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**Healing Collective Generational Trauma
and Building Resilience Through Art Therapy**

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

May 1, 2022

Ruzanna Carter

Art Therapy

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Abstract

Current research is limited in the transmission of transgenerational trauma. Most of the research available on the topic was specific to the survivors of the Holocaust. The focus in this thesis is on the Armenian population and how the trauma of the wars and the Genocide has transmitted to future generations and continues to impact the population today. The literature reviewed for this topic explored how trauma transcends these generations but also how the resilience transcends. My goal was to help build resilience through the artmaking process more in the style of Jungian art therapy in a semi-open studio structure. The artmaking and the response art served as a container in expressing the heaviness of the transgenerational trauma and became a catalyst for the reflection on the transmission of resilience. Specific to the Armenian culture, the Armenian population does not tend to seek therapy or talk about their feelings, so in this process the artmaking aided in expressing the trauma with a creative outlet through the exploration of various art materials.

Keywords: collective trauma, transgenerational trauma, intergenerational trauma, resilience, Jungian art therapy, Armenia(n)

This author identifies as a white, straight, middle-class, minority woman from Armenia.

Healing Collective Transgenerational Trauma and Building Resilience Through Art Therapy

The topic for my thesis is part of my ongoing personal self-realization and self-exploration within the context of my culture and how cultural generational trauma has impacted my life, given that I am of Armenian descent. I came to the United States in 1992 after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which had left Armenia living in a blockade with a limited supply of water, electricity, and food. Coming to the United States was a culture shock for me and complicated the trauma I had lived through in Armenia, with a horrific earthquake in 1988 and the blockade which resulted in many deaths due to poor living conditions. As I got older I had survivor's guilt, having been "lucky" to have family in the US while so many perished back home.

Armenia was the first nation to adopt Christianity in 301 A.D. Therefore Christianity is a big part of the Armenian cultural identity. Another big part of their cultural identity is the rich, vast, and sad history that seems to keep repeating itself. Armenia has suffered many wars defending its land, its faith, its people and its culture. The wars that started in the late 1800s and early 1900s with the Ottoman Empire are continuing with their descendants in Turkey and Azerbaijan. Turkey and Azerbaijan have tried to get Armenians to convert to Islam or be killed and the culture extinguished. The term genocide describes destructive actions undertaken with the purposeful intent to destroy a specific group of people based on some perceived difference – usually racial or religious (Burlison & Giordano, 2016). Since Armenians are Christian, this was the basis of the 1915 Armenian Genocide, when almost 2,000,000 Armenians were taken out of their homes and marched to their brutal deaths. Every year on April 24th Armenians all over the world mourn those who were killed during this

genocide. Most of the Armenian population are not direct descendants of those that had survived, but they mourn and pass this down to future generations.

In the fall of 2020, Turkey and Azerbaijan joined forces to finish the genocide their ancestors had started. More Armenians were killed, children orphaned, and churches, schools and, hospitals burned down in their efforts to eradicate Armenians, yet they failed once more. More Armenians were directly impacted by this war that continues in 2022 at the writing of this thesis project, even those living in the diaspora.

Thousands of Armenians living in Artsakh (part of Armenia now under Azerbaijan's control) are regularly subjected to terrorist and genocidal acts. In the winter months of 2022, in sub-freezing weather, Azerbaijan had cut off heating fuel and electricity to Artsakh and the world is silent once more. This is taking an emotional toll on Armenians not only living in Armenia but around the world. Then to this we add familial generational traumas that have been carried as burdens and passed down to children and grandchildren. Braga et al. (2012) stated, "The consequences of traumatic events are not limited to the persons immediately exposed to the event, and they often affect significant others in their environment such as family, friends, and caregivers" (p.8).

Clinical studies reported a wide range of affective and emotional symptoms transmitted over generations: distrust of the world, impaired parental function, chronic sorrow, inability to communicate feelings, an ever-present fear of danger, pressure for educational achievement, separation anxiety, lack of entitlement, unclear boundaries, and overprotectiveness within a narcissist family system (Braga et al., 2012).

This thesis will examine how to build resilience through art making and to help heal generational traumas so that future generations can live happier, healthier lives. That is not to say

that they should forget where they came from and who they are, but they should not carry this sad history on their shoulders like a burden.

In the May 2013 Discover Magazine's lead article (p.6), Dan Hurley summarized the findings of behavioral epigenetics that traumatic experiences in our past, or in our recent ancestor's past, leave molecular shards adhering to our DNA ... like silt deposited on the cogs of a finely tuned machine after the seawater of a tsunami recedes, thus our experiences, and those of our forebearers, are never gone, even if they have been forgotten. They become a part of us, a molecular residue holding fast to our genetic scaffolding. The DNA remains the same, but psychological and behavioral tendencies are inherited. (Greedy, 2013, p. 93)

In my theoretical orientation I lean towards Jungian art therapy because of the influences of my history and culture. Jung resonates with me on different levels. Symbolism is an inherent part of Jungian art therapy, and Armenians in general, myself included value personal and cultural symbols in art making, crafts, architecture, etc. Jung was interested in symbols, but his primary focus was on the spontaneous image that arose from the unconscious to express both personal and primordial elements (Swan-Foster, 2018, p. 18). Dreams are also important in the Armenian culture and dream analysis was an important part of Jung's theory. In my response art I incorporated the use of symbols in art making, creating spontaneous art pieces which included pieces of dreams, creating an altered book with daily practices of Mandala drawing, and writing stories and poems with metaphors. During the creation of his *Red Book*, Jung stated that he "found resilience in his own play, art making, and writing" (Swan-Foster, 2018, p. 8).

