated by an art therapist. It was surprising to find that nothing had been written about the grief experience of women in prison. For most of the women in the group, this was their first opportunity to deal with their grief. The group was well received by the women. The stories they shared were extremely painful, and their response to art therapy was amazing and informative.

During the group, several women described that when they were released from prison in the past, major losses such as the death of a loved one or the termination of parental rights "just hit them," often leading to repeated substance abuse to numb their overwhelming feelings of grief. This pervasive theme, as well as other insights gained from this group, served as the impetus to conduct this pilot study with the purpose of continuing to explore the benefits of art therapy with women in prison grieving a significant loss. Individual art therapy was chosen based on the experience of the facilitators and the recommendations of the women in the grief group.

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Review of the Literature

Literature discussing the use and benefits of art therapy in corrections facilities is expanding. However, the use of art therapy specifically with grieving women in prison is meager. Many incarcerated women have histories of trauma, violence, and loss (Henderson, Schaeffer, & Brown, 1998; Jordan, Schlenger, Fairbank, & Caddell, 1996; Maeve, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Singer, Bussey, Song, & Lunghofer, 1995). Because the occurrence of a major loss often triggers the memory and behavior of earlier losses or trauma (Doka, 1988; Howard, 1990; Schneider, 1994), the impact of bereavement on prisoners may be severe (Ferszt, 2002; Potter, 1999).

Marian Liebmann, a British art therapist and former probation officer, discusses the usefulness of art therapy in *Art Therapy with Offenders* (1994). According to Liebmann, "One definition of therapy is a process of engendering favorable change which outlasts the session itself.... Art therapy may then be described as the use of art in the service of change on the part of the person who created the artwork" (p. 9). McCourt (1994) asserts, "The creative process is the main therapeutic agent in art therapy" (p. 40). "I see the activity as creating oneself, acting upon paper and drawing out from within that which is dormant, making it visible and tangible, providing structure or form, giving meaning to life" (p. 43). He also states, "Art therapy involves the part of the person that is still intact and healthy—that part that the offending hasn't reached" (p. 41).

Art therapy serves many purposes in the prison setting. It provides a form of escape from a rigid and controlled environment; offers opportunities for creativity, self-expression, self-exploration, and emotional release; and can be a means of communicating experiences that are difficult to put into words (Day & Onorato, 1989; Liebmann, 1994; Woodall, Diamond, & Howe, 1997). In fact, "their art can do their talking" (Gussak, 1997, p. 10). The prison environment is a threatening place (Gussak, 1997; McCourt, 1994; Liebmann, 1994). "Inmates must constantly be aware of their environment. How they are seen and what they say are always being evaluated by other prisoners.... Consequently, an inmate learns that it is dangerous to trust others, including prying therapists" (Gussak, 1997, p. 1). Disclosure of personal issues can be quite threatening in prison. Expressing sadness or crying may be interpreted as a sign of weakness, placing the inmate at risk for ridicule by peers and correctional officers. Verbal expression of anger may be perceived as a threat to those around her and can lead to punitive measures.

Using art materials permits inmates to express feelings in an acceptable manner (Day & Onorato, 1989; Gussak, 1997; McCourt, 1994). Art therapy creates a safe place to express and discharge their tension, anguish, sadness, and anger. They can draw their feelings on paper without fear of retribution (Cronin, 1994; Day & Onorato, 1989; Gussak, 1997; Liebmann, 1994; McCourt, 1994). Art therapy responds to the inmate's intense need for diversion and emotional escape. Manipulating and choosing the various art materials provided in art therapy sessions promote

experiences of adequacy. Different media offer a range of opportunities for stimulating feelings of mastery and competence (Ferszt, Heinemann, Ferszt, & Romano, 1998; Gussak, 1997; Liebmann, 1994; McCourt, 1994; Robbins & Sibley, 1976). Hopes and dreams long abandoned can be reawakened (Gussak, 1997; Liebmann, 1994).

