Expressive Arts with New Moms
Andrea Schneider, MSW, LCSW

Blending Three Dimensions into the Elixir of Healing – Therapist as Alchemist
(A. Schneider, 2016)

CELEBRATION OF MOTHERHOOD
and INTEGRATION/RESTORATION
of BODY/MIND/SPRIT

Art Therapy and Expressive Arts Interventions

- What’s the difference between the two?
- Expressive Arts can include: music, drama, visual arts, play, sandtray, movement
- Today’s focus: expressive arts interventions with new moms (using image-making with art media)
Expressive Arts as Healing Pathway

- Innovative, cutting-edge, trauma-informed
- Helpful for ALL ages for those healing from depression, anxiety, PTSD, trauma, grief and loss
- Particularly helpful for new moms working through PMADs

Cathy Malchiodi, Art Therapist

- “Images are the midwives between experience and language. The miracle of image making is that...it helps birth a story that holds countless memories and emotions”

Image Making and Ancient Cultures/ Civilizations on Through to Modern Times

- Art used across time as a form of image making to depict celebrations, milestones (cave paintings, hand-crafted objects, etc.)
- Useful as a pathway to create meaning of joyful moments but also understanding that which is traumatic (L.A. riots, DV shelter)
Trauma-Informed Expressive Arts Interventions

- Field of trauma and mindfulness through expressive arts
- Bessel van der Kolk: *The Body Keeps the Score*
- Peter Levine: *Waking the Tiger*
- "Neuro-sequential" approaches to trauma recovery (Bruce Perry) Focus is on process, not necessarily finished product
- Process is: reclamation of self, restored hope, continuity of the narrative of the story of trauma/loss, creating meaning out of crisis

"The core of traumatic reaction is ultimately physiological, and it is at this level that healing begins" Peter Levine

Brain Physiology in Trauma Response

Parts of the Brain Involved in Fear Response
The Triune Brain

Neurosequential Model for Sensory-Based Trauma Intervention (C.Malchiodi, 2014)

- Three Basic Levels of “Art Expression”
- Kinesthetic/Sensory (lower brain)
- Perceptual/Affective (limbic system)
- Cognitive/Symbolic (cortical areas)

Kinesthetic-Sensory Level

- Music
- Rhythm
- Sound
- Senses
Perceptual-Affective Level
The “feeling” of the worry or trauma in the body (Body Map)

Cognitive/Symbolic Level
- Telling a Story (mastering the trauma through narration) through creative expression (a narrative in art or image)

Trauma-Informed Expressive Arts Therapy Key Elements
- Respond to traumatic events through sensory approaches to self-regulation
- Uses a neurosequential approach to stabilize the body’s responses
- Identifies body’s reactions to stressful events and memories
- Uses arts and play-based interventions to establish and support safety and positive attachment
- Strength-building through arts therapies to normalize and enhance resilience (C. Malchiodi, 2014)
Expressive Arts for New Moms

- Helps to nurture the nurturer by incorporating self-soothing strategies on a kinesthetic/sensory level
- Can be used in group format to build community and support or with family/older children/spouse
- Helps to master trauma by narrating story of traumatic birth, perinatal loss, experiencing PMAD
- Container for worry and fears
- Memorialize baby who is stillborn, miscarriage, perinatal loss
- Visual representation of vision board/mandala for going into birth with strength and courage; identity formation of new mother (Blessingway)
- Honoring and celebrating body, fertility (belly casts, sculptures)
- Connecting story of attachment with mother and baby and repairing any disconnect resulting from PMAD

PMADs as traumatic

- Whether surviving a PMAD, traumatic birth, intrusive thoughts, infertility, perinatal loss
- Visceral experience
- “The Body Keeps the Score” Bessel van der Kolk

- Self-regulation
- Right Brain Dominance
- Integration
- Meaning-making

Creative Arts Address these Components of Trauma Recovery (C. Malchiodi, 2016)
Expressive Arts as Sensory-Based

- Grounding
- Anchoring
- Mirroring
- Entrainment
- (C. Malchiodi)

Why Expressive Arts Help

- Art Interventions employed once client is in early recovery
- Art is the process of reclaiming control (agency) over that which seemed out of reach during trauma
- Helps with narration of story to master trauma in once-removed way (displacement)
- Use of kinesthetic and emotional brain to access cognitive processing (triune brain concept)

Creativity

- Just as important as good nutrition, exercise, good sleep and positive social supports
- By engaging the sense of sight, touch, smell, movement – stories are translated in the process of image making
- When words are not enough
- Helps improve memory retrieval, organize and verbalize, lowers stress, blood pressure, heart rate and respiration, improved mood and improved ability to communicate feelings
Rainer Mara Rilke

- “You must give birth to your images. They are the future waiting to be born.”

Mandalas

Body Map
Body Maps

- Helps to identify the “felt” pain that has been internalized on a somatic/sensory/perceptual level from trauma (i.e. from traumatic childbirth, perinatal loss, etc)
- Assists with narration of the traumatic event for synthesis of processing trauma on the 3 levels of the triune brain
- Stress Relieving Process
- Empowering for client to assign color, shapes, and meaning with the image-making

Sculpy pendants/footprints to Commemorate Baby Loss

Sculpy clay

- Sculpy clay
- Acrylic paints

- Memorializing baby loss
- Envisioning Fertility, Safe/Serene Birth
Guatemalan Worry Doll
- Clothespin
- Yarn
- Markers
- Tacky Glue

Chippewa Dream Catcher
- Paper plate
- Yarn
- Beads
- Feather
- Scotch tape
- Helpful for containing Anxiety and insomnia

Mother Masks/Shields
Inside Me / Outside Me Mask/Self-Portrait

Masks/Shields
- Represents the visual “felt” sense of the Self that is presented to the outside world and the Self which is hidden underneath
- Allows for opportunity to link color, symbols, shapes and expressions with identifying feelings connected to depression, anxiety, trauma, shame, loss, perfectionism...also strength, courage, fortitude, and transformation
- The myth of June Cleaver/The Perfect Mom can be dismantled and perfectionism addressed

Visual Journaling
Visual Journaling

Positive Affirmation Manifestation Cards
Mandala

Hands Collage to Build Compassion, Community, Courage, Connection

Connection in Community
Providing a Safe Place to Create

“It takes a village to raise a child”...it takes a community to embrace a mother

Identity Expansion and Tree Branches and Roots
Examples of Mother-Baby Art

Georgia O’Keefe and her opening, flowering blooms

Mother-Baby Joy
Flower as cervix analogy (Georgia O'Keefe)

Mary Cassatt Mother and Child works

Mary Cassatt
Moche sculpture of birthing mother

Early representation of midwifery

Pre-Colombian sculpture of giving birth
Roman Tableau of a Midwife and Mother

Venus of Willendorf

Sculpture of Pregnant Mother
Andrea Schneider, LCSW and Cathy Malchiodi, PhD, ATR

Resources

- Hand-out with website links/literature/resources

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Experiential Exercise

- Mandala Collage
- Worry Doll