

A book review: A Theory-based Approach to Art Therapy

Huss, E. (2015). *A Theory-based Approach to Art Therapy: Implications for teaching, research and practice*. Routledge.

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Ephrat Huss's recent book joins the important series "Explorations in Mental Health Issues" published by Routledge. In her book, Huss draws from her rich clinical and academic experience providing readers with a well-rounded integrative approach to researching, teaching and practicing art therapy. The framework of the book includes three sub-groups of dynamic, humanistic and systemic-social theories and their implementation in art therapy theory and practice through different prisms of psychological and social theories.

Each of the three general sections includes a summary of the theories presented within a concise table displaying the abundant information presented in the section. I found this method of review particularly helpful in providing an overview of the many theories presented in the book.

This novel approach encourages readers to observe a range of art therapy approaches within a new context, thus expanding the boundaries of traditional art verbal and art-based interventions.

The book does not shy away from some practitioners tendency to disregard theory at worst or to neglect theory due to time constraints at best, quite the opposite, Huss states in the book's introduction that art therapy must be theory-based.

The books layout is defined with each chapter including a consistent inventory of the following elements:

- Contribution of the theory to art therapy
- The theory
- Problem as defined by the theory
- The solution as defined by the theory
- The social context
- Macro applications
- Role of art in this theory
- Dynamic art therapy
- Role of the art therapist
- Evaluation
- Art evaluation
- Supervision
- Research
- Critique of the theory
- Central concepts exemplified through a case study

- Working the theory: art therapy skills and techniques
- Verbal techniques
- Overall skills to practice
- Art-based skills to practice

Huss chose to begin her book with a case study of a group of four women who survived sexual abuse in childhood, this case study is referred to throughout the book, allowing readers to observe the way in which the same art work can be viewed through different theories. The art work is featured in black and white images with colors indicated in the commentary, a decision that may well have been influenced by technical constraints. Given the gist of the book which focuses on art, I feel that color images would have enhanced the readers' experience. Choosing to exemplify the theories presented using recurrent art work bridges the gap between practice and theory in a subtle yet important way, making the book accessible to art therapists and practitioners who might otherwise refrain from theoretical material.

The final chapters of the book consciously shift away from the theory-based format in order to provide additional points of view which do not fit into the theories presented. Huss suggests observing the impact of individual, family, group and community settings (chapter 15) when addressing personal issues. She states that personal and political influence each other and need to be viewed as such. Another chapter which provides an overview of the way in which art therapy can be viewed relates to deconstructing populations (chapter 16) in a manner not traditionally done in art therapy literature which tends to provide insight into specific populations. Huss offers a novel manner of analysis and therapy utilizing a range of theories and points of view with the same client, often within a single session.

The book is unique in arrangement and extremely rich in information, these two factors while daunting at first provide a rare opportunity for readers, who are invited to read the book cover to cover or delve into specific sections according to their needs.

Two particular elements which I found especially useful were the sections ending each chapter - overall skills to practice and art-based skills to practice. In these well-defined sections Huss provides hand-on suggestions for therapists who want to improve their expertise and broaden their practical knowledge.

As I read the book cover to cover, I found myself gaining theoretical knowledge as well as jumping ahead to upcoming chapters seeking information and art-based projects regarding art therapy clients of my own.

I found that the book fulfills the substantial promise depicted in its' title, offering theoretical and practical information relevant to those teaching, researching and practicing art therapy.

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