

Mandala Therapy

What is a mandala?

“The mandala is one of the best examples of the universal operation of an archetype” – C. Jung

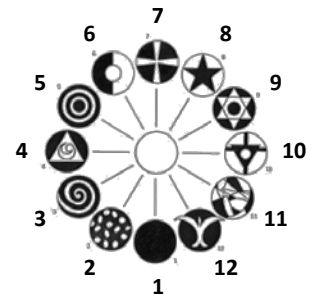
The Sanskrit word meaning “Sacred Circle” (मण्डल), the mandala is a drawing made within the framework of a circle. Cultures from around the world have used circle drawings to express universal aspects of the human experience.

Theoretical Perspective

Carl Jung: Credited for bringing a Western version of the mandala to psychotherapy. Saw the mandala as....

- The psychic nucleus, the center of personality from which the “Self” develops.
- Reflection of the process of individuation.
- A space for the unconscious to surface through archetypal symbols.

Joan Kellogg’s Great Round of the Mandala: the psyche develops through twelve stages encompassing different developmental tasks. Symbols surface when an individual experiences unconscious conflict related to the corresponding stage.



Archetypal Stages of the Great Round of the Mandala

Mandalas in Practice

A. Relaxation and Meditation

Methods: Client-drawn mandalas or coloring structured mandalas

Target Clients: No specific population

Purpose: Relief of anxiety symptoms, Active meditation

Research:

- Mandala making elicited a parasympathetic response in a group of children, age 5-10 (DeLue, 1999).
- Coloring structured mandalas and plaid forms can be more effective than free-form drawing in reducing anxiety symptoms. (Curry & Kasser, 2005).

B. Toward Insight and Individuation

Methods: Interpretation of client-drawn or pre-drawn mandalas

Target clients: Verbal and cognitively aware individuals

Purpose: Interpretation, meaning-making, awareness.

Research:

- Qualitative case studies of individual patients (Jung, 1959; Bonny & Kellogg, 1976).
- Studies on use of color, shape, space and number (Jung, 1959; Kellogg and DiLeo, 1981).
- Increase measures of self-awareness and psychological well-being in a population of college students (Pisarik and Larson, 2011).

C. For Healing and Self-Expression

Methods: Client-drawn mandalas

Target clients: Victims of trauma; Individuals with developmental disabilities or cognitive impairments; Clients who have difficulty verbalizing feelings.

Purpose:

- Provide the individual with the opportunity to process their trauma.
- By-pass the cognitive processes that can prevent self-expression.
- Centering, bringing order to psychic confusion.

Research:

- Significant reduction in blood pressure when mandala-making was used to process interpersonal conflict in adults with intellectual disability (Schrade, Tronsky & Kaiser, 2011).
- Mandala-drawing had a stronger impact than writing on symptoms of trauma (Henderson et al, 2011).

Using Mandalas to Process Trauma

- Boundary of the circle provides a safe container for memories
 - Imaginal exposure: trauma is experienced through the art and therefore outside of oneself (externalized)
 - Reconnecting implicit (sensory) and explicit (declarative) memories of trauma.
 - Access trauma memories through right-brain symbolic communication
 - Aid in the practices of centering, relaxation and self-soothing
 - Bridge sensory memories and narrative
 - The client unknowingly sets the pace of healing
 - Suggestive mandalas: Cognitive reprocessing of the trauma providing alternative more empowering outcomes
 - Provide a wealth of information: colors, shapes, spacing, and time devoted to the project
 - Not biased by culture, class, gender, etc.
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Websites

Mari Creative Resources: www.maricreativeresources.com

Susanne Fincher's Guide to Creating Mandalas: www.creatingmandalas.com

American Art Therapy Association: www.arttherapy.org

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