

Integrating Art Therapy and Ecotherapy  
to Help Young Adults in Higher Education Settings.

By  
Lori Molin

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
M.A in Art Therapy

Approved by:

Gloria Skelton advisor

GA Vis. Dept.

Alamy Dean

## Abstract

### Integrating Art Therapy and Ecotherapy to Help Young Adults in Higher Education Settings

This thesis paper was written to show the collaboration of ecotherapy and art therapy and how they can be applied to work with young adults in higher education settings. Currently throughout the United States, there are many people in higher education who do not get the proper mental health help that is needed. Art therapy can be a very valuable therapeutic experience for anyone. With modern technologies and other disturbances, the human psyche is disrupted and no longer in balance with the natural world anymore. Through ecotherapy and art therapy creating nature-based art therapy, it can help people to be able to break away from the modern lifestyle to reset themselves in understanding the natural world around them. Results of nature-based art therapy can be seen through different directives given to adults in higher education and can show that through this integration, one is able to achieve a higher sense of self, well-being, and global perspective. Conclusively, seeing clients gain a better understanding for themselves and the world around them shows that nature-based art therapy can be a powerful therapeutic path for students of higher education.

Table of Contents

1. Abstract	2
2. Introduction	4
3. What is Art Therapy?	6
a. History	6
b. How to Apply Art Therapy	8
4. Exploring Ecopsychology/Ecotherapy	13
a. What is it?	14
b. Nature-Based Art Therapy	21
5. The Human Psyche	21
a. What is it?	21
b. Where did it come from?	22
6. Higher Education and the student population.	24
a. Challenges They Face	25
b. What can help students in higher education attain a better sense of self, well-being and global perspectives?	28
7. Case Studies	30
a. GERC and UW-SUPERIOR campus in-depth	31
b. Group Sessions	32
c. Conclusion	36
8. Combining Art Therapy and Ecotherapy to help young adults in Higher Education	37
9. Conclusion	39
10. Resources	42
11. List of Figures	43

## Introduction:

As young adults turn eighteen, often the first thing they contemplate is to go to college and get a degree. The general populace not involved in higher education can forget how much distress and psychological pressure can be put on traditional and non-traditional college students. People come to higher education settings to learn, expand their knowledge of subjects, and gain a better understanding to help themselves succeed in life. People outside of the higher education setting can underestimate the hardships that can fall on students attaining degrees. Psychologically and developmentally, there are many obstacles that can be placed on a college student during any year they are in school (freshmen, sophomore, junior and senior) that can cause stress, depression, anxiety, and other outcomes. A great way for students to be able to cope with these vast changes is through art therapy.

“While this contemporary approach is gaining recognition in treatment, expressive arts therapy has been linked to the traditions and cultural precedents of world healing practices that include the application of all the arts. This model offers unique opportunities for self-exploration and emphasizes that all the arts can be used in an integrative way to enhance therapy” (Malchiodi, 2012, p. 55).

Having art therapy available to college students can provide a very important coping mechanism for them. It can help them create a better sense of self and create a better well-being practice. Art therapy can also look more intimidating to people though; there is the first aspect of therapy, which some people may have the stigmatized feeling of “needing therapy means you are damaged”; along with the other aspect of working

with art materials, which means you have to be an artist. Sally Atkins and Melia Snyder authors of *Nature Based Expressive Arts Therapy* explain art therapy below:

“The arts offer a way to hold, express and release emotions, and they provide rich possibilities to deepen and expand personal understanding and mean to create and nurture community and to sustain life” (Atkins & Snyder, 2018, p. 47).

Through this understanding and looking at young adults in higher education, one can see how art therapy would be more approachable than a clinical counseling office. In addition to art therapy, there is another great therapeutic way of working with college students, which is through ecotherapy.

“Ecotherapy is positioned as healing the human-nature relationship and includes a range of therapeutic and reconnective practices such as horticultural therapy, ‘green’ exercise, animal-assisted therapy, wilderness therapy, natural lifestyle therapy, eco-dreamwork, community ecotherapy and dealing with eco-anxiety and eco-grief with others” (Jordan, 2016 p.1).

When applied to art therapy, ecotherapy creates nature-based art therapy.

While, it is still newer to the field of mental health, it was officially deemed a field during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Jordan, 2016, p. 16).

Through my time in the art therapy program at University of Wisconsin Superior, I have been able to intern on campus at the Gender Equity Resource Center and apply nature-based art therapy directives with interested students, whom are traditional and non-traditional within the higher education setting. With practicing nature-based art therapy, students are be able to learn about themselves, while working through tough

situations all with different mediums of art materials and being facilitated by an art therapist.

## What is Art Therapy?

Misconceptions of what art therapy is and how it can be applied to clients can happen. For art therapy in the United States, there are two main founders that brought art therapy to the therapeutic world: Margaret Naumburg and Edith Kramer. Both of these women had different approaches to art therapy and how they would use it with others (Malchiodi, 2012, p. 9).

Being influenced by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory and Carl Jung's universal symbolism, Naumburg was a psychologist in the 1940's, who referred to her work as art in therapy; the basis of her work was the use of art, which was to help release the unconscious through free association. Through this kind of work, the finished art products were considered symbolic speech influenced by Carl Jung (Rubin, 2001, p. 11).

An important way Naumburg connected back to the client was to understand their expressions through the meaning of the created work came from the person themselves, and no one else could diminish that. Once the client was done creating, Naumburg would have the client analyze and interpret their own art to help bring words to their story they shared. "While not alone in her use of art for either diagnosis or therapy, she was unique in stressing its role as a primary agent, rather than an auxiliary tool" (Rubin, 2001, p. 17).

Edith Kramer also followed Sigmund Freud for his personality and psychoanalytic theory. Kramer was a child psychologist, who started to use art in her therapeutic process with children. Her process was more an art as therapy approach, and she recognized how this art process and sublimation can work hand in hand. "Sublimation entails establishing a symbolic linkage between some primitive need and another more complex cluster of ideas and actions" (Rubin, 2001, p. 29) For example: When a person has an impulse to poke someone, their mind tells them to not do it, because it not what acceptable behavior; then it will deem what is a socially acceptable behavior for that social setting, such as not poking or knowing to ask for a hug. "Edith Kramer is also credited with the notion that it is the art process that is, in fact, the 'healing' factor in successful art therapy" (Malchiodi, 2014).

