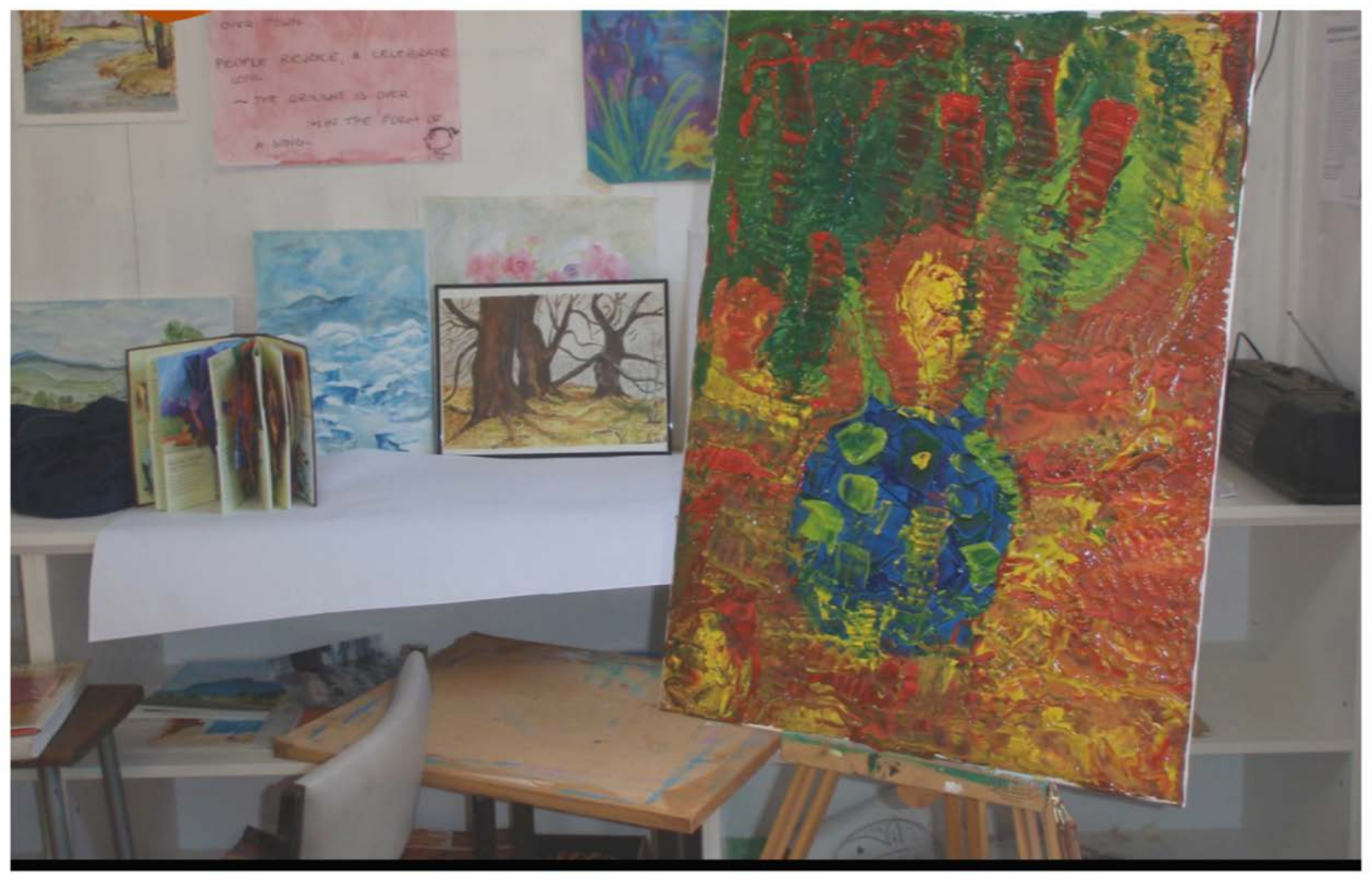


What Do They Think of Art Therapy?

Exploring the Perspectives of Mental Health Professionals.
Theresa Van Lith, PhD, ATR, AThR
Assistant Professor of Art Therapy
Department of Art Education
Florida State University



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Research Statement

Art therapists typically manage to connect with clients that are ‘hard-to-reach’ for other mental health professionals (Ashby, 2011). Furthermore, clients have noted that their sessions are highly relevant and proactive for managing their mental illness, and as a result, are more likely to be enthusiastic about attending art therapy programs (Huet, 1997). Despite this, art therapy continues to be a misunderstood and undervalued profession by fellow mental health professionals (Bellmer, Hoshino, Schrader, Strong, & Hutzler, 2003; Huet, 1997).

The reviewed research points to a need to investigate the perceptions of art therapy with mental health professionals who have exposure within their workplace. This poster will focus on the findings of a recent qualitative study where the objective was to gather an understanding of mental health professionals’ perspectives of art therapy.

