

*Processing Trauma: Expression of the Inner World*

Presenter Larissa Mcpherson, Psychology major

Mentored by Dr. Nisha Gupta

This presentation assesses how expressive arts therapies can be used by individuals to process and heal from trauma. For many years, those within the therapy and counseling community have explored the different ways creative expression can be used to aid the process of mental healing. The forms of creative expression used by those suffering from trauma vary widely, including music and the visual arts. For the purposes of this presentation, I will focus on the effectiveness of the visual arts for mental processing and psychological healing. Understanding expressive arts therapies must begin with an understanding of what expression is and how the practice of being visually creative affects the brain. Therapists and counselors have long been discovering the effects this practice can have on the brain and how well traumatic experiences are processed through and integrated into experience. Practicing creativity can give clients an outlet to visualize how a traumatic experience has effected them and even help encourage them through the process of healing and personal growth. As the psychological community comes to understand the importance of expressive arts therapies, programs have been developed to train therapists in these modalities. This has shown to be effective in clients of all ages and some studies have even looked at how clients with combat-related PTSD can use expression in a therapeutic setting. It is important that therapists and counselors are trained in how to utilize the practice, and to educate the general public in how they can practice expressive arts even outside of a therapeutic setting and improve the mental health practices of the community at large.