To better understand Kramer and her approach, she would have clients create their artwork, but they would not need to verbalize what it means or stands for, because the healing and therapeutic piece is the process of creating the art itself.

Art therapy strove to be a professionally recognized therapeutic occupation in the United States. "In the 1960s, art therapy became a recognized profession. Two events were significant in its development at that time: the creation of the *American Journal of Art Therapy* [published initially as *The Bulletin of Art Therapy* in 1962] and the establishment of the American Art Therapy Association [AATA]" (Wadeson, 2010, p. 16).

With these advancements in the United States, it gave art therapists the recognition to be taken more seriously. In this modern day and age, there are more hurdles to overcome, however art therapists are still making great strides. One of the

greater hurdles for art therapists currently is adapting to use digital media for art therapy. Knowing that traditionally that art therapy uses art material, this has been a current trend that is still getting its foot in the door. There are programs and therapists who do utilize digital media for art therapy with their clients; it is still growing in the aspect of becoming normalized. Other current trends are having multimodal approaches, such as dance/movement, music and even poetry and writing all intertwined with art therapy. These multimodal approaches are known as expressive arts therapy (Malchiodi, 2012, p. 130).

There are many different parts to understand when examining art therapy. The therapeutic process of art therapy, along with what makes art therapy a viable therapy, which can be explained by the American Art Therapy Association in a concise definition of art therapy:

“Art Therapy is an integrative mental health and human services profession that enriches the lives of individuals, families, and communities through active art-making, creative process, applied psychological theory, and human experience within a psychotherapeutic relationship.

Art Therapy, facilitated by a professional art therapist, effectively supports personal and relational treatment goals as well as community concerns. Art Therapy is used to improve cognitive and sensory-motor functions, foster self-esteem and self-awareness, cultivate emotional resilience, promote insight, enhance social skills, reduce and resolve conflicts and distress, and advance societal and ecological change” (ATTA 2017).

Through the definition above, it helps to show how art therapy can help others in many ways. In art therapy, there are multiple aspects, such as advantages of art therapy, the creative process, and the therapeutic relationship that makes up the complex nature of art therapy.

The advantages of art therapy are briefly commented on in the above citation from AATA, which are enrichment of lives, applied psychological theories and psychotherapeutic relationships (AATA 2017). Some other advantages of art therapy are imagery, decreased defenses, objectification, permanence, spatial matrix, creative and physical energy, and self-esteem enhancement; this list of advantage points come from Harriet Wadeson and her book *Art Psychotherapy* (2010).

**Imagery:** People have been able to see and think in images before we learned to talk. Imagery is visual recognition of the world around you. “Some of us develop to become more visually oriented than others, in all of us much of our preverbal thinking took the form of images” (Wadeson, 2010). Even into adulthood, images are first recognized before becoming processed verbally. Imagery is extremely important when it comes to experiencing art therapy, not only with the sense of sight but also with the other senses (hearing, tasting, touching and smelling). It is one sense that makes the therapeutic value of art therapy so meaningful, by the way of being able to see your own finished artwork from a session. Being able to create images from situations or dreams that have happened to oneself is powerful in art therapy. (Wadeson, 2010)

**Decreased Defenses:** Decreased defenses is closely related to imagery and can really take form through the creation of imagery in the sense that humans are verbal. However for art to take place, it is more of a silent process, which forces the

person to have more of an internal dialogue with themselves and that can be vulnerable for some. For a client to have decreased defenses that means they open up to their therapist. “Unexpected things may burst forth in a picture or sculpture, sometimes totally contrary to the intentions of its creator” (Wadeson, 2010, p. 11). When unexpected things do happen, it can be a big breakthrough for the client. Another notion that is projected onto art therapy is that one must be good at art to be able to do art therapy, which is not the case at all. This is where the therapist can step in to help facilitate the creation process and encourage the client to explore; however, the therapist is there if they need help with certain materials. Decreased defenses are more common as the therapeutic relationship builds and understanding happens, whether that be understanding in the verbal sense or through the artwork itself (Wadeson, 2010).

**Objectification:** There will be times when clients will not know or want to connect their own emotions to the artwork made in session; this is known as objectification (Wadeson, 2010, p. 11). When this happens, there is a resilient client who may not be emotionally ready to share those feelings with the therapist yet. For an example, if a client paints an image of a person with a sad face in their art, then they would be able to identify that face as sad. However, they may not connect it to their own emotions of sadness. Depending on the client, it may be easier or more difficult for a breakthrough of connecting certain emotions. In that case, it is important to have an understanding in the artwork and client.

**Permanence:** Permanence is a helpful asset in therapy to both the client and the therapist. Permanence is the remembering of feelings or memories of a certain object. Wadeson explains it quite well in a therapeutic sense: “There have been times when

clients have forgotten a piece of work, but seeing it recalls the feelings that were present at its creation” (Wadeson, 2010, p.12). When working with a resilient client, this could be a great approach to use with them further into treatment. For example, one may have a client who is resilient and does not want to partake in anything therapeutic about themselves, but they still make artwork. As the therapist holds onto client work and if the therapeutic relationship strengthens, the therapist can bring out past artwork, and the client can remember what emotions went into creating that piece. From that, their processing about that artwork and session can happen. The mind is a powerful tool that can hold onto many memories; permanence is just one way of recollection that can happen with the brain.

**Spatial Matrix:** Besides permanence, there is something beyond it, which is known as spatial matrix. When one is able to create an image of their family on paper, it is there all at once, whereas verbally it would be a sequence of each relation to each family member, a step by step process. For some, it may be easier than others to verbally share or to create about their life. Wadeson (2010) says “I can show closeness and distance, bonds and divisions, similarities and differences, feelings, particular attributes, context of family life, and so forth” (p. 13). For a therapist, it is important to understand spatial matrix, so that if a client is having a hard time speaking about a creation, the therapist can help steer them in the right direction. Also, it is important to remember that the artworks can help do the talking as well.

**Creative and Physical Energy:** When in an art therapy session, it is important to understand that whether in a group or individual session, there can be a change in the creative and physical energy in the room. In my experience, when facilitating a

weekly group session on Friday's after the end of a work week and other activities, it can be noted the group starts predominantly lethargic. As it nears time to do the art therapy directive, the participants can start to be more alert and awake in their actions. The action of creating and stimulating the brain to be able to create and process (verbally or nonverbally) is powerful. It is important to understand the power of one's mental and physical energy through creating art. Lastly, Wadeson (2010) states, "At times the creative activity takes on the character of play, and art therapy becomes more like fun than like work. Even when being playful, however, I take the art therapy seriously" (p. 14).