Methods

The sampling strategy was strategic (Patton, 2015), where rich cases were selected to study that could provide explanatory contributions to the inquiry. Seven of the participants understood art therapy through being a supervisor for art therapy interns, while two of the participants understood art therapy on a scholarly level. They worked in a variety of services including prisons, psychiatric in-patient facilities, transitional and psychosocial rehabilitation services, as well as outreach counseling programs. The nine selected participants were regarded as knowledgeable and experienced mental health professionals who all had more than 5 years supervisory experience.

Each participant was interviewed for approximately one to one and half hours. The length was gauged to be appropriate for gathering focused, but intensive responses. Each interview was loosely structured to gather individual perspectives about art therapy.

The process of thematic analysis initially followed the steps created by Braun and Clarke (2006). Once a set of sub-themes had been created for each participant they were then sent back for verification. The participants all provided agreement that their themes accurately represented their beliefs and perceptions. Subsequently, the sub-themes took a deeper level of abstraction through analyzing them for patterns between the participants’ accounts in order to derive themes.

Findings

Through an analysis of the data, several themes were revealed. These have been outlined in Figures 1 & 2.

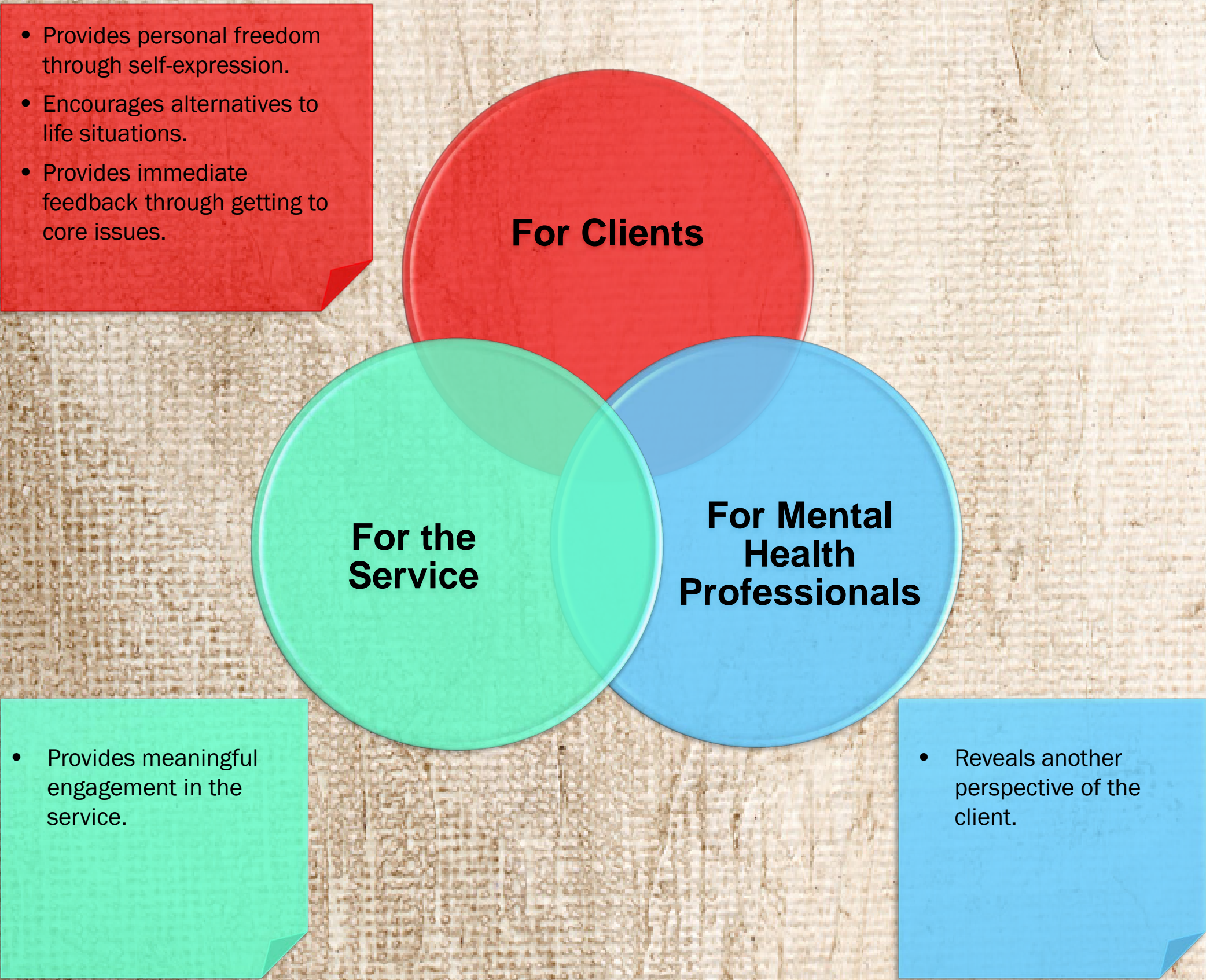


Figure 1. Established benefits of art therapy.