During the grieving process, people may feel out of control and find their ability to concentrate impaired (Doka, 1988; Rando, 1984; Schneider, 1994). For women in prison who are grieving, the loss of control may be even greater (Ferszt, 2000). "Powerlessness, helplessness and frustrated energy are the characteristics of prison life. At the most basic level, spontaneous art brings choices and decisions, extends the arena where these can be played out—the opposite of restriction and limitation" (McCourt, 1994).

In working toward growth that reaches into the future, art therapy has much to offer. The work created by the art-maker remains with him or her and is available as a reminder of accomplishment and a spur to future creative endeavors. A prisoner who had engaged in art therapy commented on its usefulness in helping him face some of the destructive patterns before his release. "The benefits of art therapy don't finish just because the picture is finished.... It's still progressing, still helping in the present, and I am looking at how it can continue in the future...." (McCourt, 1994).

The Study

Description of Participants

A purposive sample of 8 women in a state correctional facility in the Northeast participated in this study. There is no maximum-security facility for women in this state prison. Therefore, all women are placed in medium or minimum security. All 8 participants experienced the death of a significant person during their incarceration. In addition, one woman also had her parental rights terminated. The ages of the women ranged from 29 to 42 years with representation from several ethnic groups including African American, Cape Verdian, and Caucasian. Educational backgrounds ranged from completing ninth grade to 2 years of college.

Procedure

Once the human subjects review committee approved the research proposal, the principal investigator met with the warden and clinical staff to discuss potential participants who met the following criteria: (a) had experienced the death of a significant person during imprisonment, (b) had the ability to speak and read English; and (c) had no major medical or psychiatric health issues that would interfere with their ability to participate in the study. From the women identified, those who had a possible release date before the projected end of the study were eliminated because they would not be able to complete the 8 weeks of sessions and the postinterview. The research associate then met with each woman individually, described the research

project in detail, and obtained informed written consent. The women signed a release allowing anonymous photographs of their work to be used for educational and research purposes.

Demographic data were collected and a semistructured audiotaped interview, lasting 1-1/2 to 2 hours, was conducted. The women were encouraged to tell about their experiences in their own voices and to take an active role in the interview process itself. All but one of the women became easily engaged and fully participated in the interview process. These women seemed to experience a sense of relief and comfort as they were telling their stories. An opportunity was created to have their experiences validated and acknowledged.

The interviews had to be arranged around meal times, physical check-in times, and work release schedules. Each interview was held in a room with a closed door for privacy. The women were aware of the personal risk they were taking by sharing information that could bring to the surface the grief that had been contained. Clinical staff were available upon request. The women were also informed that the study was independent of the prison, and their interactions would be held confidential except in three situations: a disclosure of unreported child or elder abuse, a disclosure of suicidal or homicidal ideation, or a disclosure of a plan to escape. It was also made clear that the women would not receive any benefit associated with the prison, including influencing the possibility for parole.

Individual, 1-hour art therapy sessions were implemented with each woman for an 8-week period. A variety of materials were used in the sessions (crayons, pencils, markers, colored chalk, collage, papier mâché) with a specific purpose for each week. Approximately 2 weeks after the conclusion of the art therapy sessions, a postinterview lasting approximately 45 minutes was completed. The women had the opportunity to describe their personal experiences and responses in regard to the art therapy sessions. They were also invited to give any suggestions or recommendations.

Description of Art Therapy Sessions

To protect confidentiality, a composite case using the pseudonym Ashley has been employed to describe the therapeutic process for the eight sessions. Pamela, the art therapist, has used her own name.

Week # 1: Three Scribble Drawings and Bridge Drawing

In this first session, introductions were made and confidentiality was discussed as well as a description of the 8-week treatment period. Because Pamela wanted to allow time to build a trusting relationship, she decided that she would not initiate discussion about loss and death during this first meeting. However, all 8 women did initiate discussion about their loss in this first session.