**Self-Esteem Enhancement:** Self-esteem is being able to have confidence in oneself and gain a better sense of self-worth and respect; it is a quality that people in a therapeutic setting will often need help on. Self-esteem enhancement is when a client can derive pleasure from creating art in their sessions. This enhancement is especially noticeable in clients who may not have a natural artist background or "especially for those who are less skillful verbally, the pleasure they may derive from expressing themselves in visual form can be not only satisfying in and of itself, but it can also enhance a sense of mastery and self-esteem" (Wadeson, 2010, p. 14). Through attaining a better self-esteem enhancement, clients are enabled to have a higher sense of self through art therapy.

An art therapist mindfully blends multiple aspects such as the ones elaborated on above. In the application of art therapy, not all aspects need to be used in all sessions or honored by all the different approaches and theories of art therapy. Remember, just

because someone is not actively creating art in the sessions does not mean they are not getting therapeutic value out of the sessions and being with the art therapist. There is a conjoining of various approaches being used in expressive therapies, such as ecotherapy and art therapy to create nature-based art therapy. “From our theoretical perspective, ecotherapy necessarily involves questioning assumptions about how we think about the practice of therapy and how we live in the world” (Atkins and Snyder, 2018, p. 51). While engaged in nature-based art therapy, there are still approaches that can be applied, such as Humanistic theory.

“Humanistic theories of psychotherapy emerged in reaction to many of the ideas proposed by psychoanalytic models, introducing concepts of self-actualization and personal potential. Theories of creativity, and human potential supported art therapy’s underlying principle that the creative process of art making enhances growth, self-understanding, and individuation” (Malchiodi, 2012, p. 54).

Humanistic theory is just one of many that aids people to better understand themselves, which can be easily applied to working with many different populations through different therapeutic approaches.

## **Exploring Ecopsychology and Ecotherapy**

To understand ecopsychology and ecotherapy, it is important to understand the origins of where this practice has come from. Starting with a philosopher who had an innate love for nature and then connected his love to a bigger format.

“The word ‘ecology’ originates from the science of biology, where it is used to refer to the ways in which living things interact with each other and with their surroundings. For Arne Naess, ecological science, concerned with facts and logic alone, cannot answer ethical questions about how we should live. For this we need ecological wisdom. Deep ecology seeks to develop this by focusing on deep experience, deep questioning and deep commitment. These constitute an interconnected system. Each gives rise to and supports the other, whilst the entire system is, what Naess would call, an ecosophy: an evolving but consistent philosophy of being, thinking and acting in the world, that embodies ecological wisdom and harmony” (Gaia, 2017).

Arne Naess was a Norwegian philosopher that introduced the idea of deep ecology, which became a movement. What really sparked Naess was *Silent Spring* written by Rachel Carson, who was a famous ecologist and biologist. From her writings, Naess came up with the idea that us as human beings are deeply connected with the earth, because everything can be tied back to it. Us as humans, animals and plants are naturally in tune with the world, and with the continuing increase in technology in the world, humans keep drifting further and further apart from our connection to the world.

“The definition of Deep Ecology is as follows:

- A philosophy based on our sacred relationship with Earth and all beings.
- A international movement for a viable future
- A path for self-realization
- A compass for daily action

“It supports the following:

- Continuing inquiry into the appropriate human roles on our planet
- Root cause analysis of unsustainable practices
- Reduction of human consumption
- Conservation and restoration of ecosystems
- A life committed action for Earth.” (Gaia 2017)

As the above quote states that the way we think, act, and be part of this world are intertwined; that is important to realize that Naess really influenced a lot of people. The teachings that he shared with the world sparked so many people to become more environmentally aware for their relationship between themselves and nature.

Another person that defined ecopsychology to what it is today is Theodore Rozsak. He was attracted by the work of a group that followed Robert Greenway’s teachings. In 1990, after starting to attend groups about the teachings of ecopsychology hosted by Robert Greenway, Roszak started to write his own piece of literature, *The Voice of the Earth*. For Roszak his own definition of ecopsychology is as follows:

- “1) The emerging synthesis of ecology and psychology.
- 2) The skillful application of ecological insights to the practice of psychotherapy.
- 3) The discovery of our emotional bond with the planet.
- 4) Defining ‘sanity’ as if the whole world mattered” (Schroll, 2007).

It is noted that Roszak does have a broad range when talking about ecopsychology and everything else it encompasses. Clearly, there are other cultures in the world that talk about traits of ecopsychology that relates to their culture, and after

writing his initial points on ecopsychology, Roszak expanded on those ideas of his to help people have a better understanding. From a therapeutic standpoint, it is inspirational to see his own definition include psychotherapy and how we can relate the many different modalities of that to ecopsychology and the natural world around us. For example, some of the different modalities include wilderness therapy, sustainable living practices, and gaining understanding in global perspectives.

Ecopsychology in the modern world has been broken down into different fields. One of the main fields that it is most known for is ecotherapy, which was also developed by Theodore Roszak. The idea of ecotherapy is that us as humans are part of something bigger, and our soul/psyche are part of the bigger picture of the environment and attached to it. With the imbalance of dealing with daily modern life, we have become unconnected with the natural world, which is believed to disrupt who we are, also be known as our Human Psyche. Below is a definition of what Ecotherapy is:

“Defining Ecotherapy:

Psychotherapeutic activities (counselling, psychotherapy, social work, self-help, prevention, public health activities):

- Undertaken with an ecological consciousness or intent
- Often utilizing natural settings, activities or processes as an integral part of the therapeutic process
- Focusing on ecological aspects of self, identity and behavior
- At various scales from personal to planetary” (Jordan, 2016, p.15).

Ecotherapy can be fulfilled in many different ways, such as listed above. As you continue reading, you will see different facets that ecotherapy can be used, disaster relief, cultural rituals/religions and community action.