The response art detailed in this paper was developed to explore the potential healing and resilience building qualities of art therapy with populations and communities that continue suffering transgenerational trauma. For the purposes of this paper, the focus is on people of Armenian descent who have been directly or indirectly impacted by the Armenian Genocide and the years of continued terror through wars by Turkey and Azerbaijan. There is not a lot of research specific to this topic or this population, but there is enough to indicate the benefits of art therapy and its healing qualities and the prospects of building resilience.

I chose the article “Resilience through Art: Art Therapy with Holocaust Survivors from the Former Soviet Union” because Armenia was part of the former Soviet Union and culturally this can relate more to the Armenian Genocide, and it described how creating art as a response to events, experiences, can build resilience through art therapy, resolve internal conflicts, and allow healing to take place (Keselman, 2020). Cultural trauma impacts members of a collective group when they “feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (p.2). As with the Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide is an example of cultural trauma that has disrupted the “cultural homeostasis, values, identity, and sense of belonging” (p.3) of Armenians around the world. In this article Keselman (2020) discussed studies and testimonials of the impact of art, and how “art can provide an integrating and symbolic way of processing trauma” (p.5). In Diamond and Shira’s 2018 study,

Holocaust Survivors engaging in art demonstrated greater resilience than both Holocaust Survivors who did not engage in art and the comparison groups of older adults (one group who engaged in art and another group who did not engage in art). (Keselman, 2020, p.6).

The article “Posttraumatic Growth in Youth Survivors of a Disaster: An Arts-Based Research Project” focused on a group of youth who survived the earthquake in Peru in 2007 and focused on how they demonstrated growth after trauma with the help of the arts. A group of faculty from the Expressive Arts Therapies program in Peru “conducted a 9-month art therapy intervention program with children and adolescent survivors of the earthquake who has acute trauma symptoms” (Mohr, 2014, p. 155). The survivors of the Peru earthquake “expressed that participation in the creative arts program had provided relief and even a sense of joy during this stressful time” (Mohr, 2014, p. 155). Mohr conducted an art-based project three years after the earthquake with the same participants to see if there were any experiences of growth and understanding. Mohr (2014) stated:

Posttraumatic growth as a positive experience of change that may occur as a result of a struggle with difficult challenges or trauma which may bring heightened appreciation of meaning in interpersonal relationships, greater sense of personal strength, shifts in priorities, increased appreciation for small life events, and a richer interior life in the existential or spiritual sense. (p. 155)

As the author stated, artmaking becomes a means of expressing discomfort associated with the traumatizing event while empowering imagined possibilities for how positive change can come about, both within the self and in the environment (Mohr, 2014, p. 156). Mohr (2014) chose photo elicitation, followed by art making and community sharing “because research on photo elicitation found that it acted as an effective trigger for memory recall, thereby evoking a more emotional and many-layered response from participants than interviews alone” (p. 157). Mohr attributed other elements to the growth of these youth survivors that were tied to their active participation in their community and being surrounded by proactive adults in said

community. Mohr (2014) reported that “It is likely that this set of circumstances, as well as their role in it, contributed in large part to their having experienced a sense of posttraumatic growth” (p. 157). According to the American Art Therapy Association, art therapy is defined as, “an integrative mental health and human services profession that enriches the lives of individuals, families, and communities through active artmaking, creative process, applied psychological theory, and human experience within a psychotherapeutic relationship” (2017). The literature supported community-based art therapy interventions to conduct with survivors of the recent war in Armenia to build resilience and alter the impact of transgenerational trauma.

Literature Review

Generational, Intergenerational, and Transgenerational Trauma

Rosenthal’s (2021) article on Intergenerational Trauma (ITT) discussed how trauma is stored in the body and is also transmitted from person to person on a body level through biological and environmental means. “It is important to understand that transmission occurs through the body, and therefore must be treated through the body” with somatic interventions (Rosenthal, 2021, p. 80). If these traumatic wounds are not healed, individuals can continue to reenact the story hoping for a new ending (p.81). Rosenthal (2021) further stated “According to the concept of intergenerational trauma, psychological trauma can not only impact one’s lived experience, but can also be transmitted from parents to children, and continue to be passed on by families and communities across generations” (p.81). According to epigenetic studies, gene expression and how one reacts to certain stimuli can be passed down from parent to offspring. Studies done on the Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-1945), the Swedish

famine (1867-1869), the Montreal ice storm (1998), and the Holocaust (1941-1945) support epigenetic transmission of traits by studying offspring of parents who lived through those traumas (Rosenthal, 2021, p. 82). Rosenthal (2021) suggested when helping individuals heal from wounds and symptoms related to ITT, it is necessary to explore how systems of oppression might be affecting the client, and how telling one's story, or silence, can affect the healing process (p.84).

