


A THERAPEUTIC ART JOURNALING GUIDE FOR ART THERAPISTS WORKING WITH
TRANSGENDER PARTICIPANTS

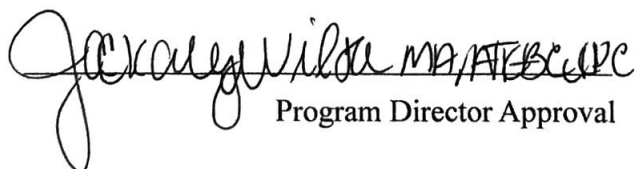
by


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Abstract

This professional contribution examines the use of art journaling, which combines the use of expressive writing and visual creativity, with the transgender population. Topics covered include ethics, marginalization, therapeutic artmaking, expressive writing, among others. The culmination of this project is a 15-page guide written for art therapists working with this population. The guide details a selection of art journaling directives to support transgender art therapy participants in developing their understanding and processing of various aspects of identifying as transgender. The guide includes materials needed for artmaking, details related to both writing and artmaking components, and questions to guide therapeutic verbal processing post-artmaking. Limitations and recommendations for future work in this realm are also provided.

Keywords: art therapy, gender identity, transgender, art journaling, visual journaling, expressive writing

Introduction

Transgender individuals are subject to hate, marginalization, and mockery in today's sociological climate. This stress compounded with life's other stressors may lead transgender individuals to seek art therapy services. Art therapy may assist these individuals in reducing stress, exploring their gender identity, and fostering a sense of community. Art therapy may also be beneficial for this population similarly to how it is beneficial for other populations—art therapy may assist in developing self-care skills, facilitating greater emotional expression, and problem solving, among a myriad of other benefits (Kaimal et al., 2016). Because transgender

individuals may seek art therapy services to support them in these areas, art therapists must be prepared and competent in working with this population.

Art therapy research with this population is sparse in comparison to research with other populations. Though this is not an experimental research project, this project aims to fill this gap by providing a thorough literature review of information relevant to working with this population in addition to an offering of a culminating professional contribution project consisting of therapeutic art journaling directives for use with transgender participants in art therapy.

This project combines the use of visual artistic expression with written expression. Art journaling is “a mixed media method that combines free or guided artistic expression along with reflective or expressive writing produced in a bound journal format or on loose pages” (Beaumont, 2018, p. 55). The benefits of combining these two approaches to creativity are reviewed within this project. Integrating art journaling into art therapy process may facilitate greater insights into the participant’s inner world and perspectives. Transgender participants in art therapy may benefit from the combination of written and visual expression in art therapy. This project is intended to explore these potential benefits and provide art therapists with guidance in working with this population in this manner.

Literature Review

Introduction

The intention of this literature review is to comprehensively cover topics related to the integration of expressive writing into art therapy practice with transgender art therapy participants. An overview of basic concepts related to transgender issues and gender identity is provided, as well as the benefits of therapeutic artmaking in conjunction with expressive writing. Art therapists may review the ethical considerations present in work with transgender

participants in addition to recommendations for the application of expressive writing in art therapy. The foundation presented in this literature review lays the groundwork for the development of this professional contribution project, which integrates the following information.

Understanding Gender Identity

When people are born, they are assigned a gender at birth according to their physical sex characteristics. Those society defines as “female” are put into the category of “girl,” while those society defines as “male” are placed into the “boy” category. Healey (2014) explores the complexities of sex and its relationship to gender; they define sex as a collection of physical qualities including sex chromosomes, external genitalia, sex hormones, gonads, and internal reproductive organs. Though sex is used to assign gender at birth, gender is complex and separate from one’s sex. Gender is an interaction between a variety of factors, including one’s assigned sex, but also one’s concept of self as male, female, or non-binary, as well as external expression of one’s gender identity through behavior (Healey, 2014).

Gender identity is one’s felt and lived experience of their own gender (Healey, 2014). For transgender individuals, their gender assigned at birth is not congruent with their gender identity. For example, an individual assigned female at birth may experience their gender as masculine-oriented and choose to transition from female to male. The term “transgender” can be used to describe a range of experience. This includes but is not limited to identities such as third gender, non-binary, transgender man, transgender woman, and two-spirit. The term “cisgender” refers to individuals whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth are in alignment. Third gender or non-binary individuals do not identify as male or female, but instead as neither, both, or some combination of genders. Two-spirit is a term utilized in Indigenous

communities to encompass their sexual and gender identity in relation to cultural and spiritual identity.

Gender Dysphoria

Some transgender individuals experience gender dysphoria, which is defined by the American Psychiatric Association (2022) in the DSM-5-TR as incongruity of one's assigned gender at birth and one's experienced gender. Individuals with gender dysphoria experience a desire to be viewed and treated as their experienced gender and sometimes have a desire to gain sex characteristics aligned with their experienced gender (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). To qualify for a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, individuals must express such feelings for at least six months and report distress/ impairment related to gender dysphoria (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). A diagnosis of gender dysphoria allows transgender individuals the opportunity to seek gender-affirming medical care. However, it may serve to pathologize and further stigmatize transgender identities.

Working with Transgender Participants in Therapy

Ethical Considerations

Art therapists have a responsibility to ethically approach their work with transgender participants, both in research and in practice. A key practice in this approach is that of self-reflexivity, or facing one's privilege, biases, and motivations for one's work (Zappa, 2017). This level of transparency in research allows one to identify one's limitations in perspective. In practice, self-reflexivity allows one to better understand one's biases and dynamics in relation to one's therapy participants. Additionally, acknowledging one's privilege as a therapist at the appropriate moment may be key in building rapport and trust within the therapeutic relationship.

By practicing self-reflexivity, art therapists and art therapy researchers can begin to make steps towards any necessary changes in their pre-existing attitudes or biases.

Art therapists are bound to follow the Art Therapy Credentials Board (ATCB) Code of Ethics. Many of these codes are applicable in work with the transgender population. Code 1.1.1 states that art therapists are not to discriminate against individuals or refuse to provide services based on gender or gender identity (ATCB, 2021). Art therapists are also to support participants in their right to make their own decisions autonomously and provide perspective on potential consequences of their decisions (ATCB, 2021). This may be especially important when supporting transgender participants when they are deciding whether to pursue transition. One final ethical code to consider is ATCB (2021) ethical code 1.2.4, which states that art therapists should develop their multicultural competence and humility through continuous training and education. This short list of codes applicable to work with transgender individuals is by no means entirely comprehensive; art therapists should familiarize themselves with the ATCB Code of Ethics and determine the applicability of codes to their work with transgender individuals.

Ethics in Research with the Transgender Population

Zappa (2017) notes issues in existing literature and makes recommendations for future research related to this topic. They point out that problematic issues in existing art therapy research with the transgender population fall into three categories: misgendering, erasure, and pathologization. As seen in Piccirillo (1996), masculine pronouns were used for participants who desired to be identified as female. Additionally, Piccirillo (1996) repeated assumptions of gender-diversity as pathological, including the idea that identification as transgender is the result of failing to individuate from one's mother and described the "ambiguity" of transness as "repulsive" to some people (Piccirillo, 1996, p. 45). Zappa (2017) also remarks upon the erasure

of the transgender perspective in art therapy research, resulting in the lack of intersectionality in research.

