



ART THERAPY MULTICULTURAL / DIVERSITY COMPETENCIES

AMERICAN ART THERAPY ASSOCIATION

(December 2011)

INTRODUCTION

AMERICAN ART THERAPY ASSOCIATION MISSION STATEMENT

The American Art Therapy Association, Inc. is an organization of professionals dedicated to the belief that the creative process involved in the making of art is healing and life-enhancing. Its mission is to serve its members and the general public by providing standards of professional competence and developing and promoting knowledge in and about the field of art therapy.

MULTICULTURAL / DIVERSITY COMPETENCE

Multiculturalism is a term that indicates any relationship between and/or within two or more diverse cultural groups. Art Therapy, from a multicultural perspective, takes into consideration the specific values, beliefs, and actions influenced by a client's race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, political views, sexual orientation, geographic region, physical capacity or disability, and historical or current experiences with the dominant culture.

Ethical Principle 6.0 of the American Art Therapy Association's Ethical Principles for Art Therapists (2011) states:

Multicultural /Diversity Competence in art therapy is a capacity whereby art therapists possess cultural and diversity awareness and knowledge about self and others, and at the same time ensure that this awareness and knowledge is skillfully applied in practice with clients and client groups. Art therapists maintain multicultural/diversity competence to provide treatment interventions and strategies that include awareness of and responsiveness to cultural issues.

Multicultural competence involves a three-stage developmental sequence of awareness, knowledge, and skills. Multicultural and diversity competency implies a specific and measurable set of deliberate actions and results that increase the ability to serve diverse populations. The Art Therapy Multicultural/Diversity Competencies are designed to clarify the types of multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills art therapists need to acquire to work effectively with persons from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. Multicultural competence is essential to ethical practice, and competence must become the cornerstone for effective art therapy practice.



I. Art Therapist Awareness of Personal Values, Biases, and Assumptions

A. Attitudes and Beliefs

1. Culturally competent art therapists believe that cultural self-awareness and sensitivity to one's own cultural heritage is essential.
2. Culturally competent art therapists recognize how their own cultural background, cultural identity, assumptions, and experiences including aesthetic experience, and experiences in the arts have influenced attitudes, values, and biases about psychological, creative, and art making processes, including developmental changes.
3. Culturally competent art therapists are able to recognize the limits of their multicultural competency and expertise.
4. Culturally competent art therapists recognize their sources of discomfort with cultural differences that exist between themselves and clients with respect to race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, age, gender, gender identity/expression, religion, socioeconomic status, political views, sexual orientation, geographic region, physical capacity, physical, mental, or developmental disability, and historical experiences with the dominant culture.
5. Culturally competent art therapists are aware of relevant discriminatory practices at the social and community levels, coupled with global sociopolitical issues (i.e., wars, occupations and natural disasters in country of origin, legalized discrimination in same sex relationships) that may be affecting the psychological welfare of the population being served.

B. Knowledge

1. Culturally competent art therapists have specific knowledge about their own race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, age, acculturation, gender, gender identity/expression, religion, socioeconomic status, political views, sexual orientation, geographic region, physical capacity, physical, mental, or developmental disability, and historical experiences with the dominant culture and how it personally and professionally affects their definition and biases of normality/abnormality and the process of art therapy.
2. Culturally competent art therapists possess knowledge and understanding about how oppression, racism, classism, sexism,



discrimination, and stereotyping affect them collectively, personally, and in their work. This allows individuals to acknowledge their own racist, sexist, classist, and discriminatory attitudes, beliefs, and feelings.

3. Culturally competent art therapists possess knowledge about their social impact upon others. They are knowledgeable about differences in styles of communications with respect to self-disclosure, nonverbal behavior, directness, respect, and assertiveness. Art therapists recognize how their unexamined assumptions can negatively impact the therapeutic relationship and the art therapy process.

C. Skills

1. Culturally competent art therapists seek out educational, consultative, and training experiences to improve their understanding and effectiveness in working with clients from diverse groups. Being able to recognize the limits of their competencies, art therapists (a) seek consultation, (b) seek further training or education, (c) refer out to more qualified individuals or resources, or (d) engage in a combination of these options.
2. Culturally competent art therapists are constantly seeking to understand themselves and are actively seeking a non-racist and non-discriminatory identity.

II. Art Therapist Knowledge of Clients' Worldviews

A. Attitudes and Beliefs

1. Culturally competent art therapists are aware of their negative and positive emotional reactions toward racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and diverse groups that may prove detrimental to the therapeutic relationship. They are willing to differentiate their own beliefs and attitudes with diverse groups of clients in a nonjudgmental fashion.
2. Culturally competent art therapists are aware of their stereotypes and preconceived notions that they may hold toward diverse groups and their cultural experiences. In addition, they may also have some knowledge of diverse groups' preconceived notions concerning the therapists' cultural group.