Braga et al. (2012) conducted a study with offspring of Holocaust survivors, and their methodology showed how the survivors dealt with parental trauma. The authors used the Grounded Theory approach to present the transgenerational transmission of trauma and the transmission of resilience patterns. "Many studies suggest that genocides in Rwanda, Nigeria, Cambodia, Armenia and former Yugoslavia brought about distinct psychopathological symptoms in offspring of survivors", such as depression, PTSD, attention deficits and behavioral disorders (Braga et al., 2012, p. 1). The authors discovered that communication style had a significant impact on the manner in which members of the second generation integrate their parents' traumatic experiences into their lives (p.4). The experience of trauma for the offspring presented as a wide range of manifestations like having terrifying world view and attempts to anticipate disaster. They also expressed feeling a lack of rootedness and belonging. Some of the participants mentioned the crucial role of art in symbolically working over traumatic parental experiences. Braga et al. (2012) stated "faced with unspeakable trauma, fictional recreation and other forms of artistic output and realization were privileged means of resilience reported by the second generation" (p.7). The authors concluded that just as the trauma can be conveyed transgenerationally, as does the possibility of overcoming trauma, with the development of resilience mechanisms by the survivors' offspring.

Sarkissian and Sharkey (2021) also focused on the transmission of trauma through familial mental health, specifically for descendants of the Armenian Genocide. The authors further stated:

For the Armenian community, the unresolved historical loss of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, with the threat of acculturation for such a large diasporic population, a continued denial by the perpetrators, as well as subsequent generations' refugee experiences, may further exasperate the impact of transgenerational trauma from genocide. (p.1)

Given the modern devastation caused by genocidal acts across the world and the continued impact of historical genocides, it is critical to better address the mental health impact on survivors and their descendants. A study on the descendants of the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda found that exposure to higher numbers of traumatic stressors during the war, levels of physical illness, and levels of social integration all predicted symptoms of PTSD among children of survivors (Sarkissian & Sharkey, 2021, p. 3). Given the history of genocide and multiple generations of displacement, Armenians have generally maintained a strong ethnic identity and an agenda to acculturate (i.e., adapt to the mainstream culture) quickly and assimilate (i.e., losing the home culture) slowly. As William Saroyan (1935) stated:

I should like to see any power of the world destroy this race, this small tribe of unimportant people, whose wars have all been fought and lost, whose structures have crumbled, literature is unread, music is unheard, and prayers are no more answered. Go ahead, destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them into the desert without bread or water. Burn their homes and churches. Then see if they will not laugh, sing, and pray again. For when two of them meet anywhere in the world, see if they will not create a

New Armenia. (p.438)

This quote exemplifies the assigned importance of ethnic identity and community connectedness among Armenians. Sarkissian and Sharkey (2021) agreed by stating that “Given the strong values of both familism and collectivism, impacts may be influenced by both direct familial exposure and cultural identity” (p. 5). Sarkissian and Sharkey (2021) suggested that treatment of transgenerational trauma may need to focus on building community strengths and resilience while acknowledging and addressing discrimination rather than approaching treatment from a more individualistic, Western lens. Additionally, Armenians have demonstrated many idioms of distress that draw focus to the physical responses to pain and suffering, and practitioners can learn how to support Armenians if they understand the connection between physical idioms of distress and the somatization of mental health needs.

In “Breaking the Chains of Generational Trauma,” Marano (2021) discussed how transgenerational trauma is not something that can be easily pinpointed. The author stated, “It is often covert, undefined, and subtle, surfacing through family patterns and forms of hypervigilance, mistrust, anxiety, depression, issues with self-esteem, and other negative coping strategies” (p.1). Marano stated that just as traumatic experiences can be passed down from one generation to the next, so can the capacity for overcoming the trauma and building resilience.

Ramona Ceciu’s (2019) article, “Trauma, Identity and Culture,” focused on various forms of trauma and how those shape distinct worldviews and problematic identities. The author stated, “It is argued that these traumas get integrated into the self through a series of negotiations, emotional reverberations and transactions” (p.63) and these interactions between the self and the world develop through genetic and epigenetic factors, “which point to the fact that trauma has a

transgenerational transmission and manifests in varied degrees and forms in different context of development” (p.63). The author focused on research done with second and third generations of Holocaust survivors and she discovered that “pride, strength, and gratitude are as much a part of the legacy as the negative effects of the experience” (p. 64). The process of passing down family behavioral patterns is considered to be done at both conscious and unconscious levels, and not only do they pass down to future generations the trauma, but also coping and adaptation patterns.