The purpose of these two activities was to allow each woman to begin the process of drawing in a nonthreatening way. For each of the three scribbles, Pamela and the

woman used an 8" x 11" piece of paper and one colored crayon. Once the woman had selected her crayon, Pamela chose a contrasting color. The same crayon was used for each drawing. Rather than just observing, Pamela actively participated. Pamela and the woman scribbled at the same time, and exchanged papers when the scribble was completed. Pamela then asked the woman to add to the scribble, make it into something concrete, and give it a title. She could add lines and use the entire scribble or parts of it. Because each woman had Pamela's scribble as a starting point, she did not have to take full responsibility for initiating the drawing, which could have been anxiety-producing. This process was repeated two more times until three separate drawings on three separate papers were finished. At this point the woman was asked to spread out all three drawings, note any similarities or themes that went along with the scribbles, and make up a story. If the woman had difficulty beginning her story, Pamela would initiate a story using her three drawings.

The bridge drawing provided an opportunity to assess and discuss each woman's transition, the strength of her support systems, any threats she was experiencing, and any suicidal ideation. Bridges are metaphors for transitions. Looking at what is holding the bridge up helps to determine what kind of support system exists. Drawings of bridges can vary from resting on strong pillars, sitting on the ground, or floating in the air without support. Examining what lies underneath the bridge can provide insight regarding any threats the woman is currently experiencing. If the water is rough with rocks, it could represent personal threats; boats in the water can be a metaphor for feeling safe or escaping personal suffering. The placement of the woman on the drawing can assist in determining what type of transition is occurring at the present time; movement from left to right often suggests looking towards the future whereas movement from right to left may represent some kind of regressive state. Assessment of suicidality can be made if the woman is standing on the bridge and looking down (Hays & Lyons, 1981).

Ashley

Ashley came to this session guarded and reserved. Looking at Pamela she asked, "What is this really about anyway?" Pamela explained that the sessions would give her a safe and protective place to express, if she chose to do so, her feelings at her own pace. At that point Ashley decided to stay.

Ashley's lines in the three scribble drawings were very lightly drawn and limited. She titled her drawings snake, a mountain, and a needle and thread. After looking at the drawing for a very long time, she told the following story. "I was walking in the mountains when I found a snake. I thought it was a friendly snake, but it wasn't; it bit me. I was bitten so bad that I required stitches. Luckily, I had a sewing kit with me, and I sewed up the bite." Pamela asked, "Do you often think that something is safe and you find out it's not? Ashley stated that many times she makes bad decisions and then gets bitten.

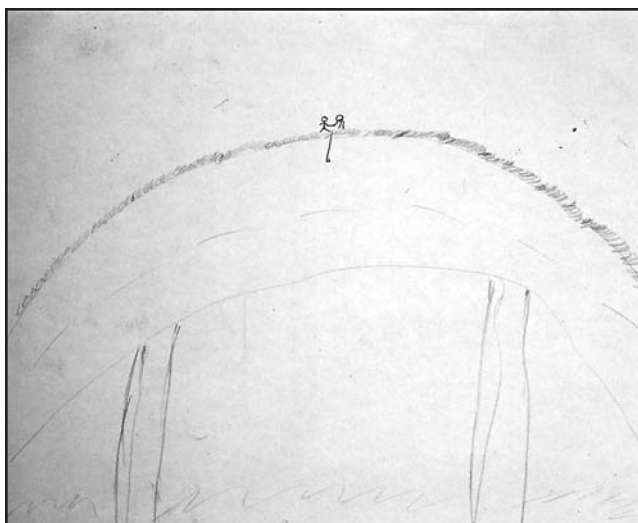


Figure 1 Bridge

I've been bitten many times, and I'm tired of taking care of myself. There's never anyone around to sew up my wound and to kiss my boo-boo. Mom was a drug addict and unable to care for me. I totally trusted Dad but he abused me. I totally loved him, but he ruined my life.

Ashley used the color black for her bridge drawing (Figure 1). "I only used black because I'm depressed, and that's the best color to represent this feeling." She placed herself and her boyfriend holding hands, about to jump from the top of the bridge. She shared with Pamela that she wished they had died together. "We crossed over that bridge just before the accident that killed the one person in the world I loved the most." Although Ashley's drawing showed some suicidal tendencies, she denied being actively suicidal. She also described herself as being well connected with her prison counselor. Prior to the end of the session, Ashley wanted assurance that Pamela would return the following week. The shift in affect from a guarded young woman to a more open one was quite striking.