Recommendations for future research include allowing transgender individuals to speak for themselves, making one's biases and assumptions clear in one's research, and exploring how art therapy practice can marginalize transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals when practiced unethically. According to Tepper (2021), transgender participants frequently experience pathologizing when seeking care for mental health. Art therapists must avoid pathologizing individuals of nonconforming gender identities and extend them a compassionate hand. Professionals who lack understanding in transgender issues contributes to participant reluctance to seek health care and other needed services (Rose & Lonsdale, 2016).

Approaches to Art Therapy with Transgender Participants

One method for working with transgender individuals is through a compassion-oriented approach, as proposed by Beaumont (2012). The purpose of a compassion-oriented approach to art therapy is to create a supportive setting for individuals to explore and develop their gender identity. The function of art therapy in this context is not to change an individual's gender identity, but rather to create a space in which participants can express concerns regarding gender and find solutions to improve gender dysphoria, if any is experienced. Compassion-oriented art therapy (COAT) utilizes mindfulness and expressive arts to assist participants in becoming aware of their emotions (Beaumont, 2012). COAT allows participants to practice self-soothing, produces awareness of the connection between self-soothing and compassion towards others, as well as assists participants in becoming more comfortable with expressing compassion towards themselves. This modality is especially effective for individuals who are struggling with self-acceptance, which may be the case for many transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals.

Pelton-Sweet & Sherry (2008) make additional recommendations for art therapists working with LGBT participants which can be applied to work specifically with transgender participants. Art therapists must be aware that reparative therapy (more widely known as conversion therapy) has been denounced by a variety of organizations including the American Psychological Association and the National Association of Social Workers (Wiggins, 2023). It is imperative that art therapists do not approach their transgender participants with the intent of changing their gender identity or making them cisgender. Art therapists must also be knowledgeable of transphobia and cissexism. Additionally, art therapists should understand the development of gender identity, approach participants non-judgmentally, respect the differences between individuals, and be open to talk about any part of their participant's life.

Sociological Perspectives

Kohlberg (1966) proposed that children absorb gender roles in conjunction with their cognitive development. Children first understand their environment through their self-concept; anything related to their self-concept becomes of high value to the child. By the time a child is three years old, they start to identify their gender and relate gendered labels and concepts to themselves and others. Kohlberg (1966) postulated that at six years old, a child experiences gender constancy, when gender is permanently established for the individual. For people with nonconforming gender identities, such as transgender individuals, gender constancy may be experienced at different ages as gender identity is explored throughout development. From ages three to five, children utilize their gender identity to find cues in their social interactions to subsequently guide their behavior (Lindsey, 2021).

Out of cognitive development theory arose gender schema theory, put forth by Sandra Bem (1981). In this context, schemas are defined as “cognitive structures used to understand the

world, interpret perception, and process new information” (Lindsey, 2021, p. 106). According to Bem (1981), schemas inform children what is permissible dependent on their gender. An example of this is a young girl watching television and seeing a woman engaging in domestic tasks such as cooking or cleaning. Models of men in media may include working outside of the home or participating in sports. As gender schemas develop in childhood, behavior and self-esteem is greatly affected; the more aligned a child’s behavior is with socially acceptable gender schemas, the more likely they are to experience higher self-esteem and confidence (Lindsey, 2021).

The Impact of Marginalization

Cisgender individuals benefit from privilege in society. This privilege is based in the assumption that the cisgender experience is normative and universal, and often this privilege goes unexamined (Healey, 2014). For transgender or other gender nonconforming individuals, moments in everyday life can become a matter of life or death. From deciding how to present themselves to deciding which restroom to use, they face the risk of harassment, discrimination, and hate crimes. Prevalent transphobic attitudes in society and cissexism result in these negative outcomes for transgender individuals.

Benefits of Therapeutic Artmaking

Stress Reduction

Participating in art therapy can provide several clinical benefits to individuals seeking services. Artmaking has potential to reduce stress, facilitate greater levels of emotional expression, aid in developing self-care skills, and increase emotional regulation abilities. Kaimal et al. (2016) conducted a quasi-experimental study to examine the effect artmaking had on the salivary cortisol levels of 39 individuals. Cortisol is understood as a biological marker of stress

levels in humans; more stress is associated with higher levels of cortisol. It is theorized that art therapy has the potential to reduce stress levels through the experience of catharsis, which in turn reduces internal tension (Kim, 2023).

In Kaimal et al.'s (2016) study, they provided participants with an open art therapy directive with options of using markers, clay, or collage and conducted 1-hour individual sessions over the course of four months. Researchers collected saliva samples prior to and following art therapy interventions. Results showed that the participants' salivary cortisol levels lowered after engaging in artmaking. This finding supports the idea that participating in art therapy has stress-reducing effects. A variety of themes emerged during art therapy sessions as well; among these were experiencing feelings of pleasure and enjoyment from making art, a feeling of "flow" or losing oneself in artmaking, and a budding desire to create more artwork in the future (Kaimal et al., 2016).

An element of artmaking which amplifies its stress-reducing properties is its potential to aid in the development of individuals' self-care practices. Kim (2023) examined the ways in which practicing art-based self-care impacted the resilience of healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Healthcare workers especially can benefit from engaging in regular self-care as a means of support in a highly demanding career field where burnout is common. Integrating artmaking into self-care practice enhances its benefits; according to Kim (2023), engaging in artmaking provided an avenue for healthcare workers to visually express their fears and emotions symbolically. Doing so also led to experiences of catharsis which relieved stress for many participants, a finding that supports Kaimal et al.'s (2016) assertion that artmaking reduces cortisol levels.

It is well-understood that engaging in artmaking can benefit individuals through its stress-reduction properties; this finding is also supported by Liu et al. (2023), who studied the impact artmaking had on the psychological wellbeing of 90 college-level medical students. There are also other benefits of therapeutic artmaking to consider when providing art therapy services; among those are aiding in emotional regulation and concentration (Liu et al., 2023), increasing understanding of one's true self (Kaimal et al., 2016), and feeling free from expectations and other constraints (Kaimal et al., 2016). Art therapy is also valuable by reducing burnout and encouraging participants to develop their self-care practice (Kim, 2023). The benefits of art therapy are numerous and can be applied to a variety of populations in different situations; it is difficult to cover each of these within the scope of this project. Art therapy can be applied in a plethora of individualized ways by knowledgeable clinicians to address a wide range of presenting problems.