A major point to make about ecopsychology and ecotherapy is that one of the truths behind this philosophy is that we are no longer connected enough to nature, and that is where our addictions, disorders (et al.) come from. However if we were to connect to the natural world again through ecotherapy, we as humans could start to heal from what the modern world has manipulated our psyche/soul to be like. There are different ways besides a traditional therapy sense that ecopsych/ecotherapy can work with people. Some of the practices can include the following, “addressing trauma in military veterans, outdoor therapies for adolescents, and observing modern day rites of passage” (Jordan, 2016, p. 17).

When looking at these various ways that ecotherapy can address many things, it is amazing. While pondering each of those areas can be very helpful to balance a human psyche to be able to feel equal again. Evidently, there are different things that need to be done as well. A more unknown area I would say is the religions and natural ways of life. Especially here in the United States today, a vast majority of humans do not think of cultures that have connections to the natural world for religion and everyday living.

The Native American tribe of Ojibwa turned to natural elements to be their guides and sources of learning. “The Ojibwas’ knowledge of the earth and the sciences was so limited, that anything they could not understand, or any object such as an odd-shaped rock, or even a waterfall, they were apt to regard as some sort of spirit, either good or

bad” (Coleman, 1937, p. 34). All of the people in the Native American Ojibwa culture were very closely connected with the Earth; it showed in more than just their rituals, and it was in their daily lives. Such as they would sleep and sit in the dirt, just so they could be closer to their Earth Spirit. They believe that nature is there to communicate with them and that they can communicate back, not just through plants but animals and rivers as well. The Ojibwa believed that nature can communicate back to them, through the sense of that each living thing (rocks, rivers and plants) has a spirit attached to it. With the different spirits, it was important for them to recognize each one. Therefore, there was a ritual to go along with addressing these spirits. They were very connected to all the different lifelines in the natural ecosystems.

Through utilizing herbs and creating different charms made of natural materials in their surrounding environment, “[t]he Ojibwa had great faith in the power of magic charms of various kinds, among them, hunting charms, love charms, cradle charms, and charms to cure illness” (Coleman, 1937, p. 53). By performing these different cultural rituals, it is seen that the Ojibwa connected to the natural world.

“Love charms consisted of a love potion which was obtained from the medicine man and worn in the clothing. Often the medicine consisted of some powder made of herbs noted for this power, mixed with quicksilver. Frequently, the woman wore a lock of her beloved's hair and made cuts or figurines representing the man she wished to attract” (Coleman, 1937, p. 53).

Through time, the Ojibwa have had to adapt with modern times to the point of where many people who were Ojibwa do not practice the religious aspects of their

culture due to forced assimilation. However, there are elders of different tribes that continue to embrace these practices and teach younger generations about their culture.

When humans work together, they are able to gain more than just success for themselves. However, in this modern day and age, a lot of that is forgotten.

“The human experience is one of collegiality, sociality, mutuality, and cooperation.

These are the traits that assured our survival” (Morgan, 2014). Through ecopsychology and ecotherapy, there are ways for humans to feel like they connect stronger locally and globally. By using the dynamics of ecopsychology, there is the aspect of helping out your local/global neighborhood. For example, there are places that people go to help volunteer in their local community, finding ways to give back on a global scale on a service trip or helping fundraise. There are a variety of ways a person could incorporate ecotherapy into their lives.

For a fellow human to be able to give back to a community that had been hit by a natural disaster (i.e.- Hurricane Katrina, Flint Michigan and the Japan tsunami) helps bring people together but also growing closer to the Earth by learning to respect and appreciate it.

Humans in today’s world, who are able to reach beyond their own inner circle to help in their community and/or beyond, do not realize how far back our innate focus of helping others goes. With Morgan stating that an “individual and social relational traits such as a sense of fear, anger, compassion, empathy, sympathy, jealousy, competition, and amorous propensities were all needed for the melding of social cohesiveness within the family, clan, and community,” it shows that humans have always been communal in

nature when it comes to a lot of things (Morgan, 2014). With the current modern world in many cultures, humans do not always have that sense of initially asking if they could help out anymore, even with a small task.

For others to really help out their fellow humans, especially after a natural disaster, it is popular to see people help do disaster relief or to support in the gathering of donations for areas that need certain items. Also, to help the natural habitat benefits people to have an appreciation for the world as a whole, the care of people, and their self in the bigger picture of things. When someone does support others, there can be an inner healing mentally and emotionally, and they will better understand themselves and to see that being able to give back to humans and the natural world is very fulfilling to do.

Ecotherapy takes a slightly different approach to understanding and working with humans. Not only does it allow humans to connect with nature, it actually allows humans to work on who they are as well through psychodynamic approaches. Ecotherapy aids individuals to better understand themselves but also to understand and work with natural elements around them. "Various ecotherapies are evolving to help communities with this recovery, assisting with practical, psychological and even spiritual healing of the ubiquitous alienation from the rest of nature and nature-based ways of living" (Jordan, 2016, p. 78).

Eco Therapists may have to try different approaches on how to get their clients what they need, depending on the location. However, there are many approaches that can be done, just because one does not have full access to the great outdoors does not mean that they are not able to benefit from nature at all. Sitting in a park, standing

barefoot, even just spending thirty minutes outside a day can help a human to connect back to a natural state of their natural world. Additionally, another way ecotherapy can help is “Permaculture is one example of this and has proven to be highly attractive to young people needing a way to envision and practise a pleasurable and satisfying sustainable lifeway” (Jordan, 2016, p. 78). Permaculture as the development of ecosystems that can be sustainable. Applying the concept of permaculture to ecotherapy can be helpful for clients who need a change in their lives.

Nature-based art therapy is an excellent way for ecotherapy and art therapy to collaborate to benefit humans psychodynamically and within their own selves in their own world. Nature-based art therapy is about bringing nature into art studio/therapy room. Connecting with nature is important and is where the therapist can help bring that understanding to the client. There are many ways for humans to be able to connect to nature, such as creating art with nature in the following ways: leaf mandalas, nature collages and creating natural paint brushes (see case studies page 36).

## **The Human Psyche**

The theory of the human psyche comes from the psychoanalytic theory, which was introduced in the early 1900s by Sigmund Freud. (Mr. Freud was one of many who worked with this theory). Despite new and different advancements over the years, Freud’s theory remains a big one when it comes to the theory of the human mind.

To understand the theory of the human mind a bit more, Freud believed that within the human mind there are three different levels of consciousness and awareness. After learning about these different levels, Freud believed that they create what is

known as our reality, the three levels are as follows: consciousness, subconsciousness, and the unconsciousness. Each of these can also be known as the Superego, Ego and Id, which ultimately makes up the human psyche. The image below summarizes what each area of the Id, Ego and Superego are.