Week # 2: Diagnostic Drawing Series (DDS): Free Drawing, Tree Drawing, and Feelings Drawing

For this activity the women were asked to draw a free drawing, a tree, and a feelings drawing, using colored chalk on an 18" x 24" white piece of paper (Fowler & Ardon, 2002). This activity was selected to encourage discussion about the women's grief and to make connections between colors, shapes, images, and their own feelings.

Ashley

Ashley drew the free drawing without hesitation. A very small heroin needle, monochromatic and in solid brown, was in the center of the paper. "Heroin ruined my life and was the reason for that terrible accident. Following the accident, I would have killed myself if I could have. After all these years, I know that I never want to use again."

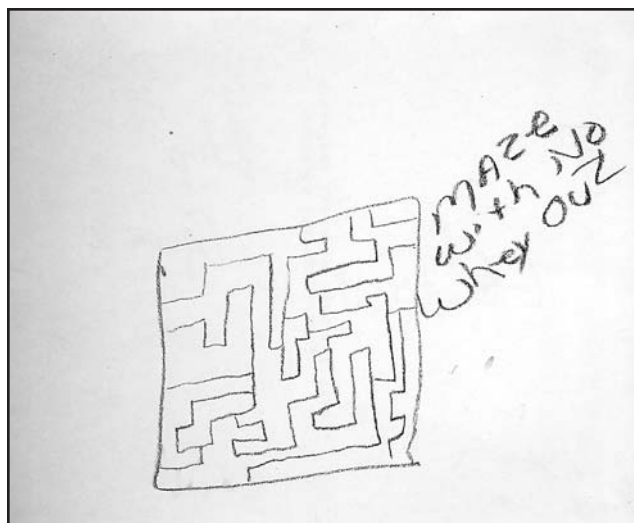


Figure 2 Maze

In the tree drawing, Ashley drew a tree stating that it looked like the olive tree from the bible. Pamela asked Ashley if she could tell the biblical story about the tree. "Judas waited near this tree after he betrayed Jesus. He then hanged himself from the same tree." When Pamela asked Ashley to connect the story to her own life she stated, "I feel betrayed by many people in my life. I often wished I was dead. I can't trust anyone in prison. I can't say anything because I'm afraid it will be repeated somewhere else."

For the feelings drawing, Ashley drew a maze that was simple, monochromatic, and black (Figure 2). Ashley stated,

This is how I feel being in prison; I have no way out. I've been thinking about the idea of mazes all week. There's no way out of prison and no way out of my head. There's no exit. I even asked my cellmate to draw one for me.

The maze was titled "No Way Out." As Ashley and Pamela discussed all three drawings, Ashley recognized that they were all very controlled, just like her feelings. "I keep my feelings controlled on the outside, but on the inside it's one big chaotic mess."

Week # 3: Montage with Natural Objects and Classical Music

This activity provided a soothing environment where noises were blocked out by the music. A safe and quiet place allowed the women to get lost in a tactile and sensory process. The women could select from a variety of objects including sticks, shells, moss, tea leaves, dried beans, rocks, sand, and feathers. The process ended with a beautifully completed piece giving the women a sense of pride in their creative ability.

Ashley

Ashley had a difficult time beginning this project. It was an exceptionally stressful week on her wing; several

fighters had occurred. Ashley appeared tense and distracted. Gradually, she began to pick up the objects, smelled some of them, and became teary. "I forgot how important smells are and I miss the beach. I've basically given up on my life. When my boyfriend died, I just gave up." After a short pause, she began gluing sticks and covered them with feathers. She added two large shells and a smaller shell underneath them. Borders of twigs and dried tea were placed along the edges (Figure 3).

Ashley identified the large shells as her boyfriend and herself on a raft, where they both felt safe. The piece reminded her of the ocean. "I love the ocean. I haven't touched these materials in such a long time." At the completion of her montage, Ashley quietly and carefully smelled the materials once again stating, "Maybe, just maybe, I do have something to look forward to." As the session ended, Ashley thanked Pamela. "I'm so glad I came here today. You reminded me that I can have something to look forward to." Ashley appeared peaceful when she left the session. The materials gave her an avenue to access a glimmer of hope and a reach toward the future. This was a breakthrough for Ashley; it was the first time that she shared deep intimate feelings and spoke even briefly about having a future.