Self-Care

Ultimately, Kim (2023) found that integrating artmaking into one's self-care practice provided healthcare workers with the ability to transform their feelings of anxiety and fear into those of hope and healing. This finding that healthcare workers can experience stress-reduction and transform negative emotions through engaging in art implies that those working in healthcare could greatly benefit from using art as a means of self-care. This can also be generalized to other populations, such as those experiencing high levels of stress due to illness, relationship issues, other demanding careers, and more.

Art Therapy Directives for Gender Identity Exploration

There are several well-established art therapy directives which are well-suited for individuals exploring their gender identity. In one directive known as "Inside Me, Outside Me,"

the art therapist instructs the participant to create two self-portraits. One of these depicts the outside, public self, while the other depicts the private, inside self (Makin, 2000). Creating these self-portraits allows the individual to explore how they view themselves and how they are perceived by others. It also allows for discussion on any discrepancies between the two self-portraits. Individuals who are in the early stages of the coming out process may find that they create two dramatically differing self-portraits, as the self they portray to the outside world does not align with their felt sense of identity (Pelton-Sweet & Sherry, 2008). Self-portraiture may be used in the context of art therapy to bring out feelings regarding the self that may be too vulnerable to express through words (Pelton-Sweet & Sherry, 2008). The “Inside Me, Outside Me” self-portrait activity may be adapted to create a mask or a box inside of self-portraits on paper. Additionally, puppet making may be a useful tool in which the puppet speaks for the individual. Makin (2008) stated that reserved participants may be more willing and feel freer to express themselves verbally when speaking through a puppet figure.

Writing a Journal

Journal-writing has been long understood to be an effective means of self-expression and personal reflection. Boud (2001) identifies multiple purposes behind journal-writing: To note important events, to write the story of something significant, to explore one’s feelings, to find meaning in one’s experiences, and to make sense of reality. Many individuals use their journals to record happenings in everyday life, reflect on meaningful events, and to express strong feelings in a contained, private space. A benefit of written emotional expression is that “[it] may fill a very important niche—providing a mechanism of emotional expression in circumstances where interpersonal expression is not viable” (Smyth, 1998, p. 174). Journal writing provides

individuals with the opportunity to express themselves without restraint due to the private nature of a journal or diary.

Writing alone has therapeutic potential; Lepore (1997) examined the use of expressive writing to reduce and desensitize individuals to their intrusive thoughts related to stressful events and how this effect impacted depressive symptoms. Participants were split into a control group which wrote about trivial subjects and an experimental group which wrote about a stressful event. Results showed that expressive writing did not have an impact on the occurrence of intrusive thoughts; however, it affected the impact of those intrusive thoughts on the experience of depressive symptoms. Participants who wrote about trivial subjects experienced higher levels of depressive symptoms when compared to the experimental, stress-writing condition.

Expressive Writing's Impact on Health

Smyth (1998) conducted a research synthesis to understand the ways in which written expression may impact health outcomes. They write that expressively writing about traumatic experiences has potential to organize an individual's sensory and affective memories into a coherent and communicable narrative format. Pizarro (2004) also notes a similar concept in which writing decreases the prevalence of health problems following a traumatic event. Writing was found to improve health outcomes in areas related to overall reported health, mental wellbeing, physiological ability and function, as well as overall functioning in everyday life (Smyth, 1998). In addition, the integration of insight words into expressive writing such as "realize" or "understand" was associated with greater health improvements (Smyth, 1998). A review by Pennebaker (1997) also asserts that writing increases general health and wellbeing.

Expressive writing is effective in improving health outcomes for several reasons. One of these is that the level of disclosure involved in expressive writing requires a certain level of

disinhibition by the writer; high levels of inhibition are associated with higher stress levels and higher risk of illness (Pennebaker, 1997). It has been hypothesized that lower levels of inhibition decrease overall stress levels and risk of illness. Another agent for positive outcomes related to expressive writing are the cognitive effects associated with engaging in writing activities (Pennebaker, 1997).

Writing as Reflective Practice

Journal writing can also be effective in promoting reflection in personal, professional, and educational contexts. It can be used to enhance learning and promote reflection on one's lived experience. Hubbs & Brand (2005) focused specifically on the usefulness of journaling practice in higher education. They state that journaling can allow students with a space to consider a variety of ideas, explore subconscious secrets and feelings, and make connections between seemingly unrelated ideas (Hubbs & Brand, 2005). This can apply to participants in therapy as well; using writing for these reflective purposes can encourage self-exploration related to personal experiences and feeling states. Boud (2001) writes that reflection is the process of taking one's experiences in life and transforming them into learning experiences. They also identify three main points at which individuals may consider using reflective journaling: doing so in anticipation of an event, doing so as an event occurs, and doing so following an event. Reflective journaling at any point can be effective for processing and brainstorming.

Audience and Rapport in Therapeutic Writing

Journaling is typically an activity which typically occurs in private, with an understanding from the writer that what they have written will not have an audience; this allows individuals to lower their inhibitions in their self-expression as noted in Pennebaker (1997). Art therapists and counselors should be aware of potential privacy and inhibition concerns when

integrating expressive writing into sessions. Boud (2001) reflects that “the expectation of writing for an external audience can profoundly shape what we write and what we even allow ourselves to consider” (p.15). Because the therapist becomes an audience to their participant’s expressive writing when it is integrated into therapy, participants may be less willing to write the full truth of their feelings and experiences. Participants bringing writing to session will likely consider the trustworthiness of the therapist, expectations for how they write/ what they write about, and the quality of feedback from the therapist (Kerka, 1996).

Therapists intending to integrate writing into process should consider the strength of the trust and rapport present within the therapeutic relationship. It is unlikely that a participant in the beginning stages of therapy, prior to establishing trust, will write in a truly disinhibited manner. It is imperative that writing brought to and created in therapy is created in this way, as interpersonal authenticity will foster growth and progress in the participant and allow for deeper processing. Many individuals will come to therapy with a fear of judgement (Kerka, 1996), which also impacts their approach to expressive writing in therapy. Therapists providing a non-judgmental space for their participants may be more likely to experience their participants’ expressive writing reflections as authentic.

Potential Negative Outcomes of Expressive Writing

Therapists should also consider potential negative outcomes related to expressive writing. Pizarro (2004) conducted a study to explore the efficacy of writing therapy compared to art therapy in improving mental and physiological wellbeing. They found that participants who engaged in a writing intervention reported negative mood states directly after writing and demonstrated overall negative affect when compared to participants who engaged in art therapy. There were no significant differences among groups in somatic symptoms, anxiety, insomnia,

depression symptoms, and stress reduction, but the art-only group was overall more satisfied with the course of their treatment (Pizarro, 2004). Pennebaker (1997) noted that participants engaged in a writing task experience more short-term distress; however, this may lead to greater outcomes and improvements in the long-term. Writing alone may be more effective in encouraging cognitive organization, but participants who experience greater negative affect or other depressive symptoms related to writing tasks presented in therapy may be less likely to continue with treatment as recommended (Pizarro, 2004). It may be important to provide participants with expectations of potential short-term distress related to engaging in expressive writing as well as long-term benefits prior to using this intervention.