Kalayjian and Weisberg (2002) explored the physical, psychosocial, and spiritual impact of Genocide on the offspring of survivors. The authors conducted an exploratory study with second and third generation survivors of the Ottoman Turkish Genocide of the Armenians living on the East Coast of the United States of America. Whereas research focusing on the survivors of the Holocaust of the Jews is vast, very few studies have been conducted to explore the impact of the Genocide of the Armenians on its survivors and their descendants. The authors stated, “The Armenian American Society for Studies on Stress & Genocide (AASSSG) organized a workshop for the children and grandchildren of survivors of the Ottoman Turkish Genocide of the Armenians” (p.261). This workshop was open to all those whose lives had been directly or indirectly impacted by the collective trauma of the Genocide. Workshop facilitators were experienced group leaders who had worked in the field of Genocide and trauma studies for over a decade. They were both offspring of the Genocide and Holocaust survivors, and a chiropractor who specialized in psychosomatic manifestations and non-verbal body language was invited to assist the participants in gaining a greater awareness of how emotions affect body sensations. He too was a child of a Genocide survivor.

Kalayjian’s (2002) six-step Bio-Psychosocial and Spiritual model was utilized. The

following are the six-steps of this model: 1) assessment, 2) expression of feelings, 3) empathy and validation, 4) discovery of positive meaning, 5) information dissemination, 6) diaphragmatic breathing exercises and being mindful of the body” (p. 261). The majority of the respondents in this study expressed feeling burdened by having to carry emotional memories of previous generations. They were thus saddled with a sense of forced responsibility for carrying the memories and helping their ancestors. The group was given an opportunity to talk about and bear witness to the trauma, to grieve, and to restore trust.

According to Karenian et al. (2010) trauma can be transmitted at a personal level or collectively (cross-generationally), and the refugees and descendants of the Armenian Genocide are likely to have been subjected transmission of collective trauma. In this study a large portion of the Armenian people who participated reported various distressing symptoms of a traumatic character, which originated from knowing about the 1914-1918 events of the genocide. Karenian also stated that “people with more intense traumatic experiences reported a stronger connection to the Armenian community” (p.334).

Art Therapy and Resilience

The article “Resilience Through Art: Art Therapy with Holocaust Survivors from the Former Soviet Union” was culturally relevant to this review because Armenia was part of the former Soviet Union. It described how “art served as a response to events in the lives of the people who were impacted, and their environment, and how one can build resilience through art therapy, resolve internal conflicts and allow healing to take place” (Keselman, 2020, p1).

Cultural trauma impacts members of a collective group when they “feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their

memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (p.2). The Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide are examples of cultural trauma that have disrupted and continue to disrupt the “cultural homeostasis, values, identity, and sense of belonging” (p.3) of Armenians and Jews around the world. Keselman (2020) reported studies and testimonials of the impact of art, and how art can provide an integrating and symbolic way of processing trauma. In Diamond and Shira’s 2018 study:

Holocaust Survivors engaging in art demonstrated greater resilience than both Holocaust Survivors who did not engage in art and the comparison groups of older adults (one group who engaged in art and another group who did not engage in art). (Keselman, 2020, p. 6)

While this article focused on the resilience of adults who have survived the Holocaust and the benefits of art for them, the next article discusses the growth response in youth survivors of a disaster.

The article “*Posttraumatic Growth in Youth Survivors of a Disaster: An Arts-Based Research Project*” focused on a group of youth who survived the earthquake in Peru in 2007 and focuses on how they demonstrate growth after trauma with the help of the arts. A group of faculty from the Expressive Arts Therapies program “conducted a 9-month art therapy intervention program with children and adolescent survivors of the earthquake who had acute trauma symptoms” (Mohr, 2014, p. 155). This added to my transgenerational trauma because of the earthquake we had in Armenia in 1988, so this connected to my research through another layer of cultural and transgenerational trauma. Those of us that were children in 1988 (I was 9 years old) are adults now and continuing to layer on the traumas without ever having dealt with any of it. The survivors of the Peru earthquake “expressed that participation in the creative arts

program had provided relief and even a sense of joy during this stressful time” (Mohr, 2014, p. 155). Mohr conducted an art-based research three years after the earthquake with the same participants to see if there were any experiences of growth and understanding (p. 155).

Mohr (2014) talks about:

Posttraumatic growth as a positive experience of change that may occur as a result of a struggle with difficult challenges or trauma which may bring heightened appreciation of meaning in interpersonal relationships, greater sense of personal strength, shifts in priorities, increased appreciation for small life events, and a richer interior life in the existential or spiritual sense. (p. 155)

The author stated artmaking becomes a means of expressing discomfort associated with the traumatizing event while empowering imagined possibilities for how positive change can come about, both within the self and in the environment” (Mohr, 2014, p. 156). Mohr (2014) chose photo elicitation, followed by art making and community sharing “because research on photo elicitation found that it acted as an effective trigger for memory recall, thereby evoking a more emotional and many-layered response from participants than interviews alone” (p. 157). Mohr attributed other elements to the growth of these youth survivors that were tied to their active participation in their community and being surrounded by proactive adults in said community and stated that - “It is likely that this set of circumstances, as well as their role in it, contributed in large part to their having experienced a sense of posttraumatic growth” (p. 157).