Week # 4: Collage with Magazine Photos

For this activity Pamela brought pictures that she had cut out from magazines and divided into six categories: people, animals, food, places, things, and words. Being able to select from these categories gave the women structure. Pamela instructed each woman to select as many pictures or words that she wanted to use, keeping her deceased loved one in the back of her mind. She could choose many images from each category; all six categories did not have to be used. The combination of images and words allowed innermost feelings to surface.

Ashley

Ashley took a long time searching through all of the pictures and words. She picked up many images, examined them, and then either set them down or selected them. Once Ashley finished selecting the images that she wanted to use, Pamela asked her to set them in front of her and talk about how they related to her loss.

Ashley chose pictures of police officers and people with handcuffs, a syringe, bottles of alcohol, a bed, a crib, a baby on a toilet seat, and an American Express Card (Figure 4). She had a sad affect during her discussion with Pamela about the significance of the chosen photographs. People in handcuffs were a metaphor for the constraint that she felt in prison and a constant reminder of being incarcerated. The photos of alcohol led to a discussion of how much "I really like to drink. I know that I would continue to drink when I'm released if I wasn't monitored."

Ashley spoke at great length about past regrets and her long history of poor decisions. She described how heroin destroyed her life, hence the syringe. "I know that I'd never



Figure 3 Montage (shells)

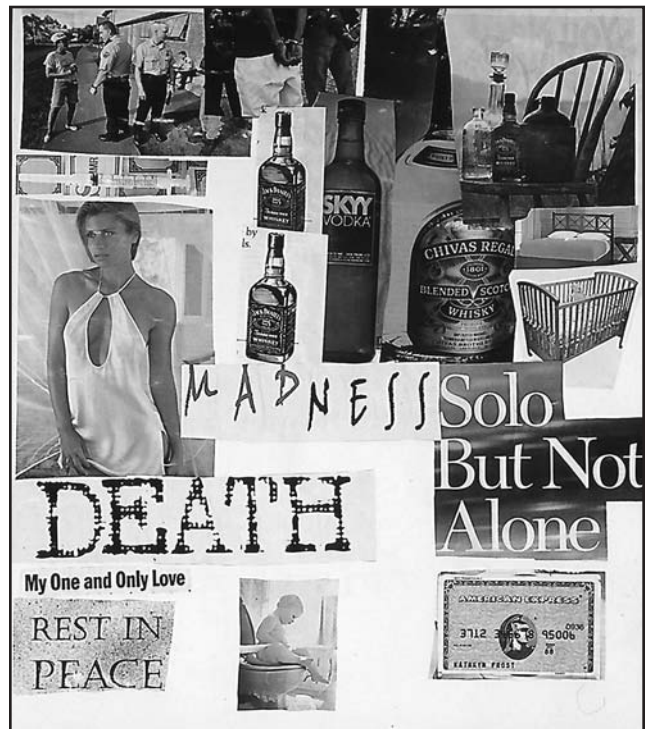


Figure 4 Collage

go back to using again. It ruined me and hurt so many people." The bed captures the lack of a good night's sleep due to uncomfortable mattresses in prison. "It's been a long time since I slept in a comfortable bed. My boyfriend and I had such a great mattress." Ashley brightened when she began talking about the crib and the baby on a toilet seat. Both of these images reminded her of her niece and nephew. "I love those kids. I want to be part of their lives. I want to see them grow up. I've already lost so much time." As she stared at the American Express card, memories of her father surfaced. "He would always fix any situa-



Figure 5 Mask

tion with his money. When I was put in jail, I asked him to please get me out. He said, 'I'm sorry but this situation can't be fixed with my money'."

In addition to the pictures, Ashley chose several words: "madness," "solo but not alone," "death," "my one and only," and "rest in peace." "I feel like I'm living in madness, both in prison and inside my head. My boyfriend was my one and only. I hope he is living in peace now and that one day he'll be able to forgive me." The words "death" and "rest in peace" reminded her of wanting to go to his gravesite. "I want to bring flowers to him, sit by his grave, and listen to the music that we both liked."