Expressive Writing in Art Therapy: Art Journaling

Part of what makes art therapy useful for participants is that art does not require high levels of verbal fluency. Art therapy communicates emotions effectively, tells a story compellingly, and acts as the precursor for verbal expression (Pizarro, 2004). While art therapy is certainly effective without the integration of writing directives, using these may prompt further growth and reflection for participants. A major upside to incorporating art journaling into the art therapy process is that doing so blends the benefits of artistic and verbal expression, which in turn enhances the effects of both (Beaumont, 2018). Participants wishing to augment their visual art process may find that incorporating writing stimulates cognition and furthers reflection.

Art Journaling's Impact on Stress

Mercer (2010) examined the effects of art journaling on the stress levels of medical students and reflected that “the [art] journal successfully combines written and visual interventions, allowing for the experience of both emotional satisfaction and cognitive awareness” (p. 144). Working from their hypothesis that the most effective interventions would

incorporate both written and visual artistic expression, the researchers found that engaging in art journaling reduced anxiety levels and negative affect (Mercer, 2010). Using art journaling to reduce stress has additional secondary positive outcomes; Ullrich (2002) found that writers focused on both their cognitive processes and emotions were able to gain awareness of the positive impact of stressful events. Therefore, expressive writing within art therapy may encourage participants to strengthen their problem-solving skills and engage out-of-the-box thinking to identify positivity amidst adversity. Gibson (2018) explored the use of art journaling to lessen the impact of vicarious trauma in therapists and concluded that doing so reduced symptomology of vicarious trauma while providing a container to explore strong negative emotions.

Art Journaling for Community

Art journaling may also be a useful catalyst for fostering a sense of belonging in a community. Holder (2022) examined the use of a virtual art journaling group for transgender participants. They held a 6-week-long group art therapy process, targeting themes of alliance, self-care, emotional regulation, self-esteem, and community using Beaumont's (2012) model of compassion-oriented art therapy. Participant engagement throughout group process was high, and the art journaling intervention was received positively. Ultimately, Holder (2022) concluded that using art journaling in a group for transgender individuals encouraged a sense of community amongst peers. Art journaling may also be used with the transgender population to address themes related to gender identity, gender dysphoria, transition, oppression, coming out, family, and more. Incorporating writing into art therapy may encourage transgender participants to identify salient aspects of their identity, determine whether they would like to seek transition, and reflect on interpersonal challenges.

A Unique Approach to Art Journaling

In *Visual Journaling: Going Deeper than Words*, Ganim & Fox (1999) propose a four-step process for engaging in art journaling. In their approach, one begins by setting clear intentions and increasing mindful awareness of the present moment. Second, one “quiets the mind” (Ganim & Fox, 1999, p. 24) by attuning to one’s breath through meditation. Then, one uses guided visualization exercises to shift one’s awareness to body sensations with the intention of heightening emotional awareness. Finally, one expresses whatever visual images emerged during guided meditation through art and written expression (Ganim & Fox, 1999). Art therapists may choose to utilize this framework to guide participant engagement in art journaling. This approach may be beneficial as it promotes mindfulness, intentionality in artmaking, and exploration of inner thoughts and feelings. Ganim & Fox’s (1999) approach is meant to be accessible to individuals outside of therapy, but their approach can be adapted and enhanced by the guidance of an art therapist.

Conclusion

This literature review was intended to comprehensively cover topics related to using therapeutic art journaling with the transgender community. Information related to ethical concerns, gender identity, and marginalization were presented. Other topics included the benefits and drawbacks of expressive writing and artmaking, as well as the integration of the two creative forms into art journaling, which is the basis for this project. The following methodology was developed to integrate and apply the information covered in this literature review.

Methodology

The following project is designed and intended for use by art therapists working with transgender participants in art therapy. It is a prototype guide including nine therapeutic art

journaling directives. The directives touch on topics of acceptance, community, identity, among others. Art therapists may use the directives in any order, considering what is most needed or applicable to the individuals they are working with.

The guide is split into two sections: “personal” and “big picture.” The directives within the “personal” section are intended to promote reflection and understanding in participants’ inner lives, decisions, and identity. They may be used with individuals who are working towards greater understanding and development of their gender identity. These directives may also be applied with individuals working through the decision of whether to pursue transition. The “big picture” directives cover topics which apply to the greater transgender community as a whole. These topics include living in today’s political climate, joy, hope, and community. These directives are all intended for use with individual participants but may also be applied to work with small groups.

Each directive was designed to be easy-to-follow for art therapists using them in their practice. All directives include a description of what art materials are necessary for engaging in the directive. They each include a writing and visual component. Also included are the intentions for the directive addressing what each directive may be best suited for. Finally, questions to guide therapeutic process are included to provide the art therapist with some guidance for process within a therapy session. These questions are also applicable to both individual and group work.

The full prototype guide is made available in Appendix A at the end of this project. Once the prototype guide was completed, the author engaged in one directive from each section in order to provide readers with examples of what completed directives may look like prior to using

them with art therapy participants. Example artwork and writing are found in Appendix B and will be discussed further in the following section of this project.

The resulting project integrates information covered within the literature review. It seeks to apply person-centered care to both individuals and groups within the transgender community. This project draws upon work of art therapists who have made contributions to work with this population. All directives are original work, save for Makin and Malchiodi's (2000) *Inside Me/Outside Me* directive. The following section details information related to each individual directive.

What's in a Name?

When transitioning, many transgender individuals choose to change their name in a way that is reflective of their gender identity. This directive is intended for the individual to think about ways in which their name expresses their chosen gender identity in addition to their personal identity as a whole. Individuals may also tap into feelings of gender euphoria related to their chosen name and reflect on ways in which their chosen name is gender-affirming. This directive also includes a social component, asking the participant to name feelings associated with using their chosen name in interaction with others. This therapeutic art journaling directive reads as follows:

Using block letters, write your chosen name so it fills the page. Fill the inside of the letters with colors and patterns that depict what your name means to you. Think about the ways in which your chosen name embodies your gender identity. Write 3-5 sentences reflecting on the characteristics of your gender identity that connect to your name.

Questions which the art therapist may use in processing this artwork and writing focus on the process of choosing a new name, positive qualities embodied in one's name, and communicating to others through our name choice.

The author engaged in both the artistic and writing components of this directive to provide examples to readers. The author took the role of a fictional adolescent who has expressed a desired to transition from female to male. The writing reflection is as follows:

“I wanted my name to be a classically masculine name. When I think of the name, ‘Jack,’ I think of storybooks, strength, integrity, and good character. Those are all things that I hope my chosen name embodies. It is affirming to my gender identity to have such a masculine name. It was also inspired by my deadname, which I feel is still a part of me and my life story.”



Figure 2. *What's in a Name?* Art example.

This directive can provide art therapists with insight into an individual's sense of identity.