In an art therapy and mindfulness meditation studio group, Kalmanowitz and Ho (2016) helped the participants build strategies for safety, supported resilience, and worked with multiple levels of loss after extreme and traumatic experiences. They considered how the combination of art therapy and mindfulness in work with refugees acknowledges human suffering and traumatic

events while at the same time recognizes the resilience that exists and the search for healing, health and growth. The authors stated that:

Trauma is responsive to mindfulness in that it works towards increased awareness and acceptance rather than to decreasing of awareness and of shutting down can assist in both emotional processing as well as cognitive processing through this attitude of acceptance, nonjudgement and present focus. (p. 58)

Some of the psychodynamic approaches to art therapy and trauma have begun to include an emphasis on the use of art, which emphasizes a connection between the body, biology and the mind. In the studio, art materials were available and introduced to the participants, but no theme was given, and mindfulness was introduced through the teaching of a variety of formal and informal mindfulness exercises. As van der Kolk suggests, the task in therapy in this context is “both to create a capacity to be mindful of the current experience and to create symbolic representations of past traumatic experiences with the goal of uncoupling physical sensations from trauma-based emotional responses, thereby taming the emotional terror” (Kalmanowitz & Ho, 2016, p. 59). Further to this, van der Kolk suggested that movement is connected to trauma. Both art therapy and mindfulness meditation engage the individual through movement at different times. “Making art emerges directly from movement and mindfulness meditation focuses on the subtle movement of breath as well as the more direct engagement in walking meditation” (p. 60). The group participants reported that the combination of art therapy and mindfulness helped them cope day to day and allowed them to begin to get a sense of who they were and what they had lived through and who they could become (2016).

A four-drawing art therapy trauma and resiliency protocol study investigated the potential effectiveness for coping with adverse life events (Hass-Cohen et al., 2018). “Resiliency, as

fostered by creativity, imagination, and the arts therapies, is a critical factor in managing the impact of adversity” (p. 44). According to Hass-Cohen et al. (2018), artmaking promoted a novel sense of purposefulness, mastery, planning, and resourcefulness, which germinated the discovery of resiliency (2018). For this four-drawing protocol participants chose from a selection of colorful and white paper, and pastels or markers, and after each drawing they wrote a title and a short story about the drawing (2018). There was a follow up session with the participants five weeks later and there were significant decreases in the trauma effect rating and negative affect endorsements (2018). In the article “Resilience and Hope,” the authors organized a community-based arts project to help foster resilience and belonging with immigrant youth that might be struggling with insider/outsider dynamics (Lewis et al., 2021). In the second phase of the project the immigrant youth invited some of the local students to work with them. The focus was on intentional artmaking, with no critical commentary (positive or negative). In addition, it was non-evaluative in nature, there was no forced participation, witnessing, sharing, and participatory involvement of facilitators (2021). The authors explored the importance of hope and the impact it had on the immigrant and refugee youth through the creative process and uses of metaphor and symbolism. The authors stated that - “because the arts easily apply in outreach programming, they fit well as tools for working with people in non-intimidating ways, privileging human experience in image creation and the space that houses it” (p. 96). This collaborative art making helped the youth connect with others, increased their self-awareness, and fostered a sense of belonging. Lewis et al. (2021) stated that artmaking as a non-verbal creative process allowed for sharing one’s presence and identity visually through creative images and noted the presence of hope in their art (p.96). The authors argued that hope is often a feature of resilience among youth who come from experiences of trauma in their homes and countries, at times including family

separation (p. 100). “While deemed to be subjective concepts, we understand that resilience develops within engaged contexts, especially as it relates to experiences of struggle and trauma” (Lewis et al., 2021, p.96) and when resilience is present, the ability to cope and move through difficulty strengthens.

Jungian Theory and Art Therapy

Granot et al. (2018) interviewed 15 Israeli Jungian art therapists in a study exploring their perception of Jungian theory and its use in art therapy. The authors explored how Jungian art therapists’ theoretical views amplified the impact of their art therapy practice. All of the art therapists that were interviewed felt that “JT (Jungian Therapy) was compatible with their particular philosophy of life and affected their perceptions of the client, therapist and the therapeutic process” (p.88) and this supported the rationale to integrate principles of Jungian Therapy into my response art to portray the symbolic language full of imagery and metaphors. In this study, “All the therapists viewed symbols as keys to treatment, and believed that working within symbolic strata could elicit change and transformation” (p.89). The most prominent transformative quality of the symbol is its universality. This does not mean that all symbols transcend cultures but that “the power of the symbol lies in establishing the individual experience” (p.89) that each client brings. Jung’s ideas reinforce the basic concept in art therapy that art can be a meaningful form of communication, both consciously and unconsciously (p.91). Most art therapists in the study stated that they fostered an open creative environment by leaving the choice of materials as well as content of the art up to the clients.