Although memories of her boyfriend and her pain related to his death are still fresh, even after 8 years in prison, some of the collage images represent hope for the future. Family has great meaning for Ashley. She looks forward to becoming a significant part of the lives of her niece and nephew. When she stood up to leave, she once again thanked Pamela and needed reassurance that she would return. "This is really helping me look at my loss and begin to deal with my grief. I'm looking forward to our next session. You will be here next week, right?"

Weeks # 5-7: Papier Mâché Mask-Making

This activity was a 3-week-long project requiring the women to be patient and postpone immediate gratification. The use of papier mâché masks allowed the women to explore the metaphor of masks, discuss how masks are used in different life situations, and how they can be effective or limiting. Role-play, using the masks, allowed the women to speak freely in prison.

Ashley

Ashley was slightly timid with this new and messy material. When she saw that Pamela was willing to get her hands messy, she quickly joined in. While she was making the mask, she talked with Pamela about how people wear different masks in different situations.

I show different parts of my personality to different people. I don't show my sadness to anyone in prison. I wear the mask of a tough girl like I have it all together and am really strong. That way no one messes with me. I'm not as strong as everyone thinks, but I don't want anyone to know that. My mask is a mad one. I can be comfortable with mad but not with sad. A lot of people take sadness as a sign of weakness.

After her mask was completed (Figure 5), Ashley painted it green with three white eyes. She painted quietly, using a great deal of concentration. As she was painting, she talked about how people wear masks for protection against others who take advantage of their weaknesses. "Sometimes people misinterpret kindness for weakness." She described her mask as an alien. "Aliens are different. No one understands them or knows why they exist." When Pamela asked her how this related to her own life, she stated, "People don't believe me or understand me." Pamela asked about the three eyes. "I can see through people and understand their motives. I always see what people are up to; I can see their personalities, and I can recognize a snake."

Week # 7: Positive Memory Drawing

In addition to completing their masks, the women were asked to draw a positive memory using markers and 12" x 18" paper. The purpose of this activity was to provide an opportunity for the women to explore and recall something positive as opposed to dwelling exclusively on the negative.

Ashley

Ashley drew in silence and only spoke when the drawing was completed. It showed a small and a large figure sitting together on a park bench on a summer afternoon (Figure 6). When Ashley was a little girl, she would go to the park with her father. "We could talk about anything and everything." Although she has positive memories of her father, she is filled with anger and rage because he sexually abused her.

My father betrayed me. I turned to drugs; they made me feel important and beautiful. Drinking filled a void that my

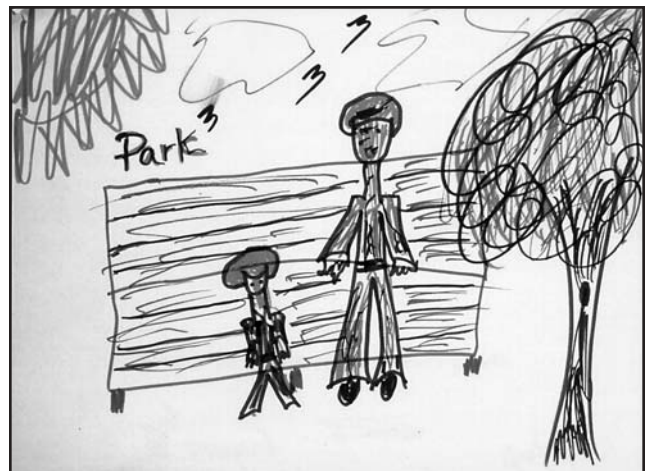


Figure 6 Park Scene

father and mother left. The drugs gave me the courage to stop the incest and stopped me from feeling my pain.

Even though this activity started as a positive memory, it made connections for her between her father, the incest, and her legacy of losses. While she was talking, she made scribbles throughout the empty spaces of her drawing. "Now the picture feels more chaotic, more like my life; my feelings for my father are chaotic too."