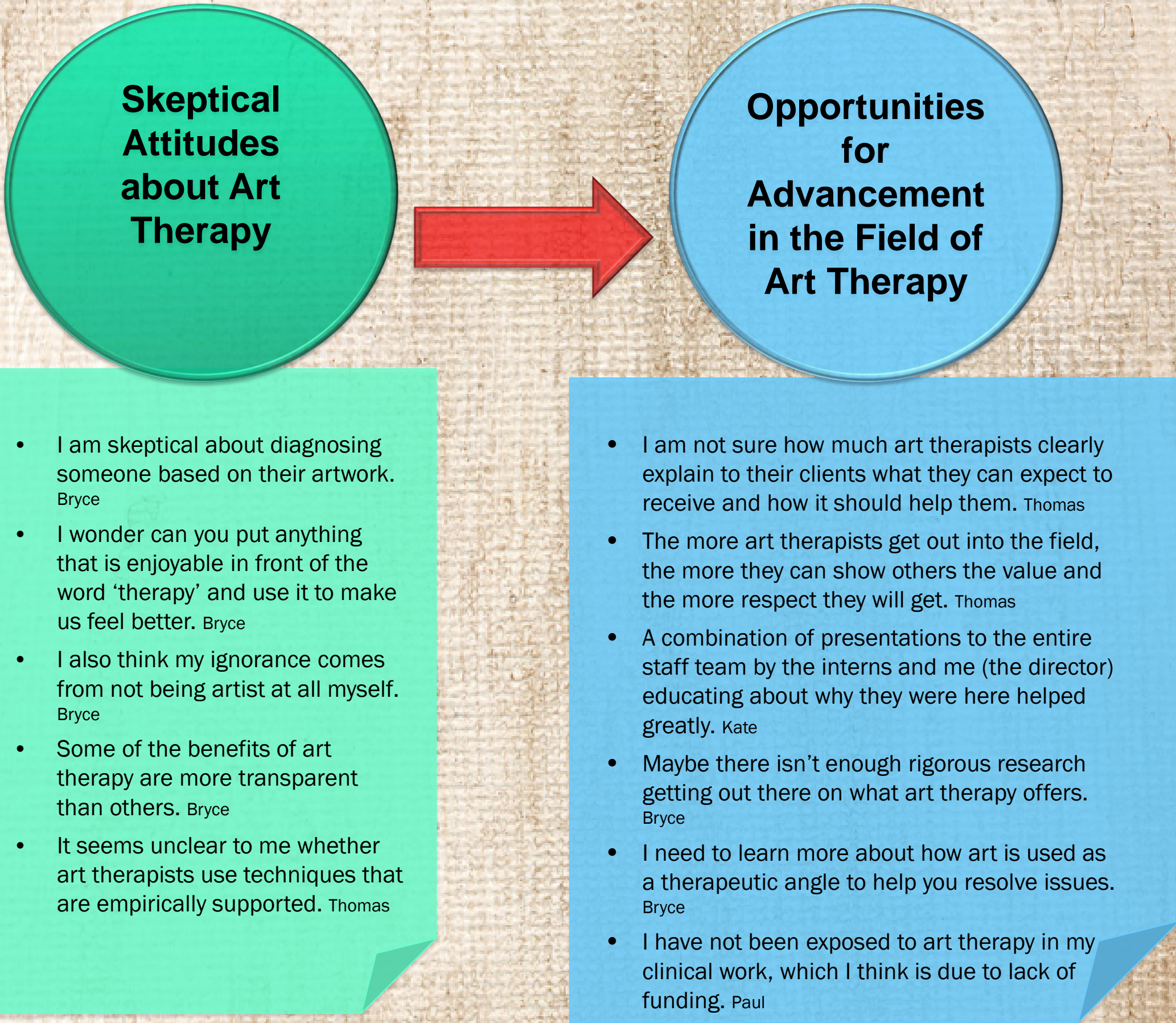


Figure 2. Skeptical attitudes and opportunities for advancement.

Conclusions

A major insight derived from this study was that mental health professionals work with a shared value of supporting clients to assist in improving their quality of life. Therefore, in order to work more collaboratively and effectively with them, art therapists need to provide a clearer understanding of how and why art therapy can provide benefits for clients in mental health settings.

The process of the interviews helped to decrease mystification about art therapy as a profession by providing avenues for clarification or amplification with the participants. They also helped to serve as a reciprocal process of information gathering and knowledge acquirement about the profession of art therapy. Nevertheless, this study was small in scope and therefore raises the issue of how information about art therapy can be communicated at a wider level.

References

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Contact Details: tvanlith@fsu.edu