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After the Crash: Treatment of Motor Vehicle Accident-Associated PTSD Using Art Therapy

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AFTER THE CRASH:
TREATMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLE
ACCIDENT-ASSOCIATED PTSD USING ART THERAPY
Sarah Banks

Mentor: Eileen G'Sell

Post-traumatic Stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that results from experiencing or witnessing traumatic or life-threatening events, and affects more than 2% of the population. While commonly assumed to be a result of assault or wartime trauma, it can also likely be a result of motor vehicle accidents. While there are a number of treatments, optimal treatment strategies have not yet been standardized in practice. To explore art therapy's potential effectiveness for treating motor vehicle related PTSD, I examined various studies on PTSD treatment and conducted a cross-analysis of research literature. Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), the most widely accepted therapeutic modality, utilizes Alternating Bilateral Stimulation (ABS), a technique not specific to EMDR. EMDR has not been found to be ultimately effective for various lesser-known symptoms of PTSD such as avoidance of talking about or being reminded of the traumatic event, negative alterations in thoughts and mood, emotional numbing, trouble processing trauma, and hyperarousal symptoms. I researched whether art therapy, which can also utilize ABS, might be well suited to address these other symptoms of PTSD. Art therapy may also allow patients a nonverbal method to communicate and reprocess their trauma, thereby offering a potentially more comprehensive approach to treating trauma symptoms. The Broca's area of the brain is an area wherein PTSD-related injury has been frequently associated with some of these lesser known symptoms. Art therapy appears particularly well suited to healing injury to this region. Thus, art therapy, at least as an adjunct to EMDR, should be part of the therapeutic approach, especially in those motor vehicle victims whose Broca's area has been impacted.