<b>Comparison of Freud's Three Systems of Personality</b>			
	<b>Id</b>	<b>Ego</b>	<b>Superego</b>
<b>Nature</b>	Represents biological aspect	Represents psychological aspect	Represents societal and parental aspect
<b>Level</b>	Unconscious	Conscious, preconscious, and unconscious	Conscious, preconscious, and unconscious
<b>Principle</b>	Pleasure	Reality	Moralistic and idealistic
<b>Purpose</b>	Seek pleasure and avoid pain	Adapt to reality while controlling the id and superego	Represent right and wrong
<b>Aim</b>	Immediate gratification	Safety, compromise, and delayed gratification	Perfection

Figure 1

(Cox, 2014)

As you can see, the Id is more about direct in the moment primal thoughts; the Superego is representation of what others would think, like your parents or other important people in your life; and the Ego is the middle group of both the Id and Superego. The Ego will sift through the consciousness and evaluate the pros and cons to each idea and situation a person is in (Sugarman, 2016, p. 114).

It is important to understand how the mind works so that humans can understand their own selves on a higher level and how they can interact on a social level as well. Knowing where our memories and habits come from is important in knowing how we function as people.

“Although the subconscious and unconscious has direct links to each other and deal with similar things, the unconscious mind is really the cellar, the underground library if you like, of all your memories, habits, and behaviors. It is the storehouse of all your deep seated emotions that have been programmed since birth.” (Journal Psyche)

Many others have done research to see that there are different ways that one can get the human psyche back into a good state of mind, through different ways.

“Wilber does not attempt to deny the truths found in the works of Freud, Skinner, May and other major figures in the field of psychology, but he argues that their works describe only a part of the human psyche, and a full portrait of the mind must include recognition of the non-ordinary states achieved by those who practice meditation and other spiritual disciplines. Thus, a complete psychology must acknowledge not just the conscious ego and unconscious id, but also the soul and transpersonal spirit” (Wilber, 2014).

As Wilber suggested that a human can help get back a better human psyche, I would like to elaborate on how ecopsychology could do that.

In today’s world, it implies people have been out of touch on understanding their own minds, actions and how they evolve. Especially in the modern world, you can see so many people have lost touch to nature. It is known that each of our human psyches are attached to nature as well. With our psyches out of balance, it is harder for our conscious selves to know that we are.

“My theory is what Richard Louv calls Nature-Deficit Disorder is an ongoing condition suffered by much of modern humanity in industrial cultures around the world. Like captive tigers born and raised in a cramped zoo cage, we find ourselves going crazy in industrial society but often having no idea why we’re unhappy, or what it is that we’re really longing for” (Jordan, 2016, p. 75).

Especially with all the over stimulation of the modern world that we have --such as cell phones, constant electric pulses of the internet, TV, texting, and living in concrete jungles-- we are mainly in the mindset of “me, me, me.” With the practice of ecopsychology, humans can connect back to their natural roots of the Earth.

Ecotherapy is another branch from the ecopsychology tree, and it is really bringing the different aspects of ecopsychology to people through different practices (Jordan, 2016).

Though ecopsychology is just one way a person can help their own psyche connect back to the natural world and themselves, it may not be what is right for a person, which is completely all right. What works for one person may not work for the another, and that is very important to keep in mind when working with a client through any therapeutic setting.

## **Higher Education and the student population**

“With perhaps the widest array of institutional types of any country, and with one of the highest college participation rates, the American higher education system is challenged with educating the most diverse student population in the world” (Ward, 2016).

In the United States today, it is expected and normalized to attain a degree whether associate and/or bachelors. What many older generations may not understand is what incoming student populations can face. Each different level (freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior) can experience different things. It is important to understand how the student population works, so that people who work throughout colleges and universities can better help the student populations succeed on campuses (Ward, 2016).

When people think of student populations in general, many would assume people who can easily afford to go. However, student populations are rising to serve many different socioeconomic backgrounds, such as first-generation students. Although some students may have earned a label of first generation, due to being the first person in their family to achieve a higher education degree, this does not encompass all the many facets that make up their identity (Ward, 2016, p.1). There are nine themes that are determine retention in higher education.

“The nine themes include the students’ backgrounds, money and finances, grades and academic performance, social factors, bureaucratic factors, the external environment, psychological and attitudinal factors, institutional fit, and student intentions” (Ward, 2016, p. 29).

When a person starts their journey of higher education, it typically starts at a freshman level through senior. Below is a list of common struggles and developmental tasks each higher educational level goes through according to University of Central Florida (UCF), which this information is based from the Chickering’s Seven Vectors, a developmental model.

### **Freshmen-**

#### **Developmental Tasks:**

- Separating from family and home life and transition to being on your own.
- Developing and/or discovering one's likes, interests, and preferences.
- Balancing social and academic demands and pressures.

#### **Common Struggles:**

- Mental Health Issues
- Homesickness
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Study Skills
- Lack of connection, social life, or friends
- Family problems and stress
- Loneliness
- Confusion about major
- Using unhealthy and nonproductive coping behaviors such as binge drinking, unprotected sex, frequent one-night stands, anger outbursts, isolating self.

### **Sophomore-**

#### **Developmental Tasks:**

- Achieving competence in social and academic life.
- Establishing personal autonomy
- Developing a sense identity and purpose.
- Making important choices as an individual instead of as a collective freshmen group.
- Declaring a major and a sense of career direction.

- Exploring values

#### **Common Struggles:**

- Mental Health Issues
- Confusion
- Anxiety/ stress
- Internal conflicts
- Doubting self, abilities, decisions etc.
- Dealing with feelings of frustration, anxiety, fear depression.
- Values clash
- Family problems.
- Wanting to transfer
- Relationship and social struggles
- Academic struggles

-Using unhealthy and nonproductive coping behaviors such as binge drinking, unprotected sex, frequent one-night stands, anger outbursts, isolating self.

### **Junior-**

#### **Developmental Tasks:**

- Choosing a career path (more focus on personal and academic life and job opportunities).
- Increased commitment to intimate relationships including friendships and a better sense of interdependence.
- Better sense of values clarification.
- Increased self-confidence in purpose, role, beliefs etc.