Skov (2013) discussed using symbols as self-representation, provided the opportunity to explore different parts of the unconscious and to change the attitude to self

through that exploration. In her study, Skov (2013) stated that the “transformative process of consciousness develops through the compensative function of the self, operating through the art making process, followed by therapeutic exploration of the image leading to an ego-self relationship” (p.1). She had some great suggestions for group art therapy and how

groups can hold, mirror and confront original new parts of the individual self when some attention is laid on group dynamics, and when the individual has been given enough time to become familiar with the inner self before confronting the collective. (p.2)

Skov (2013) noted that there can be confusion due to not knowing what the image means on a personal level which will come during the “free exploration” of the image when the “solution to a problem appears intuitively as a result of the transcendent function” (p.4). In her opinion, the imaginative and non-personal dialogue came before the client’s personal association, and if the client made personal association too soon the therapist would redirect to fully explore the image (Skov, 2013). Characteristic for a Jungian approach in art therapy is an intentional activation of the unconscious through the creative process and therapeutic use of images. Skov (2013) discussed the spiritual domain becoming more active in the creative process and imaginative exploration of the artwork and how the “spiritual approach in art therapy is grounded in the understanding of the self as an inner guide” (p.12).

Art- Based Response

To further reflect and amplify the content examined in the literature review I worked in a semi-open studio style with spontaneous creation of art and a specific focus on cultural identity and exploration of cultural trauma. With the focus on Jungian art therapy, the creation of art focused on personal and cultural symbols, such as crosses, pomegranates, trees, Mount Ararat,

ornamental Armenian designs, an Armenian church, the monument of the Armenian Genocide, and writing in Armenian. Based on Jung's *Red Book*, I created an altered book (Figure 1.) with a series of mandalas as I worked through the thesis process. I chose *The Da Vinci Code* to alter because of all the art symbolism that the book contained. I used polymer clay to create the tree on the cover and used resin to create the Armenian ornamental designs. As I worked on some of the ornamental pieces that I created in resin, I asked my daughter to join me in the making process. This was a good bonding experience for us as we played and created together, and she learned about the Armenian design elements. In some of them I used mustard seeds to represent my faith and the quote from the Bible: "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, move from here to there, and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Once these pieces were ready, I used them on the cover of my altered book.

As Granot (2018) stated in his article that the Israeli Jungian art therapists saw the use of symbols as a key to treatment, so I used a lot of symbols in my mandalas in the book and in my drawings in general. One of the mandalas included Mount Ararat and Noah's Ark (Figure 2.), which the Bible states that Noah's Ark landed on Mount Ararat. This also illustrates the importance of religion throughout Armenian history, with Armenia being the first nation to adopt Christianity in 301A.D. As I was working on the mandalas and looked back on them, I realized that the work I was doing in the artmaking was on the surface and childlike. I was not delving deep because I was afraid of the intense emotions that would come of it. Once I worked through this process, I was able to push through, dig deep, and just focus on the process without trying to make "pretty" art with my symbols. The mandalas started to be more organic and expressive, and the larger pieces reflected the difficult process of recognizing resilience.



Figure 1

The larger pieces of artwork were done on 14 by 18-inch mixed media paper, experimenting with traditional art materials like charcoal (Figure 3), chalk and oil pastels, and paint, along with nontraditional materials like Armenian coffee (Figure 5) and pomegranate ink made out of the seeds of the pomegranate. I used my “inner guide” (Skov, 2013, p. 12) in the creation of these art pieces to help explore and express what I was feeling. The charcoal drawing (Figure 3) was a spontaneous drawing, in which I was continuously moving and not stopping to think about what arose. This piece evoked a lot of emotions but at the end it felt cathartic. There were a lot of



Figure 2

symbols in there that showed the silence and blindness of the world to what was happening in Armenia in 2020 during the war. This drawing was dark and expressed the anger and the hurt I was feeling from the silence of this world not acknowledging what was happening in my homeland. It made me reflect on the resilience of the Armenian people and how they continue

living, rebuilding, and creating after each war. Then I created a smaller pen and ink drawing (Figure 4) with charcoal of a winter tree with bare branches and a red pomegranate made of resin.



Figure 3

As I reflected on the drawing, I thought the tree represented Armenia in its current state. Armenia does not have riches to offer to the world; it just has a rich history and culture, and people that have great minds and have contributed a lot to this world.