For the individual, it provides an opportunity for reflection upon gender presentation and personal identity. It may also be used to explore name options for art therapy participants who have not yet settled on a chosen name, if a name change is desired.

Inside Me/ Outside Me

This directive is the second in the “personal” section of the prototype guide. It is pulled from the work of Makin and Malchiodi (2000). It is common for transgender individuals, especially prior to coming out, to have an inner world that is not necessarily reflected in the way they present themselves to others. Transitioning is often a journey towards living authentically; this directive allows art therapy participants to identify what they may be concealing from others and determine what is holding them back from expressing themselves fully in their everyday life. The therapeutic art journaling directive is as follows:

Create two self-portraits. One depicts who you are on the inside (the more internal/private aspects of yourself). One depicts who you are on the outside (the side of yourself you present to others). Write a paragraph about one thing you don’t typically share with others that you would like to share, including what makes sharing this thing difficult and what you might gain from sharing this.

When engaging participants in this directive, art therapists should make note of visual differences between the two self-portraits in order to gain an understanding of what the participant may not be readily sharing with others. These may also provide insight into what aspects of oneself may be associated with shame and inhibition. Therapeutic process may focus on authenticity and self-expression. Art therapists should also consider what may be safe and unsafe to reveal to others in the participants’ life, especially living in a world that is often cruel and judgmental towards transgender individuals.

Pursuit of Transition

This art journaling directive focuses on the possibility of gender transition. It is intended to help participants determine whether they would like to pursue medical and/or social transition; if so, this directive may provide support in what outcomes are desired. This directive incorporates the individual's thoughts and feelings surrounding gender transition. It also addresses what steps may be necessary for the individual to take in order to achieve those desired outcomes. The directive reads as follows:

Drew a portrait of your whole self presenting in a manner that expresses your gender identity fully. Incorporate gender affirming clothing, makeup, accessories, and physical attributes that make you feel most like yourself. Use colors that reflect your gender identity. Then write 3-5 sentences about how presenting yourself in this manner makes you feel.

When discussing gender transition with participants, it is important that therapists understand and affirm that transition is not necessary when one identifies as transgender. Transition is an individualized and personal decision as there are many reasons why one may or may not decide to transition. Art therapists can center verbal processing on authenticity, safety, and fears related to transition.

This directive is intended to be used prior to engaging in the following directive, *Acceptance of Oneself/ Self-Love*. This is because consideration of transition often involves identifying the things one wishes to change about oneself. This can be positive and constructive when contemplating how one can begin to step into authentic self-expression. However, if dwelled upon, this thinking may lead to feelings of low self-esteem in the present moment before

any changes are made. Engaging in the following directive after this one targets those negative feelings that could potentially arise.

Acceptance of Oneself/ Self-Love

This art journaling directive may be used in conjunction with the previous directive, but it also may be used independent of other directives. It is intended to assist art therapy participants accept the way they are in the present moment. Identifying positive aspects of oneself through this directive may lead to feelings of increased self-esteem and self-worth. It also ties in mindfulness, appreciation, and gratitude for who one is in the present despite the desire to make the changes involved in medical and social gender transition. The directive reads as follows:

Choose one thing you love or appreciate about yourself right now. It can be a physical characteristic, personality trait, or something else. Pick one word that best describes this thing. Write this word in block letters on your paper. Illustrate around and within the word using natural imagery—this could include flora, fauna, water, sunlight, or something else that resonates most with you. Create a list of 5 or more things that you love or appreciate about yourself. Come up with an easy-to-remember personalized affirmation based on the qualities/ attributes in your list. Write your affirmation down on a sticky note and place it somewhere you will see it every day.

It is recommended that art therapists utilize this directive after the participant engages in the prior directive, *Pursuit of Transition*. It may also be used independently of other directives. Used together, these directives provide insight into identity while also building self-esteem. Therapeutic process may focus on the difficulty or ease of identifying one's positive attributes as well as potential roadblocks for the participant to see themselves positively. While gender

transition implies change in physical and social domains, accepting the way one is in the here-and-now can build confidence and reduce negative self-image.

Support

Having social support is imperative for every individual, and it is especially important for those within the transgender community. Many transgender individuals are rejected by their families and community members due to their gender identity and transition. Lacking interpersonal support can leave one feeling alienated and lonely. This art journaling directive aims to assist art therapy participants in identifying members of their support system who are affirming in their gender identity. The directive reads as follows:

The art therapist will provide a definition of chosen family (bonds with those outside our biological family that provide us with support and love). Write a brief letter (3-6 sentences) to the members of their chosen family. This can range from expressing gratitude, love, or other positive feelings. Then circle words that stand out as important. Illustrate the areas surrounding the circled keywords. You may choose to create drawings of your chosen family, incorporate elements of the natural world such as plants or bodies of water, or opt for an abstract art process.

The therapy participant may have difficulty identifying supportive people in their life. In this case, the art therapist can guide the participant to consider past supportive relationships or explore the things in their life that make them feel connected to others in their community. Therapeutic process may focus on identifying the importance and impact of the circled keywords in addition to the symbolic significance of the participant's illustration. Other topics to consider for discussion are transformation and the feelings that emerge when contemplating one's support system.

Community/ Belonging

This art journaling directive is the first within the “big picture” section of the guide. It follows in the theme of the previous directive and dives more deeply into feelings of safety and belonging. While *Support* assists the individual in identifying support within their social circle, *Community/ Belonging* is intended to target the individual’s community at large. Participants may choose to reflect upon places involving their families (chosen or otherwise), locations within their community, or anywhere else that they feel they belong. The directive reads as follows:

Draw or paint a picture of a place where you feel belonging and acceptance—a place where you feel that you can be fully yourself. Reflect on the place you chose to draw.

Write a paragraph about how this place makes it easy for you to be authentic.



Figure 4. *Community/ Belonging* art example.

The author engaged in both writing and artistic aspects of this directive to provide examples for the reader. The fictional reflection is as follows:

“This is a drawing of my grandmother’s house. She passed away before I came out to my family, but I know she would have been accepting of me if she knew. We had a lot of fun together when I was younger, playing games and cooking. She always made sure that I knew that I was loved for who I am.”

Therapeutic process following this directive can follow themes of support, authenticity, and connection with the community. It may be helpful for the individual and art therapist to discuss what is necessary to feel safe enough to be one’s authentic self in interaction with others. The art therapist may choose to ask the participant questions such as, “What are some things you do here that feel in alignment with your gender identity?”, and “What about this place makes you feel safe enough to be fully yourself?”

Impact of Marginalization

Transgender individuals, both in the United States and internationally, unfortunately live within a society that is hostile, judging, and discriminatory towards them. This art journaling directive is intended to assist the individual with releasing and expressing feelings related to this harsh reality. It asks individuals to identify the impact of the current sociopolitical climate on a personal and community level. The directive reads as follows:

Think about how it feels to identify as transgender in the current sociopolitical climate.