Week # 8: What I Want and What I Need

This session began with Pamela asking each woman to draw a picture of what she wanted and what she needed. The women were given a 12" x 18" piece of paper and oil pastels for the drawing. Some of the women wanted to focus only on what they wanted. After the drawing was completed, Pamela and each woman talked about the differences between want and need. Together they reviewed their work from all eight sessions, discussed their experience using the art therapy as a treatment modality, and discussed termination.

Ashley

Ashley wanted to focus her drawing on what she wanted. She titled her drawing "Life—A Lesson Learned" (Figure 7). Her drawing had a clock with wings, an eagle with a flag, flowers, and children with halos. As she was drawing, she talked about how she was once unaware of the pain she caused others.

I got to jail so that I could see, like a hand from God. Time is moving on while I sit still in prison [clock]...I care about this country and there still is so much bloodshed [eagle with a flag]. I think about all the people in my life that have passed away, even my babies through miscarriages and abortions [children with halos]. Someday I'll plant flowers again.

The drawing had symbols of sadness but also of hope. It had many names on it representing all of the friends she and her boyfriend once knew. They are dead as a result of drug abuse. The tears were for her boyfriend; the child praying was Ashley hoping that one day she would be forgiven. Flowers and children symbolized the hope for a better future.

This was a difficult session for Ashley. She walked into the room angry, defensive, with her arms crossed. She was angry because all the feelings that she had buried had come to the surface. Softly, Pamela said to her, "I don't think that this is the real Ashley. You showed me parts of you that are very caring and sensitive." "No this is the real me, the angry me," she retorted. Pamela once again disagreed. She then looked at Pamela, who maintained a quiet presence. After a long silence, Pamela suggested that perhaps she was mad because this was the last session, and she once again felt abandoned. She replied "Everyone that I care about eventually leaves. I don't want to care about anyone anymore."

At this point Pamela reminded Ashley of all the positive things that she had identified and looked forward to: being part of a family again, having a comfortable bed to

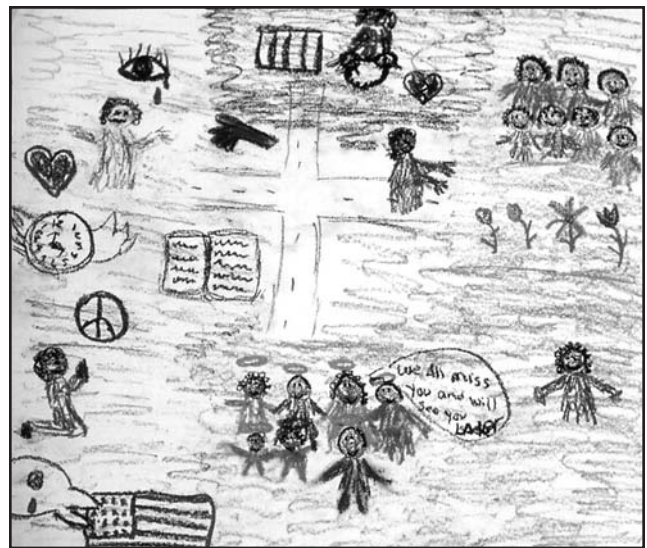


Figure 7 Drawing

sleep on, taking walks on the beach, smelling sea shells, and planting flowers. Visibly, she became calmer and was able to move beyond the anger, recognizing that termination with Pamela was the real issue. This was another breakthrough for Ashley. Pamela reassured her, stating, "I understand your anger, and I didn't take it personally. I also knew that there was a lot more to you than that."

In the past, Ashley would frequently become angry without being aware of the source of her feelings. She pushed others away for fear of being disappointed, hurt, and abandoned. She soothed herself with self-destructive behavior. Now she was beginning to recognize her anger, talk about it, and develop a plan to meet her needs. She decided that she was ready to make better use of the time with her counselor. She was ready to talk about what was really going on inside of her rather than use a mask to distance and protect herself.

As a result of these 8 weeks, Ashley had begun to explore all the losses in her life. She had gained tremendous insight into her behavior and was now ready to deal with feelings that had been buried for years. In the process of termination, all of her work was reviewed. She smiled at many of her pieces and once again smelled the natural objects. She commented on her own creativity. After 8 long years of bottled up feelings and overwhelming guilt, she was finally able to see a future for herself. Perhaps one day Ashley will forgive herself, become part of her family again, and plant flowers.