B. Knowledge

1. Culturally competent art therapists possess specific knowledge and information about the particular group with which they are working. They are aware of the life experiences, cultural heritage, cultural identity, artistic traditions, and historical background of their clients.
2. Culturally competent art therapists understand how race, culture, and other aspects of diversity may affect personality formation, vocational choices, manifestation of psychological disorders, help-seeking behavior, creative process, image making, experiences with the arts, and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of art therapy approaches.
3. Culturally competent art therapists understand the sociopolitical influences (i.e., belonging to the dominate culture) that can impinge upon the lives of all individuals. Discrimination, racism, sexism, classism, ageism, oppression, prejudice, stereotyping, racial profiling, poverty, powerlessness, and settlement/immigration issues may significantly impact self-esteem and self-concept in the therapy process.

C. Skills

1. Culturally competent art therapists familiarize themselves with relevant research and latest findings regarding mental health and mental disorders that affect racial, ethnic, cultural, and other diverse groups. They should actively seek out educational experiences that enrich their knowledge, understanding, and cross-cultural skills for more effective therapeutic behavior.
2. Culturally competent art therapists familiarize themselves with the artistic traditions and art making processes of various racial, ethnic, cultural, and other diverse groups. They strive to understand how their clients' art reflects those values, even if they would be seen as pathological, resistant, or stereotypic when viewed through another perspective.
3. Culturally competent art therapists involve themselves in actions of solidarity with individuals within their communities on a personal and professional level so that their perspective of diverse individuals is more than an academic or helping exercise.



III. Art Therapist Skills in developing and/or Implementing Appropriate Interventions, Strategies, and Techniques with Sensitivity to Language, Religion, and Biculturalism

A. *Attitudes and Beliefs*

1. Culturally competent art therapists demonstrate their respect for the clients' religious and/or spiritual beliefs and values, including attributions, taboos, symbolic traditions, and preferred methods of treatment because they affect worldview, psychosocial functioning, and expressions of distress.
2. Culturally competent art therapists respect indigenous helping practices and helping networks among racial, ethnic, cultural, and other diverse groups.
3. Culturally competent art therapists value bilingualism and biculturalism. They do not view another language or cultural customs and beliefs as an impediment to art therapy.
4. Culturally competent art therapists seek educational opportunities and strive to develop and implement interventions, strategies and techniques with sensitivity to language, religion, and biculturalism.

B. *Knowledge*

1. Culturally competent art therapists have a clear and explicit knowledge and understanding of the generic characteristics of art therapy (culture-bound, class-bound, and monolingual) and how they may clash with the values of various groups.
2. Culturally competent art therapists have knowledge of culturally specific resources (i.e., interpreters/ translators) and are aware of barriers (i.e., inflexible hours for providing services, transportation) that prevent clients from various groups in accessing and utilizing mental health services.
3. Culturally competent art therapists have knowledge of the potential bias in assessment instruments and use procedures and interpret findings keeping in mind the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the clients.
4. Culturally competent art therapists are able to understand how their clients' expected art traditions may affect their participation, choice of materials, and creation of imagery in art therapy.
5. Culturally competent art therapists have knowledge of family structures, hierarchies, values, and beliefs from diverse



perspectives. They seek training, education, and consultation to gain knowledge about the community where a particular racial, ethnic, cultural, or other diverse group may reside and the resources in the community.

6. Culturally competent art therapists should be aware of relevant discriminatory practices at the societal (i.e., racism, classism, sexism, and ageism,), coupled with global sociopolitical issues (i.e., wars, occupation, and natural disasters in country of origin) that may be affecting the psychological welfare of the population being served.

C. Skills

1. Culturally competent art therapists are able to engage in a variety of verbal and nonverbal helping responses. They are able to send and receive both verbal and nonverbal messages accurately and appropriately. They are not tied down to only one method or approach to helping, but recognize that helping styles and approaches must be adapted to clients. When they sense that their helping style is limited and potentially inappropriate, art therapists anticipate and modify it; thereby expanding their own personal growth and training as therapists.
2. Culturally competent art therapists are able to design and offer art therapy interventions and experiences that take into consideration their clients' diverse art traditions, preferences for art materials, and their beliefs and practices related to the creation of imagery.
3. Culturally competent art therapists are able to exercise institutional intervention skills on behalf of their clients. They can help clients determine whether a problem stems from racism, classism, sexism, ageism or bias in others so that clients do not inappropriately personalize problems.
4. Culturally competent art therapists are not averse to seeking consultation with traditional healers or religious and spiritual leaders and practitioners to aid in treatment.
5. Culturally competent art therapists take responsibility for interacting in the language requested by the client and, if not feasible, make appropriate referrals. This being the case, art therapists should (a) seek a translator with cultural knowledge and appropriate professional background or (b) refer to a knowledgeable and competent bilingual art therapist.



6. Culturally competent art therapists have training and expertise in the use of art-based assessments. They are also aware of the cultural limitations, which may warrant reconsideration and /or modification of the assessment.
7. Culturally competent art therapists should attend to as well as work to eliminate biases, prejudices, and discriminatory contexts in conducting evaluations and providing interventions.
8. Culturally competent art therapists continue to seek educational opportunities to stay abreast of current multicultural needs of their community and of the needs of global currents.
9. Culturally competent art therapists take responsibility for educating their clients about their rights and responsibilities as partners in the therapeutic process. Art therapists recognize that properly executed, the informed consent process is a way of engaging the participation of clients; a means of empowering clients; and a means of providing clients with clear information about the benefits and limitation of art therapy treatment

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