Close your eyes and engage in deep breathing for one minute while holding space for this feeling. Create a piece of artwork to illustrate this feeling. Write 2-3 sentences about how this feeling impacts your day-to-day life and interactions with others. Then write another 2-3 sentences about ways you can find relief from this feeling.

When engaging a participant in this directive, it will be important for art therapists monitor for distress and discomfort as this directive brings to light unpleasant and negative feelings. Art therapists should take special care to ensure that any feelings of distress are tended to and given space to be expressed. Therapeutic process can be centered on the impact of these negative feelings on an individual's wellbeing in addition to identifying constructive ways of coping and finding community to serve as support. Some techniques to consider integrating into therapy after engaging in this directive may include grounding, mindfulness, and deep breathing.

Fostering Joy

Living in a discriminatory society can leave transgender individuals feeling hopeless and despondent. To counter this, this directive asks individuals to consider the impact of experiencing and fostering joy in one's life. Experiencing joy can be a major act of resistance against marginalization. This directive asks art therapy participants to identify a memory in their life in which they felt joyful. In doing so and during subsequent verbal processing in art therapy, the individual may gain a better understanding of what might help them to feel joyful in the future. Additionally, this exercise is intended to assist the participant in connecting their transgender identity to feelings of joy. The directive reads:

The art therapist will support the participant in defining joy (the experience of much pleasure or delight). For the participant: Think about an experience you had in your recent memory where you felt joyful. Create an abstract watercolor painting that reflects how you feel when you think about that experience now. Think back to the experience that inspired your painting. Write a few sentences about what made that experience so special.

Questions to guide verbal processing are provided within the guide itself; most of these questions focus on present-moment aspects of joy, including how one's body feels when experiencing joy, and what one can do during the present day to promote feelings of joy. The art therapist may also choose to support the individual in identifying joy within transgender identity. Aspects to focus on may include gender euphoria, authenticity, and genuineness.

Imagining a Future/ Hope

It can be difficult for transgender individuals to imagine a future due to the stress of living as a minority. Dickey and Budge (2020) assert that at least 40% of transgender people have attempted suicide at least once. This is largely due to minority stress including discrimination, hostility, and mockery. Because of this reality, this art therapy intervention is intended to assist individuals in identifying what makes life worth living. It also supports individuals in naming obstacles to their ideal future in addition to what steps may be necessary to secure the life they want for themselves. The directive reads as follows:

Close your eyes and imagine yourself 10 years from now in a place where you feel peaceful. Draw a picture of what this place looks like. Write a paragraph (3-5 sentences) about what you hope your life is like 10 years from now.

This directive provides opportunity to think long-term and imagine a future for themselves. The art therapist may choose to guide therapeutic verbal process in a way that focuses on finding solutions to obstacles to an ideal future, identifying what physical space the individual would like to live in, and ideal conditions in the future including personal supports. This directive is intended to counter feelings of overwhelm and isolation and transform those feelings into hope for the future.

Discussion

Through the development of this project, many key factors within this topic emerged. In writing the culminating guide for art therapists, it became clear that there were a number of topics that may be powerful for transgender individuals to consider during the course of their participation in art therapy. These topics became the backbone of the directives presented in this project. Providing structure and guidance for exploring these topics with transgender art therapy participants may promote the art therapists understanding of these topics, in addition to providing a jumping-off-point for art therapists to begin their work with this population.

There may be a lack of art therapists within the field who have significant experience in working with this population. This project may serve to bridge this gap and promote art therapists' feelings of competence in providing services to transgender individuals. The transgender population is deserving of receiving art therapy services from professionals competent in this area of work—this project is intended to bring art therapists one step further into competence in working with this marginalized population. As a discipline, art therapy has made significant progress in working with the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community; it is time that art therapists begin to move forward in developing competence and confidence in working with the transgender population as well.

That is not to say that there has been no progress within the field thus far; during the course of the literature review presented earlier in the project, it became clear that the field of art therapy is beginning to move in the right direction in this regard. Beaumont (2012), Holder, (2022), Rose & Lonsdale (2016), Tepper (2021), Zappa (2017), among others not covered within this project, are making significant contributions to the field of art therapy's competence in working with the transgender population.

This project is limited in several ways which should be considered by its readers. First, the methodology presented within this project (the written guide) was not the subject of research with subjects within this population. Further formal, experimental research would be necessary to address whether the presented directives are effective and lead to positive outcomes with transgender participants in art therapy. Second, though efforts were made to mitigate the effects of the author's personal bias and opinion, its presence may impact the outcomes and conclusions of this project. Finally, it is notable that a structured approach may not be appropriate for every art therapy participant. It may be more impactful and effective to provide a nondirective, unguided approach to art therapy in work with certain members of this population. Art therapists contemplating the use of these directive in their practice should consider what is most appropriate for and preferred by each individual they are working with.

As previously stated, further research to support the efficacy of these directives in work with the transgender population is necessary. Future research should focus on the validity and reliability of an art journaling approach in art therapy with transgender individuals. Other subjects to be covered in future research which may be beneficial to explore include exploring gender identity through artistic and visual expression, reducing the stress of marginalization through individual and community artmaking, and instilling hope for the future/ reducing suicidal thoughts and behaviors among this population using art therapy interventions.

Art therapy has made progress in developing best practices for work with the transgender population. Despite this, there is still progress to be made. Future art therapy research can support the field in developing confidence, competence, and efficacy in supporting positive outcomes for transgender individuals in a turbulent sociopolitical atmosphere. This project is intended to fill a gap in existing art therapy research and promote a greater understanding of

work with this population. Additionally, it provides art therapists with structure and guidance for this work.

Conclusion

Therapeutic art journaling provides a unique and potentially effective approach which art therapists may use to support transgender art therapy participants. This project provides a comprehensive literature review of topics relevant to this work. Additionally, it provides a guide including a variety of therapeutic art journaling directives which art therapists may choose to utilize in work with this population.

Art therapy can provide all individuals of all walks of life with many benefits and avenues of support. Transgender individuals today face a unique set of challenges and stressors. Engaging in therapeutic art journaling facilitated by a skilled and competent art therapist can support transgender individuals in developing, understanding, and exploring their personal gender identity. Art therapy may also serve to reduce stress and assists transgender individuals in developing hope for the future despite the challenges they face in today's society.

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Appendices

Appendix A.

1

Art Journaling Directives for Work with Transgender Participants in Art Therapy

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Author's Note

In today's world, transgender individuals are a target of relentless hatred. Many face the harsh reality of hate crime, discrimination, and mockery. Transgender individuals each face the unique challenges of their own inner world and life situation in addition to rising political extremism which threatens their wellness.

Many transgender people seek therapy to cope with life in these conditions, to support in the decision to transition, to further understand their identity, in addition to many other desired outcomes. Art therapy provides a unique avenue for exploring identity, support, and societal conditions.

This short guide provides a number of art journaling directives, combining the power of visual and written expression, which are intended to support transgender participants' process in art therapy. The directives are divided into two sections: personal and big picture. The art therapist may use any or all of these directives with their participants in any order. Each directive details its intention(s), required art materials, and questions to guide process in art therapy.