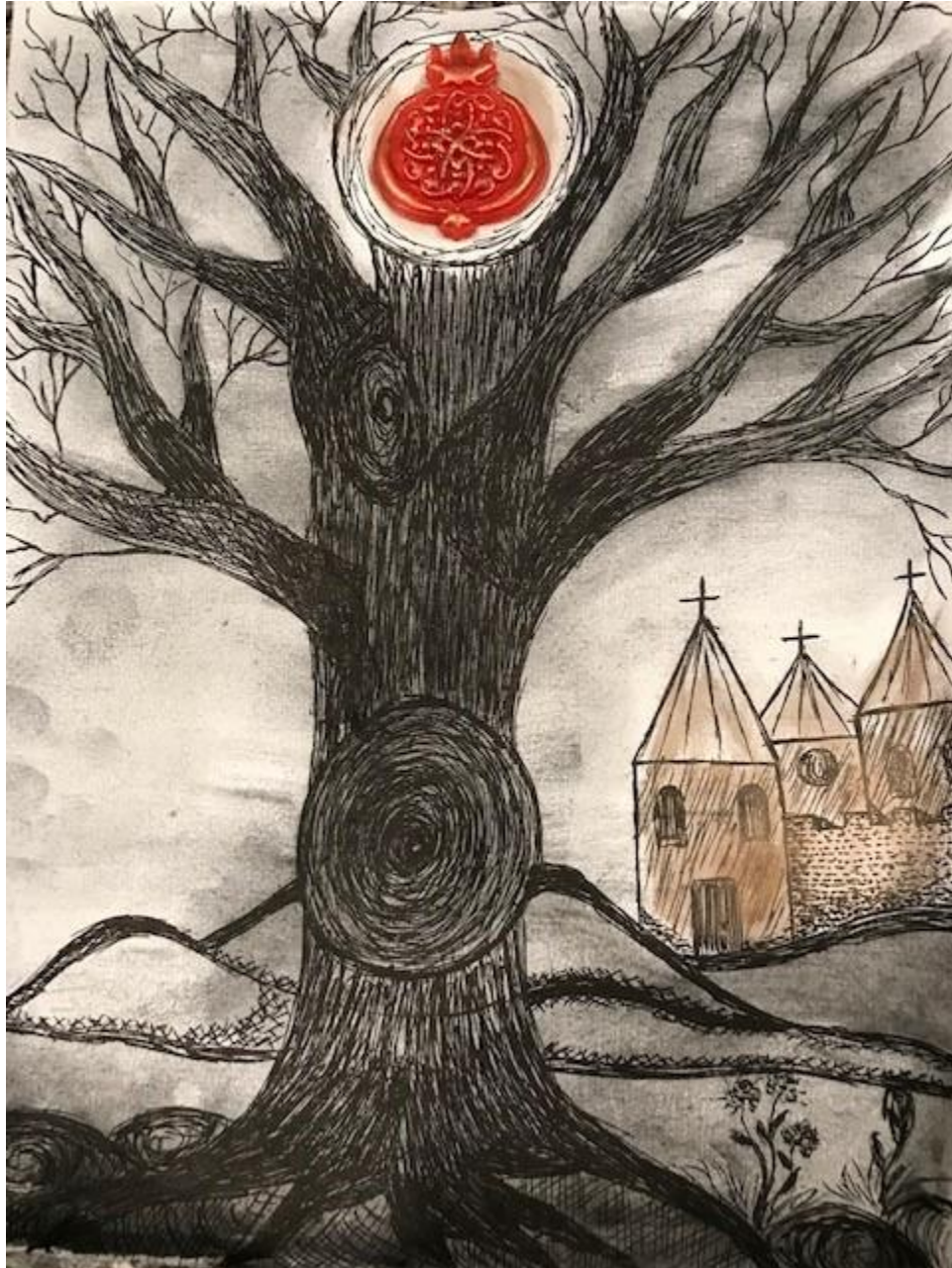


Figure 4

In the final piece of art I included, I wanted to end on a positive note to focus again on the resilience and faith that carries the Armenian people through the most difficult times. This was illustrated by the mixed media collage of the Armenian church (Figure 5). For the painting of the church, I used Armenian coffee to paint it and this added a sensory component to the process, which evoked a strong sense of my culture. The focus of the art creation was on the feelings that arose from past historical events and the current war that has been spanning the past two years and the choice to focus on the resilience of my culture and my family with the intention of passing those patterns on to others.

As I continued the process of the artmaking, I started to think of myself as being resilient and I recognized the benefits of artmaking to build resiliency and address transgenerational trauma. Psychotraumatological studies carried out in Vilnius University in Lithuania indicated that people who are survivors of direct political repression and even intergenerational transmission of trauma also demonstrated an intergenerational transmission of resilience (Gailiene, 2019).