#### **Common Struggles:**

- Mental Health Issues
- Concerns with career path
- Relationship issues
- Struggles with feelings of anxiety, depression and confusion.
- Decision making difficulties
- Family problems.
- Using unhealthy and nonproductive coping behaviors such as binge drinking, unprotected sex, frequent one-night stands, anger outbursts, isolating self.

### **Senior-**

#### **Developmental Tasks:**

- Getting ready to graduate
- Making plans for personal and career life beyond college.
- Deciding on job or graduate school.
- Deciding on the future of intimate relationships.
- Saying goodbye to meaningful relationships.

#### **Common Struggles:**

- Mental Health Issues
- Anxiety about graduation and no set plans or path.
- Lack of motivation (depression)
- Decisions making difficulties about future academic, personal or career life.
- Feelings of panic, discouragement, confusion, and/or sadness.
- Disconnecting prematurely from meaningful relationships. (College Student)".  
(University of Central Florida)

From the lists above, it illustrates what struggles people in each stage of higher education face, and some continue throughout their higher education career. For professionals working in the higher education system, it is important to know and understand the different outcomes of the list above, so that one can be knowledgeable on preventive and helpful measures and to help the student population succeed in various ways of academically, socially, and mentally.

Also, in the UCF list of developmental tasks and common struggles, it mentions the Chickering's Seven Vectors, which is a model about psychosocial development in college students. To understand the model, Chickering has used a metaphor of a journey to help people understand: he refers to vectors as highways. Here is a breakdown of each of the seven areas-

1- Developing Competence

- Possessing basic intellectual, physical, and interpersonal skills and a general feeling of confidence in those skills.

2- Managing Emotions

- Balancing self-control and self-expression

3- Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence

- Gaining emotional and instrumental independence while developing interdependence.

4- Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships

- Developing the capacity for tolerating and appreciating the differences of others, developing the capacity for intimacy.

-

5- Establishing Identity

- Resolving a host of issues related to appearance, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and social situation and developing a positive stable self-concept.
- 6- Developing Purpose
- Assessing interests, clarifying goals, making plans, and persisting despite obstacles in vocational, personal, and interpersonal and family commitments.
- 7- Developing Integrity
- Humanizing values: Balancing self-interests with the needs of others.
  - Developing congruence: Allowing personally held values to guide behavior

(University of Central Florida)

With seeing the seven vectors and their meanings, the factors can be applied to college students and on their journey of self-discovery in the higher educational system. Clearly, each student is different from one another and will not always follow a certain pattern, which it may be that one person may attain a different area before another one. However, it is important to understand that Chickering's theory is here to help us understand the different stages that people can go through in a higher education setting (University of Central Florida).

*Personal Insight:*

As someone who interns with the student population at University of Wisconsin Superior (UWS), I have seen different areas on how to work with the students for them to gain a better sense of self, well-being, and global perspectives. Primarily, I would like to state that the UWS campus has many great departments and centers for students to reach out and find a sense of purpose. Some of the centers are Gender Equity

Resource Center, Multicultural Center, First Nations Center, and Veterans and Non-traditional Students Center.

Each of these centers offer great resources to students to better understand themselves and the college and non-college environment. Students who utilize these resources often find themselves feeling more comfortable with the college setting, especially if they are a freshman, a non-traditional student or even just having a hard time finding a spot in the campus life. Students are helped through the center(s) by finding a sense of purpose for them to gain a better sense of self. Through the journey of gaining a better sense of self comes a better sense of well-being, which to have a great academic, socially and mental stability is needed.

Lastly, another influential piece for students to learn about themselves and others are different global perspectives, which can represent itself through understanding one's own personal background or about their peers' backgrounds as well. For myself as an art therapy graduate student, I held an internship on the UW-Superior campus in the Gender Equity Resource Center. In the following section, you will be able to see selected clients that I have worked with and how the clients have been able to learn these different aspects through art therapy collaborating with ecotherapy.

## **Case Studies**

The following names have been changed for confidentiality\*

I have been able to intern on the UW-Superior campus in the Gender Equity Resource Center (GERC) working with students who utilize the center. GERC serves the students of the UWS campus who can utilize the center as a safe space on campus and are able to gain more knowledge of different identities. Many students come from many different backgrounds, such as- Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer plus (LGBTQ+), traditional/non-traditional, international et al.

While working at the Gender Equity and Resource Center at UW-Superior, I provided opportunities that wove aspects of ecotherapy in with art therapy to work with the people who utilize the center. One of the biggest ways I worked with the clients is through an open studio group, where people who came in and out of the center were able to participate in the project if they wanted to but were not obligated if unwilling. There were also private sessions for people to attend, but little results were accumulated due to attendance. Over my time interning at the center, I have noticed that having the open studio sessions are the best way to gain an audience.

Through my time interning and working with students at GERC on the UW-Superior campus, I have seen firsthand students to be able to engage in art therapy sessions that have facilitated a foundation for learning about themselves, a sense of well-being that works for them, and different cultural perspectives, as sessions may incorporate certain cultural aspects. Art therapy in GERC has been getting a great response from the students on campus with visible results in the clients I work with, such as gaining and attaining different skill sets. Having spent a year and a half interning at GERC, I have been able to see clients progressively change and be able to understand themselves better within the higher education system, through participating

in art therapy and nature-based art therapy directives. Highlighted below are a few nature based art therapy sessions applied at GERC

*Natural Paint Brushes:*

Natural paint brushes are created out of different wooden sticks and leaves such as pine needles, cedar branches and prairie grass taped together to create a paint brush. From having these paint brushes created prior to bringing them in for clients, it was an easier directive to lead, instead of them taking the time to create their own brush. The goal of this directive was to have the clients connect to the natural materials they were using as they used it with other normal art materials to create an image of their choosing. This was the first nature-based art therapy activity that I brought in for GERC. The directive was received very well by the students who participated in this session; for some, it was the first time that they ever had a nature-based art therapy directive.

**Ian:** While participating in the directive, Ian connected with a past trauma. Ian did not go into detail about what the trauma was, but he did share that “as a young child I went through testing for ADHD and how I was judged by a room full of doctors.” Ian went through a tough time in the center with being bullied by other students. As he continued to work with this directive, I did multiple check-ins with him, but he never went any further than what he verbally shared with me, even when a one-on-one session was offered. Ian became very focused on finishing his painting (figure 2.)