This guide seeks to avoid the use of capitalistic and pathologizing language. For that reason, the words "client" and "patient" are replaced with the word "participant," as advised by Mullan (2023). Additionally, the word "goal" has been replaced with the word "intention." Mullan (2023) states that, "We [therapists] do not heal or treat; we merely have the privilege of offering support and help" (p. 4).

Art therapists are in a position to offer support and help to the transgender community at a turbulent moment in history. Consider what directives provided here may be of service to your art therapy participants; Take what resonates and leave what does not.

This guide was created in fulfillment of the requirements of Marywood University's Master of Arts program in art therapy.

Part One: Personal

The directives present in this section are intended to provide insight into an individual's inner world and identity.

What's in a Name?

Intention: The therapy participant will use this directive and writing prompt to consider how their name is reflective of the gender identity, as well as their general personal identity. Additionally, they will contemplate how their name is gender-affirming and reflect on feelings of gender euphoria associated with using their name in interaction with others.

Materials needed: 8.5 x 11" mixed media paper, pens, pencils, markers, oil pastels, markers, and colored pencils.

Art therapy directive: Using block letters, write your chosen name so it fills the page. Fill the inside of the letters with colors and patterns that depict what your name means to you.

Writing prompt: Think about the ways in which your chosen name embodies your gender identity. Write 3-5 sentences reflecting on that characteristics of your gender identity that connect to your name.

Questions to guide therapeutic process:

- What led you to choose your name?
- What was the process of choosing your name like?
- What qualities do you hope your name embodies?
- How do you feel when people address you using your chosen name versus your dead name?
- Was there a person, place, or thing that inspired your name choice?
- How do the colors and patterns you drew communicate the meaning of your name choice?
- What do you hope your chosen name communicates to others?

Inside Me/ Outside Me

Note: Credit for the development of this directive is due to Makin and Malchiodi (2000).

Intention: The therapy participant will identify ways they may be masking their identity in their interactions with others. They will identify aspects of one's identity that feel safe and unsafe to share with others and process the root of those feelings. Finally, they will identify necessary conditions to feel safe enough to share their authentic self with others and how they can contribute to developing those conditions in their life.

Materials needed: Two 8x10" pieces of mixed media paper, colored pencils, markers, and oil pastels.

Art therapy directive: Create two self-portraits. One depicts who you are on the inside (the more internal/ private aspects of yourself. One depicts who you are on the outside (the side of yourself you present to others).

Writing prompt: Write a paragraph about one thing you don't typically share with others that you would like to share, including what makes sharing this thing difficult and what you might gain from sharing this.

Questions to guide therapeutic process:

- What are the biggest differences between your self-portraits?
- What feelings come up when you consider sharing more of your authentic self with others?
- What leads you to feel unable to share certain aspects of your identity?
- Are there any parts of your "outside self" drawing that feel inauthentic?
- What do you need to feel freer to express yourself authentically with others?
- What is one thing you hope to share with others that you feel you are unable to currently?
- What are some ways you may benefit from presenting yourself more authentically?
- What are the risks of presenting yourself more authentically?
- Is your trans identity something you readily share with people? Why or why not?

Pursuit of Transition

Note: This exercise is intended to be used prior to engaging in the following directive, *Acceptance of Oneself/ Self-Love*.

Intention: By participating in this exercise, therapy participants will identify feelings associated with socially presenting themselves in alignment with their gender identity. They will consider the emotional impact of medical/ social transition, contemplate the decision to transition, and plan for what steps to take if transition is desired. The art therapist will affirm that transition is not a necessity but is instead a deeply personal, individualized decision.

Materials needed: 8.5x11" drawing paper, graphite pencils, pens, colored pencils, and markers.

Art therapy directive: Draw a portrait of your whole self, presenting in a manner that expresses your gender identity fully. Incorporate gender affirming clothing, makeup, accessories, and physical attributes that make you feel most like yourself. Use colors that reflect your gender identity.

Writing prompt: Write 3-5 sentences about how presenting yourself in this manner makes you feel.

Questions to guide therapeutic process:

- Are there any differences between the portrait you drew and how you present yourself daily? If so, how do you make sense of those differences?
- What contributes to your decision to pursue or not pursue medical and/ or social gender transition?
- Do you have any fears related to transition? If so, what are they?
- Is there anyone that you can think of that is an inspiration to how you present/ would like to present yourself? What about them would you like to emulate?
- Have you ever presented this way in public? If so, what was that experience like?
- If you would like to pursue transition, what are some steps you would like to take? What step would come first?
- What feelings come up when you present in alignment with your gender identity?

Acceptance of Oneself/ Self-Love

Note: This exercise is intended to be used after the therapy participant engages in the previous exercise, *Pursuit of Transition*. It may also be used as a standalone directive.

Intention: The therapy participant will identify positive aspects of themselves to increase feelings of self-esteem and self-worth. The therapy participant will begin to appreciate and accept who they are in the present moment.

Materials needed: 8.5x11" mixed media paper, watercolor paints, watercolor pencils, paint markers, water-based markers, paint markers, and oil pastels.

Art therapy directive: Choose one thing you love or appreciate about yourself right now. It can be a physical characteristic, personality trait, or something else. Pick one word that best describes this thing. Write this word in block letters on your paper. Illustrate around and within this word using natural imagery—this could include flora, fauna, water, sunlight, or something else that resonates most with you.

Writing prompt: Create a list of 5 or more things that you love or appreciate about yourself. Come up with an easy-to-remember personalized affirmation based on the qualities/ attributes in your list. Write your affirmation down on a sticky note and place it somewhere you will see it every day.

Questions to guide therapeutic process:

- How was it for you to pick something out about yourself that you love? Was it difficult or easy?
- How often do you think about the things that you appreciate about yourself?
- Is there anything holding you back from seeing yourself in a positive light?
- What are some characteristics you hold that are in alignment with your gender identity?
- What are some ways that you practice self-care? Is there anything new that you would like to incorporate into your life?

Support

Intention: Through this exercise, the therapy participant will identify members of their support system who affirm their gender identity and cultivate a sense of gratitude for their community. They will decrease feelings of isolation and increase feelings of support and togetherness.

Materials needed: 8.5x11" drawing paper, pens, graphite pencils, markers, and colored pencils.

Art therapy directive & writing prompt: The art therapist will provide a definition of chosen family (bonds with those outside our biological family that provide us with support and love). Write a brief letter (3-6 sentences) to the members of their chosen family. This can range from expressing gratitude, love, or any other positive feelings. Then circle words that stand out as important. Illustrate areas surrounding the circled keywords. You may choose to create drawings of your chosen family, incorporate elements of the natural world such as plants or bodies of water, or opt for an abstract art process.