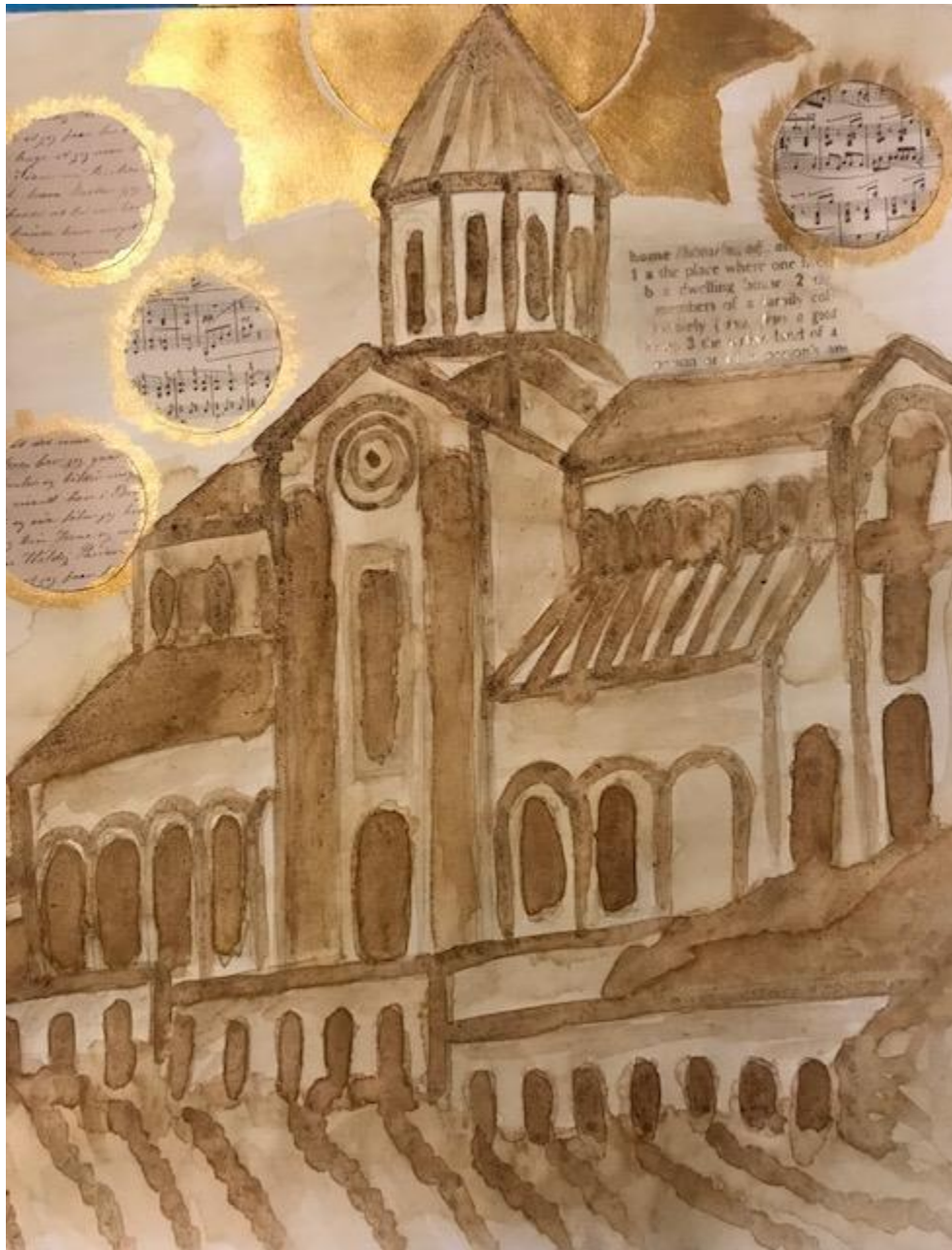


Figure 5

Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to research the topic of the transmission of cultural trauma from one generation to the next within the context of the Armenian Genocide and other wars in Armenia. Most of the literature found on the topic pertained to the Holocaust and how the trauma, but also the resilience of the people, transcended from one generation to the next. Rosenthal (2021) discussed how transgenerational trauma is stored in the body and is passed down from one person to the next, and since I am Armenian and have lived through some of the traumatic events in Armenia but have also inherited some of this cultural trauma, I wanted to explore this the art processes in arts-based response and in the literature review. The aim of coping with the trauma is to restore a healthy cultural identity that ensures the recognition of one's own uniqueness (Gailiene, 2019) and to overcome the trauma once the repressed memories are processed through art.

In the art making I was avoiding delving deep by creating “pretty” and childlike images that were not representative of my feelings, especially the anger and sadness I was feeling with the current war in Armenia. Once I processed these feelings and was able to be kind to myself and ask my “inner guide” to help me through this process, I found my resilience and continued to work. The art making process kept me going and gave me a sense of hope. I recognized the benefits of using art, and exploring and playing with different art materials and techniques to help build resilience.

Recommendations include working directly with the Armenian using Jungian art therapy in a semi-open studio concept. More research is needed in exploring these approaches in a community or group work, especially with the Armenian population who have strong ties to their communities.

Studies of the effects of collective trauma and of the interplay between individual and communal efforts in coping with cultural trauma are lacking (Gailiene, 2019), especially those pertaining to the Armenian culture. A deeper understanding of the processes of cultural trauma requires careful study and comparison of the deep traumatic experiences and coping processes of the Armenian people. The research can also be applied to other countries and cultures that have suffered wars and genocide with specific focus on cultural differences.

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