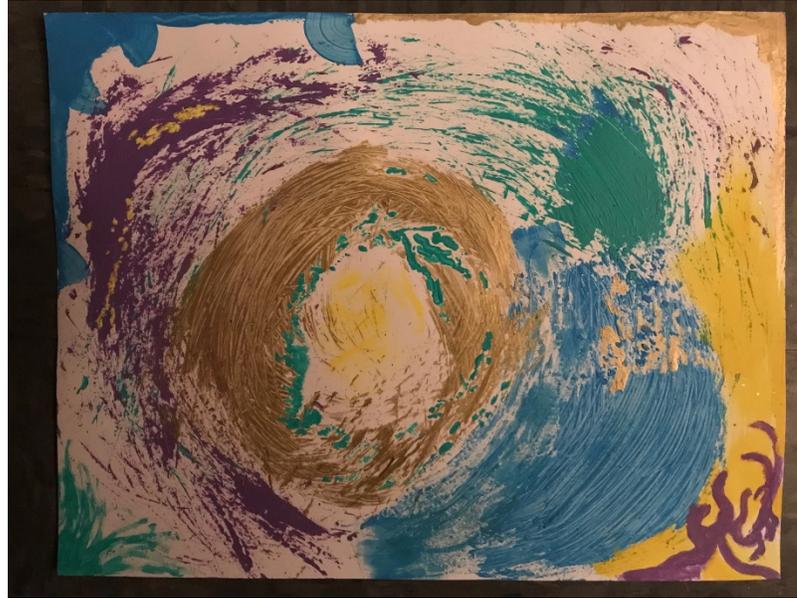


Figure 2. Ian's Natural Paint Brush Artwork.

For Ian and other clients in the center, the result this project seemed to be able to help others to think more outside of the realm of regular art materials and evaluate what else they could use in their everyday life and natural life to create with and to accept something new into their life.

#### *Flower Mandalas:*

This directive was for the clients to create with natural materials of flowers and leaves and to make an image that represented themselves. Since many people do not create with nature daily, it was a refreshing directive to utilize. The directive itself introduced the client to examine themselves to understand themselves and how they can represent themselves. The clients who participated in this directive became very

mindful. When the clients saw the material for the session, they were all excited to see something that is familiar to them but enticed by the idea that an object that is well known by them can be used to create art. The material was flowers and greenery, they were to create a mandala or image out of using just the flowers and leaves that were available.

There was a total of four participants. When the session started, the clients were intrigued by the fact that there was something different for the art material. At first, the clients did not want to destroy the plants that were brought in. Then once they realized what could be created from them, it was so freeing for them to create.

**Seth:** Created a dual identity image, there were two different circles one called “Kissing Tulips” (figure 3) and the other did not have a name. There was a small circle of petals above both of these circles, which he shared it represented himself, “not that I am above anything, but that I am alright and not sinking” were Seth’s words when he was verbally processing through the image. The two main circles of the image were not supposed to be daunting but just representing two different parts of his life. Seth started the session in an anxious mood, and by the time he was done creating, he left in a relaxed state of mind.



Figure 3. Seth's Flower Mandala

**Katie:** Showed the most resistance with this directive. At first, she just watched others participate but did not want to do it herself. Eventually, she started to play with the materials, then she ended up using one of the flowers as part of a prayer for her religion before she created. She shared that this was a prayer she will say when things get to stressful for her, and she has tensions with friends.

As Katie allowed for the group and myself to witness this prayer was quite unique for the entire group, giving everyone a peak into a lifestyle that most in this area are not accustomed to seeing. Once she was done with the ritual, she was able to create an image with the directive given for the session. The image she created was about symmetry (figure 4). Katie shared that it was clear that she is the kind of person who likes to have things be equal and no grey areas, but black or white. Having an outlet to express that feeling was very powerful for Katie in the sense that she does not really get to share those kinds of feelings with others besides her partner. Her attitude leaving

group was much more relaxed and was complying with others around her, whereas at the start she was more on edge and resistant toward myself and others in GERC.



Figure 4. Katie's Flower Mandala

Overall, I believe this was a great nature-based art therapy directive, in the sense that the participants had a break from typical art supplies, and it made them think about representations of themselves and other things in a more organic and bigger picture sense.

#### *Case Studies Conclusion*

These directives aid the participants in understanding and working with natural material, which is something that can be lost in today's world. Katie sharing her own ritual with the group was a special moment for everyone in attendance, whereas it shows how other religions/spiritual groups of the world can and will incorporate nature

into their lives. When looking at the college aged population who have participated in the natural paint brush directive, such as Ian, it was more of a regressive directive, but he was able to work through the negative memories to create an image that was uplifting for him and helped him to better understand himself. Having used nature based art therapy with clients at GERC, it assisted in teaching them to understand themselves and different global perspectives through the use of natural art materials.

## **Combining Art Therapy and Ecotherapy to help young adults in Higher Education**

From what has been presented so far about art therapy and eco therapy, they have shown that young adults in higher education have been able to benefit greatly by participating in therapeutic offerings. Through the different directives that were available for the students to participate in, there was growth seen in areas of understanding the self, well-being and global perspectives.

For attaining a better sense of self, it is evident that through the directives offered to the students of GERC that they were able to learn about themselves and their peers in session. During the sessions, there were psychodynamic times that allowed for them to really dig deeper to understand who they are through the process of creating art and at times natural materials as the art. When a person can attain a better sense of self, their whole perspective of themselves in their world can change. Their mental health will

increase and having a better understanding of themselves will leader to greater breakthroughs.

Well-being is an area that can increase with having a better sense of self. When well-being is being address, it helps a person to take care of themselves mentally, physically, and emotionally. Through the sessions at GERC, the students have been able to realize how important it is to take care of themselves whether that be through art therapy, nature-based art therapy, or even just slowing down to relax. The sessions have taught the young adults to really take that time to themselves and to help restore a good balance of well-being to them.

As others got to know each other through sessions, it was apparent that they learned about each other and their backgrounds. Working with others from different backgrounds has been very beneficial for that people in the sessions have been able to learn about different global perspectives from each other. Having the sessions be diverse has helped to serve as a safe space for having conversations about one's religions or cultural background. Through learning different global perspectives, people learn to have respect for each other and themselves.