Questions to guide therapeutic process:

- What keywords in your letter stood out to you the most?
- How do your keywords reflect the nature of your chosen family?
- How do you compare your level of support from your chosen family versus that of your biological family?
- How did it feel to transform your letter into an image?
- How did you decide what type of image(s) to create surrounding your keywords?

Part Two: Big Picture

The directives present in this section are intended to provide insight into community, society, and living in the world as a transgender individual.

Community/ Belonging

Intention: The therapy participant will identify safe places to express themselves, including what creates feelings of safety in a place/ with others. They will identify safe people in their life. This exercise will help to foster feelings of acceptance, belonging, and gratitude for one's community.

Materials needed: 8.5x11" mixed media paper or watercolor paper depending on chosen medium, watercolor paint, gouache, oil pastels, markers, chalk pastels, and colored pencils.

Art therapy directive: Draw or paint a picture of a place where you feel belonging and acceptance—a place where you feel that you can be fully yourself.

Writing prompt: Reflect on the place you chose to draw. Write a paragraph about how this place makes it easy for you to be authentic.

Questions to guide therapeutic process:

- Is there anyone present in this place? If so, what about them makes you feel accepted?
- What are some things you do here that feel in alignment with your identity?
- How do you express yourself in this place?
- How do you express your gender identity in this place?
- What about this place makes you feel that you belong?
- Is there anyone you would like to invite to spend time with you in this place?
- How much time do you spend in this place? Would you like to spend more or less time here?
- What about this place makes you feel safe enough to be fully yourself?
- What is your favorite thing about this place?

Impact of Marginalization

Intention: To validate the emotional response to the reality of living in a society that is hostile to transgender people and provide space for the release of related feelings. The therapy participant will identify practical ways to cope with these feelings. The therapy participant will identify the impact of the current sociopolitical climate on an individual and community level.

Materials needed: 11x14" watercolor paper, watercolor paints, acrylic paint, gouache, and oil pastels.

Art therapy directive: Think about how it feels to identify as transgender in the current sociopolitical climate. Close your eyes and engage in deep breathing for one minute while holding space for this feeling. Create a piece of artwork to illustrate this feeling.

Writing prompt: Write 2-3 sentences about how this feeling impacts your day-to-day life and interactions with others. Then write another 2-3 sentences about ways you can find relief from this feeling.

Questions to guide therapeutic process:

- Are you able to safely express this feeling to others? If not, would you like to?
- How often do you experience this feeling?
- Does experiencing this feeling impact your wellbeing in any way? If so, how?
- Where do you feel this feeling in your body?
- What are some ways that you cope with this feeling?
- Do you know of anyone who shares similar feelings to you?
- How do you connect with people who can relate to you in this way?

Fostering Joy

Intention: The therapy participant will identify a memory where they felt joyful. This exercise will promote understanding of what can make one feel joyful in the future. The participant will be supported in connecting their trans identity to feelings of joy.

Materials needed: 12x18" watercolor paper, watercolor paints.

Art therapy directive: The art therapist will support the participant in defining joy (the experience of much pleasure or delight). For the participant: Think about an experience you had in your recent memory where you felt joyful. Create an abstract watercolor painting that reflects how you feel when you think about that experience now.

Writing prompt: Think back to the experience that inspired your painting. Write a few sentences about what made that experience so special.

Questions to guide therapeutic process:

- How often do you experience joy?
- How does your body feel when you experience joy?
- What are things in your daily life that make you feel joyful?
- What can you do today that would promote feelings of joy in your life?
- Is there anything about your trans identity that makes you feel joyful?

Imagining a Future/ Hope

Intention: For many trans people, it can be hard to imagine a peaceful future—This exercise asks participants to do just that and identify what makes life worth living. This exercise will support participants in fostering a sense of hope for the future. The therapy participant will identify obstacles to living in a hopeful future, determine what they can change to make that possible, and begin working to accept the things about their life they may not be able to change.

Materials needed: 8.5x11" mixed media paper, graphite pencils, colored pencils, markers, and oil pastels.

Art therapy directive: Close your eyes and imagine yourself 10 years from now in a place where you feel peaceful. Draw a picture of what this place looks like.

Writing prompt: Write a paragraph (3-5 sentences) about what you hope your life is like 10 years from now.

Questions to guide therapeutic process:

- Is there anything getting in the way of you living the life you hope for? What would it be like to address those obstacles?
- Is there a different place you see yourself living 10 years from now?
- Who do you hope to surround yourself with in the future?
- What kind of things do you hope to be spending your time doing 10 years from now?
- What do you hope to be doing for work in 10 years?
- What are some steps you can take in the present to create a hopeful future for yourself?

References

Makin, S. R., & Malchiodi, C. A. (2000). *Therapeutic art directives and resource: Activities and initiatives for individuals and groups*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Mullan, J. (2023). *Decolonizing therapy: Oppression, historical trauma, and politicizing your practice*. W. W. Norton.

Figure 1. Guide prototype.

Appendix B.



Figure 2. *What's in a Name?* Art example.

I wanted my name to be a classically masculine name. When I think of the name, "Jack," I think of story books, strength, integrity, + good character. Those are all things that I hope my chosen name embodies. It is affirming to my gender identity to have such a masculine name. It was also inspired by my deadname, which I feel is still a part of me + my life story.

Figure 3. *What's in a Name?* Writing example.



Figure 4. Community/ Belonging art example.

This is a drawing of my grandmother's house. She passed away before I came out to my family, but I know she would have been accepting of me ~~if~~ if she knew. ~~we~~ We had a lot of fun together when I was younger, playing games & cooking. She always made sure that I knew that I was loved for who I am.

Figure 5. Community/ Belonging writing example.

Glossary

Art journaling: “A mixed media method that combines free or guided artistic expression along with reflective or expressive writing produced in a bound journal format or on loose pages” (Beaumont, 2018, p. 55).

Art therapy: An approach to therapy which integrates creativity, self-expression, and the artistic process to support individuals in improving their mental wellbeing.

Cisgender: An adjective to describe individuals whose gender identity aligns with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Cissexism: Describes the belief that there are only two genders and that one’s gender should align with one’s gender assigned at birth.

Deadname: One’s name prior to gender transition.

Expressive writing: Using the written word to verbalize authentic feelings and thoughts related to one’s experiences via writing (Beaumont, 2018).

Gender assigned at birth: The gender assigned to an infant when they are born according to their external genitalia.

Gender dysphoria: Incongruity of one’s assigned gender at birth and one’s experienced gender (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

Gender identity: One’s felt and lived experience of their own gender (Healey, 2014).

Gender non-conforming: Describes individuals whose gender expression is not consistent with traditional gender norms.

Non-binary: An adjective to describe individuals whose gender identity falls outside of the traditional “male” and “female” identities.

Transgender: An adjective to describe individuals whose gender identity does not align with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Transphobia: Prejudice against transgender individuals.

Two-Spirit: A term utilized in Indigenous communities to encompass their sexual and gender identity in relation to cultural and spiritual identity. Two-spirit individuals do not identify as male or female.