The Benefit of Art Therapy for Ashley

Ashley's experience with art therapy is a good example of the benefits of this treatment approach. She benefited a great deal from the materials used and was able to access and express her feelings through a medium other than verbal therapy. This therapeutic process helped her to begin to identify and grieve the multiple losses in her life. Through the art therapy process, she found hope and began to move

towards a future that she believed she had lost. Her ability to create gave her a sense of competence.

Results of the Study

Six women in this study described in great detail how the art therapy allowed them to express feelings that were “bottled up” or were “shut down” for fear of “getting into trouble.” A safe place was created where the women could express feelings of sadness, emptiness, and anger. These six women also discussed that the art allowed them to express feelings that they were not able to express with traditional talk therapy. Although painful feelings surfaced, happy memories also surfaced and created a balance for them.

Five women discovered positive aspects about themselves that they never knew existed. The experience of creating increased the women’s self-esteem and sense of competence. This finding is consistent with Ferszt’s (Ferszt et al., 1998) previous research, “Transformation Through Grieving: Art and the Bereaved.” One woman in the study shared that she was finally able to look at her loved one’s photo after 2-1/2 years, stating that this was a healing experience for her. Several of the women kept some of their artwork in their rooms to remind them of their creative ability and their competence. Five women described increased positive affect each day after the art therapy sessions.

Seven women recommended that the program be continued and suggested that it be increased in length; one woman preferred traditional talk therapy. One woman needed to increase individual counseling after the 8-week program was finished. Terminating with the art therapist raised earlier issues of loss that needed to be further addressed. However, both the woman and her counselor stated that she had benefited greatly from the art therapy and wished that it could be continued.

Implications and Recommendations

Much work needs to be done with this underserved population. Art therapy holds great promise in being able to assist inmates with their grieving process in a safe, supportive environment. Data from the interviews from this exploratory study give testimony to the effectiveness of this treatment approach. More studies in this and other correctional facilities would add to the body of literature that is sorely needed. Longitudinal studies would also be useful in assessing the lasting effects of art therapy for grieving women offenders once they have been released from prison.

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Call for Applications: Journal Editor

The Journal Search Committee seeks applicants with experience and interest in scholarly writing to serve as Editor of *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, a quarterly professional publication. The position has a three-year contract, renewable once for a total of six years. The contract includes a per-issue stipend based on the experience of the applicant. Applicants must be Credentialed Professional Members of AATA.

Responsibilities of the Editor include:

1. selecting and maintaining an Editorial Board (with approval of AATA Board of Directors) consisting of a Journal Advisory Board and an Editorial Review Board;
2. soliciting, reviewing, selecting, and copy editing submissions to the Journal;
3. planning the overall form and content of issues in collaboration with Associate Editor, Production Editor, and Journal Advisory Board;
4. maintaining the scholarly and ethical quality of each issue;
5. writing an editorial/introduction for each issue or designating an appropriate substitute author;
6. generating acceptance and rejection letters for submissions and answering questions regarding Journal policy and procedures as determined by the AATA Board;
7. conducting Journal Committee Meetings at the AATA Annual Conference and reporting to the AATA Board of Directors and to the membership;
8. assisting in the selection of an Associate Editor.

Qualified candidates are invited to apply by submitting to the AATA National Office a letter of intent, an up-to-date curriculum vitae, and samples of their professional publications. Finalists will be asked to review and copy edit an article and to write a sample editorial. Applications will be reviewed by a search committee composed of two of the present Editorial Board members, two members of the AATA Board of Directors, and a Member-at-Large. Position will be open until filled.

Calendar of Events

November 16-20, 2005

American Art Therapy Association, Inc. (AATA) 36th Annual Conference
Hilton Atlanta, Atlanta, GA
Contact: 1-888-290-0878 or e-mail: info@arttherapy.org

November 15-19, 2006

American Art Therapy Association, Inc. (AATA) 37th Annual Conference
Hilton Riverside, New Orleans, LA
Contact: 1-888-290-0878 or e-mail: info@arttherapy.org