In a college setting, it is incredibly important to assist young adults in keeping their mental health in order. Especially since, starting their first year to their last year of college, they go through a wide range of emotional stress, such as depression and anxiety (UCF). Along with mental health being affected, there are other aspects that can be changed, such as learning to manage emotions, developing a sense of purpose and developing integrity. This can also help with any other hardships that can come with being in higher education and each person's background.

## Conclusion:

“All creative expression begins with our presence with the sensory experience of the body. We see nature as the inspiration and the model for our understanding of creative process, and we view creative expression and responding as participatory processes embedded in the ongoing creative processes of the world”  
(Atkins & Snyder, 2018).

With having different mental struggles while in higher education, it is important for young adults to be able to have access to resources that can help them, such as counseling centers and different diversity centers. While having access to centers like that, one can benefit greatly from having a safe place to go, explore different opportunities and be able to work through struggles. I would like to note that not all diversity centers are staffed with a therapist or counselor; however, they are great resources to help connect students to the proper care that they seek.

Nature-based art therapy is good balance for college students to participate in because it helps them to work on their mental health through a therapeutic setting of learning about themselves, also by showing them how the natural world and one are connected. Through learning about that relationship, one could learn to appreciate the world around them, and cultivate new ideas and activities to do for themselves, which can be known as learned self-help through therapy, regardless if it was in a counseling center or a different diversity center.

Through working the GERC at UW-Superior, I have been able to see young adults learn about themselves and grow their psyche to better understand their emotions and actions, through integrating ecotherapy and art therapy.

Atkins and Snyder (2018) mention it perfectly: "The Earth teaches us that when threatened, it has the innate capacity to restore equilibrium, reorganize and adapt to change". With having understood the collaboration of ecotherapy and art therapy and seeing how students can benefit from sessions of art therapy, it is important to keep in mind that their well-being grows along with their sense of self and global perspectives to attain nature-based art therapy.

Through the nature based directives that were offered to students of GERC, it was noticeable to see that each of them left with a deeper sense of self, well-being, and global perspectives. Firstly, they were able to gain a deeper sense of self not only by participating in the nature-based art therapy directives, but while in session, they were able to learn more about themselves and how they can interact with themselves. For example, how Seth was able to recognize in his Flower Mandala that he is at a good stage in his life and did not see the bigger circles of the page as ominous.

Secondly, well-being was attained in the sense that participating in the directives and learning about themselves. The students were also able to walk away from the sessions with better understanding of how they can take care of themselves. It will always be different for each person, but through the sessions, they were able to learn different ways to connect back to natural elements and how refreshing that it can be.

Thirdly, it was seen that the students were able to learn from each other through different global perspectives. With students having different cultural backgrounds, there is going to be a plethora of people one will meet in the higher education setting. Through nature-based art therapy, students were able to connect with each other and learn about each other's backgrounds, if the session was set up for it.

As an example, look at Katie's interaction with a group session, before she could create, she said a prayer using nature. It was a new experience for the students at the session to witness this. Katie was very open in talking about her ritual with the rest of the group.

These different areas that were highlighted to the students in the group sessions were areas that the students all gained more knowledge and skills on. Since attaining these newly developed skills, the students will be able to apply their freshly obtained sense of self to the rest of their higher education careers and beyond. While learning about themselves, they were also able to learn about their connection to the natural world and how their own psyche can be altered from different distractions of the modern world. Seeing the students I worked with be able to connect to themselves and nature through nature-based art therapy, it is recommended that more higher education settings offer more mental health services that can help students understand themselves through different modalities.

## References

- Gaia. (n.d.). Deep Ecology. Retrieved February 18, 2018, from <http://environment-ecology.com/deep-ecology/74-deep-ecology.html>.
- Rubin, J. A. (2001). *Discovery, Insight, and Art Therapy*. In (2 ed., p. 17). Philadelphia, PA: Brunner-Routledge.
- Malchiodi, C. (2014, February 24). Edith Kramer: Art (Therapy) Tells the Truth. Retrieved March 04, 2018, from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/arts-and-health/201402/edith-kramer-art-therapy-tells-the-truth>.
- Freud's Model of the Human Mind. (n.d.). Retrieved March 07, 2018, from <http://journalpsyche.org/understanding-the-human-mind/>.
- Wilber, K. (2004). *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy*. *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 8(2), 125-127. doi:10.1525/nr.2004.8.2.125.
- John H. Morgan. (2014). THE DEEP STRUCTURE OF HUMAN NATURE: PROBING THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL PROPENSITIES IN BEHAVIORAL MATRICES (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO E. O. WILSON). *Agathos: An International Review of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, (2), 112-123.
- Cox, K. (2014, February 21). Friday, February 21st. Retrieved March 13, 2018, from <https://www.smores.com/2fhm-friday-february-21st>.
- Ward, L., Siegel, Michael J, & Davenport, Zebulun. (2012). *First-generation college students understanding and improving the experience from recruitment to commencement / Lee Ward, Michael J. Siegel, Zebulun Davenport ; foreword by John N. Gardner*. (1st ed., Jossey-Bass higher and adult education series). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- College Student Development. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2018, from <https://caps.sdes.ucf.edu/resources/parents-development/>.
- Jordan, M., & Hinds, J. (2016). *Ecotherapy: theory, research and practice*. London: Macmillan.

-Schroll, M. A. (2007). Wrestling with Arne Naess: A Chronicle of Ecopsychology's Origins. *The Trumpeter*, 23(1), 1-30. Retrieved March 10, 2018.

-Wadeson, H. (2010). *Art psychotherapy*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

-About Art Therapy. (n.d.). Retrieved April 07, 2018, from <https://arttherapy.org/about-art-therapy/>.

-Malchiodi, C. A. (2012). *Handbook of art therapy* (2nd ed.). New York: The Guilford Press.

-Coleman, B. (1937). The Religion of the Ojibwa of Northern Minnesota. *Primitive Man*, 10(3/4), 33-57. doi:10.2307/3316455.

-Sugarman, S. (2016). *What Freud really meant: A chronological reconstruction of his theory of the mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rubin, J. A. (2001). *Approaches to art therapy: Theory and technique*. (2nd ed. P 29) New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

## List of Figures

Figure 1- Freud's Comparison of Personality	22
Figure 2- Ian's Artwork	33
Figure 3- Seth's Artwork	35
Figure 4- Katie's Artwork	36